Violence and Empathy: Jennifer Walshe's XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! as a Simulation of Acquaintance Rape

and

Microvariations

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

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This paper is an analysis of Jennifer Walshe's 2003 multimedia Barbie opera
XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!, with a particular focus on the opera's treatment of sexual assault. I
argue that in addition to depicting an instance of acquaintance rape directly in the narrative,
Walshe's entire opera can be read as a simulation of an experience of acquaintance rape and its
aftermath. Drawing on sexual assault research and case studies, I demonstrate that
XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! creates this simulation in three ways. First, plot points are initially
obscured and later clarified. This slow revelation simulates the phenomenon of delayed
recognition (in which many acquaintance rape victims do not immediately recognize their
experience as rape). Second, the opera's overwhelming multiplicity of intersecting and diverging
sonic, musical, visual, and textual streams simulates the complex web of communications
surrounding an instance of acquaintance rape. Third, the drastic reduction of sonic and visual
information and the emotionally dissonant music in the rape scene simulate the phenomenon of
disassociation. By creating a simulation instead of a mere representation, Walshe engenders
enhanced empathy for victims of sexual assault.

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Acknowledgements

In my time at Columbia University there have been so many people who have helped, supported, challenged, and inspired me. There are too many to name, but I thank all of my colleagues, professors, and the staff members for making Columbia an amazing place to be a composer. I would like to thank my dissertation sponsor and mentor extraordinaire, George Lewis, and my wise and insightful committee, Brad Garton, Zosha DiCastri, Marcos Balter, and Alice Teyssier. I am extremely grateful to my teachers from long ago, without whom I would not be a composer, specifically Al Tonn, Brad Schultz, Jeremy Kunkel, and Brooke Joyce, and my more recent teachers Georg Friedrich Haas, Fred Lerdahl, and Kamran Ince. I also want to thank my family and my husband Sam Pluta for their unwavering support in all my endeavors.

I am especially thankful to Jennifer Walshe for so generously speaking with me about
XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! and suggesting many resources. I would also like to thank the
members of the ensemble Mocrep for their assistance in locating performance materials and
especially Kayleigh Butcher for her insight into performing XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!. I also
must thank the students of my and Georg Friedrich Haas's undergraduate composition seminar in
the spring of 2016, especially Jeremy Corren, whose keen insights into
XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! planted the seeds of this paper in my mind.

Finally, I would like to thank the conductors and ensembles who have performed *Microvariations* in its various versions: Lorraine Vaillancourt and Le Nouvel Ensemble Moderne, Walter Boudreau and the Ensemble of the SMCQ, and Christopher Dietz and the Bowling Green State University New Music Ensemble. *Microvariations* is a piece that presents some technical and logistical challenges and I am so pleased that so many fabulous musicians have already taken it on.

1. INTRODUCTION

XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! is a daring 2003 opera in three acts by Irish composer

Jennifer Walshe (b. 1974). Loosely based on the premise of Aristophanes's Lysistrata, sexual assault is one of the most salient themes in the opera. Taken as a whole, the disparate parts of XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! create a simulation of an experience of acquaintance rape and its aftermath: the process of recognizing the event as rape, the surrounding cultural and interpersonal narratives, and the phenomenon of disassociation.

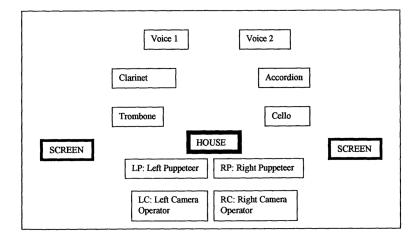
XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! uses Barbie dolls as puppets and combines instrumental music, acousmatic sound, low-fi electronics, physical theatre, written, spoken, and read texts into temporally dyssynchronous narratives and a perceptually overwhelming experience.

XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! has been performed by many ensembles in Europe, the U.S., and Canada, but this paper works primarily from the video produced by the U.K. ensemble Apartment House (with Jennifer Walshe), which is currently the only commercially-available version.¹

XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!'s performing forces consist of two female vocalists, clarinet, trombone, accordion, cello, two puppeteers, and two camera operators. The stage set-up is meticulously specific, with a Barbie house at center stage, serving as the main focus. Two video screens flank the Barbie house, each projecting the shots filmed by one of the camera operators. The ensemble is visible behind the Barbie house.

¹ Jennifer Walshe, XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!. DVD. Mere Records 7090019070029, 2009.

Example 1: Stage Diagram



All performers are precisely synchronized with timers. The puppeteers and camera operators listen to a recorded track of verbal instructions telling them exactly what to do in real time throughout the piece. The score, while highly coordinated and specific, often gives the performers leeway on a local level and is usually unconcerned about exact pitches and rhythms. The performance materials also include an annotated script with instructions for the puppeteers and camera operators.

The use of screens and cameras gives Walshe the film maker's ability to visually curate what the audience notices, nudging viewers to focus on specific parts of the tableau and to linger on certain characters and scenes at controlled moments. At the same time,

XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! also retains the perceptual paradigm of an opera or play in which the audience sees everything happening on the stage at once. The use of the screens and the stage tableau in tandem contributes to the listener experience of information over-saturation. In addition to all the action and sound on stage and screens, the audience members receive unannotated copies of the libretto. However, the libretto contains much more text than is actually heard by the audience.

Thus the audience is confronted with at least five intertwined yet distinct and independent information streams: the images on the screens, the visual elements of all bodies and objects on the stage, the non-textual sounds and music, the audible text, and the read text. This paper will analyze the myriad ways these information streams interact to create a multisensory simulation of the experience and aftermath of acquaintance rape (defined as rape occurring between individuals who know each other, often contrasted with stranger rape in research on sexual assault).

2. FORM

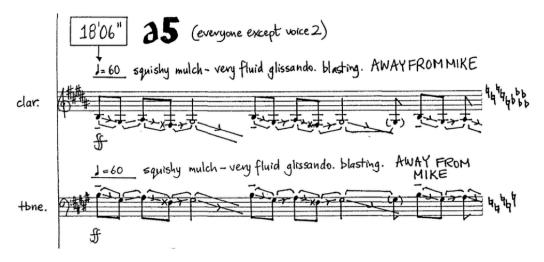
In brief, the plot of XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! follows three female friends (Camille, Naomi, and Gloria) and their boyfriends (Mike, Tom, and John). In the first act Naomi and Gloria visit Camille in her kitchen and Camille recounts (via flashback) the story of a dinner party she hosted in which Mike and Tom had a violent fight. The fight began with an argument about the quality of the Elton John song "Candle in the Wind." The violence becomes a recurring issue. Camille proposes the idea of withholding sex until the men stop fighting. Gloria and Naomi eventually agree to the plan. In the second act, the women are staying at Camille's house and the men come over and start throwing stones at the windows. The women agree to talk to them on the roof deck, but fighting erupts and Naomi is accidentally pushed off the roof and she dies. In the third act, Camille is grieving Naomi's death and, in a long, uninterrupted scene, Camille's boyfriend Mike rapes her.

The form is driven by the narrative, but the narrative is also highly obscured and adorned.

The piece consists of a three-minute overture and three acts. Though all the acts contain related sounds such as noisy static and aspirative vocalizations, the musical material changes on a

moment-to-moment basis and rarely repeats. The collage-like sound world channels diverse styles from Baroque to folk to Beyoncé to instrumental musique concréte. Performers mostly begin executing a musical idea at a precise moment and then spin it out at their own pace until the next idea or task begins. This temporal independence of parts makes the few moments of musical unity especially impactful. For example, a loud, "squishy" unison gesture in the second act at 18:06 underscores the heated argument among the characters on the roof.

Example 2: 18:06, Unison Gesture (also doubled in voice 1 and cello)



"Extramusical" actions or events, defined here as physical actions executed by the performers beyond playing their instruments, contribute to the sonic and visual landscapes and add to the activity level and complexity of the whole. The number of plot points, number of Barbie actions not central to the plot, and number of extramusical ensemble actions in each act serve as measures of the overall density. As shown in Figure 1, the density is the highest in act one, decreases in act two, and reaches its lowest point in act three. Thus, the overall form progresses from highly chaotic, dense, and complex to less dense and more focused. This form engenders the feeling of delayed recognition, which will be discussed further in chapter four.

Figure 1: Chart of Plot Points and Extramusical Events

	T	
Act I: doll not included	Act II: in the elegance of pink satin	Act III: fun*beauty*
3:00-12:40	12:40-23:00	adventure*excitement
total length: 9:40	total length: 11:20	23:00-34:00
		total length: 11:00
3 Important Plot Points:	2 Important Plot Points:	1 Important Plot Point
1. Camille is on the phone, Camille,	1. Naomi and Gloria are staying at	1. Mike rapes Camille
Naomi and Gloria greet each other	Camille's house and their boyfriends	
and talk in Camille's kitchen	come over and start throwing stones	
2. Flashback to the dinner party and	at the windows. The women agree to	
their boyfriends' fight	talk to the boyfriends on the roof	
3. Camille convinces her friends to	2. Fighting erupts and Naomi is	
withhold sex until the fighting stops	accidentally pushed off the roof and	
	she dies	
3 Additional Barbie Actions, (not	0 Additional Barbie Actions, (not	0 Additional Barbie Actions, (not
essential to the plot):	essential to the plot)	essential to the plot)
1. Naomi using bathroom		
2. Naomi smoking human-sized		
cigarette		
3. Audience sees photos of naked		
female Barbies in sexual positions		
21 Ensemble Actions (beyond "just	17 Ensemble Actions (beyond "just	9 Ensemble Actions (beyond "just
playing"):	playing"):	playing"):
1. cl: slams phone down 6 times then	1. cl: play radio, cycle through	1. tbn, acc, cl: shout, sob, sing
pushes it off table onto ground	stations	2. tbn, acc: tell the story of the opera
2. acc: face down on instrument	2. v1, v2, tbn, ac: take pictures	3. v1, v2: fast-forward and rewind
3. cl: passive-aggressively cleans	3. tbn, acc: throw glo-beans	tapes
instrument	4. v1, v2: pat hair, smooth gown,	4. cl, acc: noisily and violently play
4. tbn: amplified knuckle tapping on	etc.	with toy cars
hand	5. tbn: tune toy guitar until a string	5. v2: wring hands neurotically
5. acc: reach right arm out to toward	breaks	6. all: shouting/speaking
typewriter	6. v1: breathe into paper bag	7. tbn: tell the story of the opera
6. v2: tuning guitar softly and	7. v2: drop drinking glasses on floor	8. v2: slowly interfere with and
thoughtfully	8. v2: breathe into paper bag	manipulate mouth, lips, tongue,
7. acc: typing	9. cl: burn a Barbie's hair with a	cheeks, etc. with fingers and hands
8. cl: tasting reed, adjusting	lighter	9. v2: smooth dress and arms, pat
mouthpiece over and over	10. v2: crumple paper bag and throw	and fix hair, pat face
9. v2: nod five times slowly,	it away	
privately	11. v1: smooth paper bag against	
10. cl: loud page turning	body	
11. v2, tbn, vlc: playing recordings	12. cl: toss doll on ground	
12. cl, tbn, vlc: slap leg, shout	13. cl: amplified knuckle tapping on	
"exactly!"	hand	
13. tbn, acc: uproarious laughter	14. cl: leg trembling	
14. cl: rub temples	15. cl: rub temples	
15. tbn: clean trombone frantically	16. tbn: abruptly turn in chair,	
16. cl: lean forward on chair, elbow	shifting chair 45 degrees	
on knees, clarinet between legs	17. tbn, acc, vlc: looking at each	
17. tbn: hold still; occasionally	other and interacting as if in a silent	
twitch	argument	
18. cl: irritatedly turn pages of a		
book		
19. v2: pick aimlessly at guitar		
20. cl: slam book onto floor		

21. cl: sit forward, put clarinet in lap	
and head in hands	

3. CONTEXT: MARIONETTES, LYSISTRATA, AND THE MEANING OF BARBIES

In the introductory notes, Walshe places XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! within the marionette opera tradition.² XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! follows several traditional conventions of this genre such as using a story from traditional source material, incorporating structured improvisation, expecting a few performers to execute many musical and theatrical tasks, and most importantly including scenes of inter-puppet violence. Marionette opera dates back to the 17th century and there were dedicated marionette theatres in Italy, France, and England.³

Marionettes performed both operatic repertoire meant for human singers and pieces specifically written for marionettes.⁴ Haydn, who wrote six marionette operas, provided musical direction for the puppet theatre at the summer palace of Prince Nicolaus Esterházy.⁵ Many well-known twentieth century composers have contributed to the genre including Paul Hindemith (Das Nusch-Nuschi, 1921), Manuel de Falla, (El retablo de maese Pedro, 1923), Erik Satie (Geneviève de Brabant, 1926), and Harrison Birtwistle (Punch and Judy, 1968).⁶

At the beginning of the 19th century an especially robust tradition of marionette opera known as the *Opera dei Pupi* emerged in Sicily.⁷ The topics of *Opera dei Pupi* frequently

² Jennifer Walshe, liner notes for *XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!*, Mere Records 7090019070029, 2009, DVD.

³ John Mohr Minniear, "Puppet Opera," In *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, Accessed April 10th, 2018.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Giacome Cuticchio, "Opera dei Pupi, Sicilian puppet theatre," UNESCO Web Archive video, 5:09, April 30th, 2018.

http://webarchive.unesco.org/20160711134132/youtube.com/watch?v=5Ql7DxcWILE

included medieval chivalric literature, Italian Renaissance poems, and the lives of saints. As an opera based on an ancient Greek comedy, *XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!* similarly extrapolates from a well-known story. The actual lines spoken by *Opera dei Pupi* characters were often improvised by the puppeteers. Singers in *XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!* often improvise by freely traversing graphically-organized webs of instructions, conveying the meaning while adding a storyteller's improvisatory flair. In *Opera dei Pupi* performances, a small handful of puppeteers played multiple characters and also changed sets and costumes, performed live sound effects, and played instruments. The cast members of *XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!* similarly perform a dizzying array of tasks, embody multiple characters, and create sound with all manner of voices, objects, and instruments.

Most importantly, the marionette opera tradition often took advantage of puppets' ability to perform extreme, theatrically heightened scenes of violence, including prolonged sword-fighting, cutting opponents in half, and characters hitting each other with clubs or pans. 11 The violent scenes in marionette opera are often farcical or satirical. Marionette opera is an especially effective vehicle for the themes of XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! because it contains scenes of extreme violence that, when performed by Barbies, have a much more ambiguous affect than the same scenes performed by humans would have. As John Mohr Minniear notes, "[B]ecause of the caricature nature of puppets, most works written for them have been comic adaptations, mockheroic dramas or satires of popular dramas." Walshe takes advantage of this association with comedy and satire to create a piece that uses trappings of comedy, but thwarts expectations and

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

ultimately reveals itself to be a dark and disturbing tragedy, made even more disturbing by the puppets' associations with childhood and comedy.

Walshe states that XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! "takes the thesis of Aristophanes' Lysistrata as a jumping-off point." The main premise of Lysistrata, a Greek comedy which premiered in 411 B.C.E., is that the title character creates a campaign to end the Peloponnesian War. Lysistrata, whose name means "Dissolver of Armies," gathers women from many regions and convinces them to refuse to have sex with any men until the fighting factions create a peace treaty. In XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! Camille takes the role of Lysistrata, convincing her friends Naomi and Gloria to stop having sex with their boyfriends until they stop fighting with each other. Both Lysistrata and XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! are explicit, bawdy, and vulgar. Lysistrata contains many jokes about unconcealable erections and how soldiers from certain regions have a greater proclivity for anal sex. XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! includes images of naked Barbies having acrobatic threesomes. In both texts the women stage a ritualistic toast to seal their commitment to the no-sex pact and then hole away together in a woman-only space to wait out the strike. From that point on the two narratives diverge. Lysistrata is a comedy with a happy ending; the campaign is successful and the fighting stops! XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! is a tragedy ending with Camille being raped.

In *Lysistrata* the risk of rape comes up, but is quickly dismissed. When Lysistrata is explaining her proposal to Lampito and Calonice, the latter says:

Calonice:

Suppose they grab us, drag us into bed.

We'll have no choice.

Lysistrata:

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¹² Walshe, liner notes for XXX LIVE NUDE GIRLS!!!.

¹³ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, trans. Sarah Ruden (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2003), 1.

Resist. Hang on the door.

Calonice:

Suppose they beat us.

Lysistrata:

Yield a lousy lay.

They force a woman, and it's no more fun.

Plus, no more housework! They'll give up—you'll see

How fast. No husband's going to like to screw

Unless he knows his woman likes it too.¹⁴

Aristophanes anticipates that the audience might think a sex strike could lead to sexual violence, thus foiling Lysistrata's plan. So, Calonice gives voice to this concern which gives Lysistrata the opportunity to refute the possibility. The plan is fail-safe because from Lysistrata's perspective, no man would want to have sex with an unwilling or unenthusiastic partner. This paradigm makes it possible for the play to remain a hopeful comedy, exploring themes of democracy and good-faith negotiation, and portraying members of both genders with cunning and agency.

Compared to Lysistrata, XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! works from a much more base paradigm of human nature. Walshe's exploration of dark, violent scenarios was inspired not by Lysistrata, but by her observations of children's play with Barbies. In her program notes Walshe recounts her research, in which she interviewed many children and adults about the stories that they enacted with their Barbies. Walshe found that both sex and violence were "explicit and commonplace." 15 Walshe elaborates,

Barbie regularly meets a terrible and painful end, either dying at the hands of another doll or the girl playing with her...through torturing, fighting or accident she often sustains horrible injuries, which may become complicated because 'the doctors think she is lying and won't treat her;' she may become pregnant 'without knowing it' and leave the baby

¹⁴ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 11.

¹⁵ Jennifer Walshe, program notes for XXX LIVE NUDE GIRLS!!!, milker.org, downloaded March 8th, 2016.

to die on the kitchen table after she gives birth because 'she wants to go dancing;' she will embrace, fondle and sleep with one or more of the other dolls, often at the same time, by force if needs be; she will marry another female doll or an animal if no men are available to her; if she does manage to successfully wed a male, the police may come and 'kill him because he is drunk.' 16

In her research Walshe also observed that children often physically mutilated Barbies, dressed them in drag, and drew on them with markers, ¹⁷ which perhaps inspired some of the aesthetic choices within the piece. For example, the credits are written in black marker on naked and mutilated Barbies and the boyfriends are played by female Barbies in drag.

Walshe is not the first to observe children acting out violent scenes and exploring negative character traits and behaviors with Barbies. Filmmaker Susan Stern's first inspiration for making her documentary *Barbie Nation* came from a game invented by her five-year-old daughter Nora called "Jealous Barbie." Stern explains,

My Barbie doll had to be jealous of her Barbie doll for hours on end. Her Barbie had better hair, a better car, a better guy. Horrified, I sat Nora down and explained in my best feminist manner that women don't have to be jealous of other women. Nora listened patiently and then said, "Okay Mom, first let's play 'Jealous Barbie' and then we can play what you want to play." ¹⁸

In a Barbie-themed art-making workshop for 8-to-12-year-old girls in South Bend,
Indiana, facilitators asked the girls how they played with Barbies. In addition to describing classaspirational play with wealthy and successful Barbies, the girls reported that Barbie would
"bungee jump and die," be "thrown off a top bunk," "dissected," or "jumped-on," and "have her
head torn off to be used as Halloween decorations." According to Tara Kuther and Erin

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸ Jeannie B. Thomas, "Review," review of *Barbie Nation: An Unauthorized Tour*, by Susan Stern, *The Journal of American Folklore* 114, no. 454 (Autumn 2001): 490-491.

¹⁹ Louise Collins, April Lidinsky, Andrea Rusnock, and Rebecca Torstrick, "We're not Barbie Girls: Tweens Transform a Feminine Icon," *Feminist Formations* 24, no. 1, (Spring 2012): 102-126.

McDonald's 2004 paper, "[a] surprisingly common form of Barbie-related play reported [by twenty sixth-grade girls] was torture play." They also observed "anger play," in which children redirected anger at real people toward their Barbies. Tween participants in the Indiana workshop also reported that "you can destroy a doll rather than hurt someone" and "when mad, you can toss a doll." These girls reimagined and transformed Barbies with costumes, additions, and alterations resulting in Barbies such as "Dumpster Diver Barbie," "Feral Barbie," and "Nun Barbie." According to her creator, Nun Barbie is "a total religious freak [who] prays 89,000 [times] a day." Thus, Walshe's observations about children using Barbies to explore taboo, violent, and adult topics and negative emotions are corroborated by others' research.

Walshe views Barbie as

a blank plastic canvas with a perma-smile onto which little girls can project many different things, from the innocent to the unsettling. In the end, value judgments about Barbie become irrelevant; what is more important is how she functions as a toy, how she is manipulated by the children who play with her, how she is used as a lens through which human experience is viewed.²⁴

Yet Walshe does not really use Barbie as a "blank canvas." When combined with violence and tragedy Barbie's "perma-smile" has an unsettling rhetorical effect. Is Barbie masochistic? Is she hiding the pain and putting on a happy face to retain her cheery public persona? Also,

XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! is packed with references to Barbie's historical and cultural baggage, including associations with unattainable beauty standards, shallow materialism, and anti-intellectualism.

²⁰ Tara L. Kuther and Erin McDonald, "Early Adolescents' Experiences with, and Views of, Barbie," *Adolescence* 39 (2004): 39-51.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Collins, et all, "We're not Barbie Girls: Tweens Transform a Feminine Icon."

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Walshe, program notes for XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!

From a sonic perspective, most Barbies (like marionettes) are silent until given voice by the people creating the stories. However, "talking" Barbies also exist, and their sound has greatly influenced the sound world of XXX LIVE NUDE GIRLS!!!. In 1992 Mattel released Teen Talk Barbie, a Barbie with a tiny speaker inside her and a button on her back that triggers one of four audio clips. ²⁵ Each Teen Talk Barbie was randomly assigned four phrases from a body of 270 possibly phrases.²⁶ Some of the phrases include "Let's have a campfire!," "Wouldn't you love to be a lifeguard?," and "Want to go shopping?" Most controversially, one of Teen Talk Barbie's lines was "Math class is tough!" This line was criticized by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the American Association of University Women as reinforcing gender stereotypes and undermining efforts to promote math and science education and careers to girls.²⁸ Some dolls contained the following sequence of phrases: "Math class is tough. Want to go shopping? OK, meet me at the mall!"29 perhaps implying that girls should skip math class or give up on studying math and instead go shopping. Mattel eventually apologized to the American Association of University Women and removed the "Math class is tough!" phrase from future dolls.30

Walshe alludes to this controversy in the opening scene of XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!.

Beginning at 3:00 Camille (currently voiced by Voice 1) is talking on the phone. Her words are mostly of little substance ("Yeah, no. No, no...No. No, yeah. Yeah"), but at 3:49 she clearly says "Maths is hard." Thus in the first scene in which the audience is introduced to Camille, she

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²⁵ Linda Van Laren, "Math Class is Tough," *Girl Culture: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Claudia A. Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, (Westport, Connecticut/London: Greenwood, 2008), 423-24.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

fulfills Barbie stereotypes. Camille is talking on the phone, but in a highly reflective manner, only responding to what the person on the other end of the line is saying and never contributing ideas of her own except for "Maths is hard." As the audience finds out later, the air-head implications of this line do not actually fit Camille's valiant character. Thus Walshe is presenting the complex and contradictory nature of Camille, who is both a stereotypical unintellectual Barbie and an embodiment of a Greek hero.

In Teen Talk Barbie, the tiny, cheap speaker produced a low-fidelity sound, lacking in high overtones. The sound is further muffled because the speaker is encased in Barbie's hard plastic torso (with small holes to let the sound through). The phrases are spoken by a bubbly, stereotypically high and feminine voice, but the sibilants are dull and there is an audible tininess to Barbie's voice. Walshe replicates Teen Talk Barbie's lo-fi vocal sound throughout <code>XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!</code>, primarily with the use of Dictaphones and walkie talkies in the voice parts. (Early performances of the piece used true Dictaphones which are small cassette players meant for voice transcription; more recent performances used smart phones in their place). Throughout the opera, Walshe uses sounds mediated through the Dictaphones and walkie-talkies to create "off-stage" sounds and simultaneous sound-tracks of the characters' inner and outer voices, and to build noisy musical layers that both allude to previous moments in the piece and obscure concurrent musical events.

Barbies bring cultural baggage, but Walshe is most interested in Barbies as an imaginative toy that children use to play out their own stories. In its frenetic style and taboo subject matter XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! emulates the play of children testing out confusing and titillating adult topics before they have the tools to fully understand them.

4. SIMULATION OF VICTIM RECOGNITION OF ACQUAINTANCE RAPE

The climax of XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! is a violent scene in which the main character Camille is raped by her boyfriend Mike. Both scholarly research and news media sources about acquaintance rape offer insight into Walshe's treatment of this event. In her 1988 book I Never Called It Rape, Robin Warshaw writes, "Acquaintance rape remains largely hidden because few people identify it for what it is—a crime punishable by law. Because the assault occurs between individuals who know each other, within the context of the often confused personal and sexual relationships between men and women, it's difficult for many people to label it correctly." Sharing her own experience, Warshaw continues, "It took me about three years to realize I had been raped... Since my attacker had been my boyfriend, with whom I had had sexual intercourse before, I never attached the word "rape" to what happened."

In Warshaw's research she encounters this pattern again and again; many victims of rape by current or former partners did not immediately define the experience as rape. Warshaw writes, "several of the women interviewed for this book spoke of how they repressed their acquaintance-rape episodes for years until a conversation, a news article, or another emotionally disturbing event brought the reality of the rape rushing back at them." This slow realization that what happened was indeed rape, the piecemeal and sometimes uncertain coming-into-focus, often shaped by external voices such as friends and media, is the feeling Walshe creates in the first thirty minutes of XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS. Throughout the first and second acts and the beginning of the third act, the listener must struggle to parse Walshe's barrage of information and piece it into a coherent narrative. The snippets of audible text, the pages and pages of written

³¹ Robin Warshaw, *I Never Called It Rape* (New York: Sarah Lazin Books, 1988), 4.

³² Ibid, 6.

³³ Ibid, 55.

text, the non-sequiturs and red herrings, and the voices animating different characters on a moment-to-moment basis, all contribute to this sense of grasping for what is real.

Delay between the rape and the realization that what happened was rape is a common theme among victims of acquaintance rape. Summarizing her research, Warshaw concludes "Because of her personal relationship with the attacker, however casual, it often takes a woman longer to perceive an action as rape when it involves a man she knows than it does when a stranger assaults her...Indeed, regardless of their age or background, many women interviewed for this book...never named their assaults as rape until months or years later."34 Even with more awareness and education about acquaintance rape today (compared to when Warshaw wrote her book in 1988) this pattern still exists. In a 2014 piece Columbia University blogger Anna Bahr described the experience of an anonymous victim, Columbia undergraduate student "Natalie." "[Her boyfriend "Tom," also a Columbia undergraduate] often forcefully pinned her arms back against the mattress during sex; Natalie would cry during and after they slept together. Not until months after their break up did Natalie recognize this as non-consensual intercourse." Natalie only began to label what happened as rape after another Columbia student, "Sara," told her that she (Sara) had been raped by Tom.³⁶ Learning new information helped Natalie see past events in a new context. Walshe creates delayed realizations in the same way. The plot is hazy and obscured at first, but Walshe strategically reveals information that clarifies past events in the opera, thus creating a temporal experience similar to that of the acquaintance rape victim. The complexity and density of the first and second acts emulates the confusion and cognitive

³⁴ Ibid, 26.

³⁵ Anna Bahr, "'Accessible, Prompt, and Equitable'? An Examination of Sexual Assault At Columbia," Bwog (blog), Blue and White Publishing Inc, January 23rd, 2014, http://bwog.com/2014/01/23/accessible-prompt-and-equitable-an-examination-of-sexual-assault-at-columbia/.

³⁶ Ibid.

dissonance directly following acquaintance rape. The relative clarity of the third act emulates the painful but clear realization when the victim can finally name what happened.

Upon a first viewing/hearing, the opera's main plot points are difficult to discern. There are characters, theatrical conventions, lines, sounds, and musical allusions that distract from and obscure the main narrative rather than contribute to it. For example, a minor character, the Princess of Norland, is briefly introduced in the dinner party scene but she ends up having little consequence. If the audience is not closely following the script they may be confused and mislead by the dinner party scene as a whole because it uses second versions of Camille, Naomi, and Gloria, wearing different outfits, thus the audience may assume they are also new characters.

The scene in which Camille, Naomi, and Gloria are creating the no-sex pact does contain clear clues about what is happening (notably the words "No coming to bed! No coming to bed! No coming to bed! No coming to bed! No sex. No snogging. Not until the fighting stops"), yet it also contains extremely fast, noisy, non-semantic vocalizations. The no sex line is followed by an eruption of laughter leaving the audience to wonder, is it all a joke?

From 9:00 to 11:30, as Camille, Naomi, and Gloria are still discussing the no-sex pact, a few lines come through the collage of Orfeo-inspired vocalises, grunts, gags, typewriter sounds, and strummed cello chords. The following lines are heard:

"well you what? You made him buy you a ring?
No, wait a second, y—
Okay, okay, okay, fine Jesus will you just leave it out?
Whoohooh, Oh yeah, Camille's peace plan and we'll all go down Gloria?"³⁷

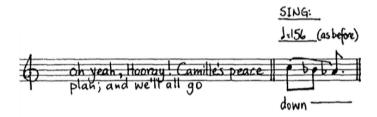
It is difficult to parse the conversation and its relevance to the narrative as a whole. If an audience member is following along in the script, and they have successfully found the part of

³⁷ Jennifer Walshe, *XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!* (Dublin: Contemporary Music Centre, 2003), 38-41.

the script that coincides with the current action, they would know that "You made him buy you a ring?" is Gloria's response to learning (from Camille) that Naomi once withheld sex from her exboyfriend until he bought her a pink diamond ring.³⁸ Camille is using the fact that Naomi has strategically withheld sex before to convince her to do it again. However, many audience members will probably not absorb all that contextualizing information from the script and will instead experience the conversation on a more abstract sonic level.

The line "Camille's peace plan and we all go down" is spoken except for the word "down," on which Voice 2 sings a three-note descending gesture.

Example 3: 10:32-10:41, Voice 2 Descending Gesture



At that moment, live cello and recorded cello begin playing "continuous, melding" downward glissandi, sul ponticello, beginning in a high part of the range (B5).

Example 4: 10:32-10:41, Cello Glissandi



The trombone is already playing shorter downward glissandi and eventually the clarinet takes over the continuous, melding, downward glissandi. This canon of downward glissandi becomes the dominant musical idea of the section, as well as a rare moment where multiple musical

³⁸ Ibid, I.8.

³⁹ Ibid, 41.

voices are audibly working together. The extended and literal text-painting of "down" signals that it is an important word or idea. According to Walshe's instructions, the tone of the spoken/sung line is "very sarcastic," perhaps expressing Naomi's skepticism about the plan. "We all go down" could refer to "going down on" someone in a sexual sense, which would be confusingly paradoxical because Camille's peace plan is about NOT "going down" sexually (on their boyfriends at least). Going down could also mean descending in a metaphorical sense into tragedy or a negative situation. This certainly does happen in the opera, so this fantasy on "going down" can be read as foreshadowing. In the written script, the line is different: "Camille's Peace Plan: leave them alone, and they'll come home with their dicks between their legs." This difference exemplifies the multiple converging and diverging narratives created among the visuals, the heard text, and the written text.

Throughout the opera, several salient and memorable events that at first appear structurally salient actually obscure or distract from the main narrative. For example, for eight seconds at the end of Act I (11:49-11:57) the audience sees on the screen a series of Polaroids of three female Barbies in sexual poses, illuminated by a flashlight held in the puppeteer's mouth. The images are accompanied by heavy breathing and muffled talking. In the Apartment House production the Barbies are totally naked and one of the Barbies is pregnant, though this is not specified in the score. The score simply asks for "6 Polaroids of Camille, Naomi and Gloria in compromising positions." Thus, the exact positions and levels of nudity are open to the creativity of the producers of any specific performance. From the audience members' perspective, it may be difficult to recognize the Barbies as Camille, Naomi, and Gloria because they may not have their signature outfits and hairstyles. The Polaroids may be part of the main plot or they may be a

⁴⁰ Ibid, 41.

⁴¹ Ibid. I.9.

red herring; a jarring XXX moment inserted for shock value. The audience has little context with which to make sense of these images. One possible interpretation of this moment is that after agreeing to the no-sex-with-their-boyfriends pact and while camping out at Camille's house the three main characters are enacting a stereotypical straight male fantasy/fear by engaging in sexual activities with each other.

Again and again, ambiguity and lack of a perceivable hierarchy of lines, sounds, and events obscure the plot. In the second act Tom simply "exits" a scene by being thrown in the air off of the house. Three minutes later, when Naomi falls off the roof she is killed. These two very similar actions (being thrown off the house by the puppeteers versus being made to fall off the house by the puppeteers) have totally different meanings and results. There are sonic and visual clues as to how they differ; for example the camera ignores Tom's exit and lingers on Naomi's fall, but what happened to Tom is still quite unclear to the first-time viewer.

Walshe creates a simulation of delayed realization by setting up seemingly funny, neutral, impenetrable, or abstract situations and then introducing an element that recontextualizes the previous material, revealing a disturbing and darker side. A clear example of delayed realization occurs in the overture. In Apartment House's production (with the composer performing the Voice 1 part) the sniffs, swallows, and breaths at the very beginning of the piece do not sound particularly emotional or even recognizably vocal. The voice and the drones of white noise from walkie-talkies combined with layers of more focused trombone noise and cello clicks sound abstract and innocuous at first. Then, at 1:13 when the projected video begins, the soundscape remains the same but the emotional tone completely changes. The opening images of mutilated and defaced Barbies with bright lights shining on them bring to mind a torture scene in a horror film. Suddenly the listener perceives the noisy, ambiguous sounds as gasps and muffled sobs.

The previously neutral sounds take on a dark tone. The emotional trajectory of this brief overture reveals a rhetorical device that Walshe goes on to use several more times in the opera.

The clearest example of delayed realization occurs in Act III. Camille is on the couch crying (presumably mourning Naomi's death). At 23:57, in the midst of loud car sounds, vocal fry, and noisy clarinet multiphonics, the trombonist and accordionist both use their voices to tell the story of the opera; the trombonist from the first-person perspective of Camille and the accordionist from the first-person perspective of Naomi. The fact that both are speaking at the same time means that both stories will be obscured, but audience members may hear some plot points articulated and remember them from the preceding chaos. (In the Apartment House video it does not sound like both people are talking, though the story is still only partially audible due to all the other coexisting sounds). At 24:22 both singers whisper the story of the last scene, but car sounds and loud, accented trombone blats cover up any textual meaning they express.

Then, at 27:08 the audio scene clears out and in a moment of relative calm the trombonist tells the story of the opera in third-person, speaking clearly into a mic in a low voice like an authoritative, omniscient narrator. Walshe does not provide the exact words that he should use; she expects the trombonist to summarize the plot in his own way. In the Apartment House video, he efficiently summarizes the main plot points, cutting through the "noise" of all the elements obscuring the main narrative. All that happened before suddenly becomes clear to the audience. The trombonist's summary continues past the present moment, in which Camille and Mike have gone from making out to arguing. The trombonist matter-of-factly says "Camille tries to kiss him but once more Mike is more aggressive and rapes her." The audience experiences a sense of temporal whiplash, re-living all that had happened over the last 29 minutes, seeing the plot with clearer eyes, and also being thrown ahead, knowing what is going to happen next. Soon after, the

rape begins. The rape scene starkly contrasts the previous scenes in its sonic and narrative simplicity and straightforwardness. There is no ambiguity or doubt that it is rape, but the overall ambiguity and slipperiness of all the material leading up to the rape serves as a metaphor, a simulation, imitating the uncertainty and delayed realizations often reported by victims of acquaintance rape.

5. SIMULATION OF COMMUNICATIONS SURROUNDING SEXUAL ASSAULT

In addition to creating a simulation of a victim's evolving conception of an acquaintance rape experience, XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! simultaneously creates a simulation of the overwhelming multiplicity of communications surrounding an instance of sexual assault. These communications could include messages from peers, family, the media, and institutions such as school and the police, and also include the victim's and perpetrator's stories filtered through media and other people.

According to the most relevant definition in the Oxford English Dictionary, a simulation is "the technique of imitating the behavior of some situation or apparatus (whether economic, military, mechanical, etc.) by means of a suitably analogous situation or apparatus." The "situation" imitated throughout Walshe's opera is not a specific event, but a fictionalized conflation of many rape victims' diverse experiences. In the article "Simulation, Simulacrum," Devin Sandoz writes, "The simulation differs from the image and the icon...in the active nature of its representation. What are forged or represented are not likenesses of static entities, but

eid.

⁴² Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. "simulation," accessed May 7th, 2018, http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/view/Entry/180009?redirectedFrom=simulation#

on eliciting feelings to create a deep experience and therefore an enhanced sense of empathy.

The feelings of overstimulation and delayed recognition situate the simulation within the listener.

According to Sandoz "the simulation is total mediation without meaning. The content is shifted to a surface level, into the realm of experience rather than communication of truth, and the way that the medium affects us becomes our main interpretive focus."

In the case of the two Columbia University students allegedly raped by "Tom," the communications surrounding their assaults created a complex web of bureaucratic layers and converging and diverging narratives. When Sara and Natalie filed complaints in April 2013, they were assigned "specially trained investigators" from the Columbia University Office of Student Services for Gender-Based and Sexual Misconduct.⁴⁵ The investigators gathered "pertinent documentation materials" from all involved parties, including interviews, text messages, emails, and interviews with friends of the involved students.⁴⁶ Natalie was asked to tell her story to her investigator, who took notes by hand and without a recording device.⁴⁷ "[The investigator] would write things down that were abbreviations of what I said," Natalie recalled. "Things that weren't correct. It didn't come out coherently. It didn't sound like a strong case."⁴⁸ Natalie was asked to review Tom's statement and, if she did not have the emotional energy to thoroughly dissect it, to come into the office and make X's in the margins where she disagreed with Tom's story.⁴⁹ Similarly, Sara's narrative was written down by hand by the investigator. "Sara watched [the

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⁴³ Devin Sandoz, "Simulation, Simulacrum," *Theories of Media*, (Winter 2003), http://csmt.uchicago.edu/projects.htm.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Anna Bahr, "Accessible, Prompt, and Equitable?."

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

investigator's hand scribbling notes across a page and saw that she made glaring errors in her transcription. 'I would be describing the position I was in when he raped me and her hand just wouldn't move. She wouldn't write it down. That's important stuff." The investigator had to call Sara several times to fill in details later.⁵¹ In contrast, Tom prepared his own carefullywritten statement with the help of a lawyer.⁵²

Thus, in addition to the stories the victims remembered and told each other, there were versions filtered through the fallible recording methods used by the investigator, and there was Tom's version of the story filtered through a lawyer. On top of that there were in-person testimonies, blog posts and articles, and commentary upon those articles. The details of this specific case are not important to the discussion of XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!, but the diversity of discourses surrounding the events at Columbia are illustrative of the feeling created by Walshe. This chaotic multiplicity of narratives, some with much more information than others, all differing in tone and style, is recreated throughout XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!.

For example, the 3-minute introduction is called "Overture: bendable leg." Even in the relatively simple overture, a multiplicity of voices, sound sources, visuals, and extramusical allusions add up to an overwhelming whole. The title is an inside joke; a nod to those with insider information. It refers to a 1965 advance in Barbie technology: the life-like bendable leg. The bendable leg mechanism consisted of a hinge with three positions (covered by pliable plastic Barbie skin). Bending the leg into a new position caused a dry click sound. For the first two minutes of the section, the most salient sound is an unmetered striking of the cello's muted D and A strings near the bridge with a chopstick. The result is a dry, clicking sound that comes in quick

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

spurts of several notes each. This sound recreates the satisfying sound of bending Barbie's legs quickly through all three positions.

The overture also features the accordionist, silent but physically positioned like a tossedaside Barbie laying on the floor, "face down on instrument, facing to right [away from the audience], arms hanging loosely by the sides of the instrument."53 The trombonist blows focused, amplified, rhythmic blats of toneless air through the instrument. The singers play amplified static from walkie-talkies. The Voice 1 part sounds like one side of an emotional phone call (in which the unheard person is doing all the talking). The singer breathes, sniffs, and sobs into the walkietalkie, leaving long silences between sounds. Voice 1's walkie-talkie transmits sound to Voice 2's walkie-talkie which adds distortion to the sound and imitates the sound of a phone call. Also, because Voice 1's sound comes from her mouth and also, almost simultaneously, from Voice 2's walkie-talkie and the main speakers, Walshe creates a convention: the vocalists are not meant to be single characters, but act as free-floating entities.

In addition to creating a low-fi, noise-heavy aesthetic, the use of walkie-talkies and Dictaphones in combination with video, puppets, and visible human performers confuses the listener's sense of spatial magnetization. Michel Chion describes spatial magnetization as the psychological phenomenon of a sound coming from a specific spatial location, especially a location on-screen in a film context.⁵⁴ For example, the sound of off-screen footsteps in a movie will be perceived as coming from a space off-screen even if in reality the sound is coming from the same speakers as the other sounds. 55 Walshe explores this concept by creating multiple simultaneous visual loci from which the sound originates, either literally or symbolically (the

⁵³ Walshe, XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!, 3.

⁵⁴ Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 69-70.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 69-70.

Barbies on screen, the Barbies on stage, and the singers and instrumentalists) from multiple sonic loci (the voices/instruments, the walkie-talkie and Dictaphone speakers, and the main speakers). This multiplicity of loci overrides the listener's sense of spatial magnetization and creates an almost constant sense of ambiguity about which sounds and words come from which character.

Act I shows Camille in the kitchen and Naomi in the bathroom. Recordings of refrigerator drones set a domestic tone. Camille is on the phone with her boyfriend Mike, responding in a distant manner. In the midst of the aloof phone call Camille suddenly yells through her hand, presumably at Mike. She yells, "You want to take one fucking look at this? Fuck you! This is what I have to deal with day after day! And you have the fucking." Then Voice 1 (and the clarinetist) freeze and a pale cello tone abruptly takes over the sound. Her anger at Mike is suppressed; she's obviously angry but her angry voice is filtered through the hand over the mouth. The hyper-fast speed makes it sound like she has been holding these feelings in and they are now inevitably spilling out. At this point the audience has no idea why Camille might be mad, but this outburst is the first inkling. Or is it simply an absurd sonic outburst with little decipherable meaning? The latter interpretation is certainly plausible considering the busy context.

During Camille's phone call the clarinetist loudly slams a phone down on the receiver multiple times and then begins "neurotically" and "passive-aggressively" cleaning their clarinet. The trombonist taps the microphone. The accordionist, head still flopped down on their accordion, types on an amplified typewriter with one finger. These theatrical actions performed by the instrumentalists seem arbitrary in their specifics, but they add to the chaotic information overflow and multiplicity of voices that define this opera.

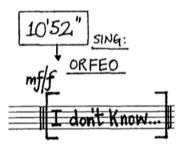
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⁵⁶ Walshe, *XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!*, 12.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 7.

In the Act I dialogue between Camille and Naomi (and later Gloria), the singers giving voice to the characters are instructed to sing their lines in many different styles including nasal/folk, Beyoncé, Christina Aguilera, Mariah Carey, Monteverdi, and Mozart's Queen of the Night. At times they sing or speak words, but often they are only portraying the feeling and intention of specific words but actually singing on neutral syllables. For example, in the following case the singer improvises a brief phrase in the style of Orfeo, on a neutral syllable like "oh," while implicitly communicating the text "I don't know."

Example 5: 10:52, Voice 2 in the Style of Orfeo



Though the audience has scripts, the scripts do not contain the exact words that the singers are trying to portray through their wordless vocalization. The puppeteers controlling the Barbies follow the script, moving the Barbies as if they were saying the lines in the script, though they are not actually saying them. The script generally contains much more text than is actually heard. Thus if an audience member is able to follow the script in real time they will have much more context and knowledge of what is happening plot-wise. Yet following the script in real time is quite difficult considering most of the words in the script are not actually spoken and there is so much else to look at and listen to.

After Camille yells at Mike on the phone, Naomi enters the kitchen and sits down with Camille. She hilariously begins smoking a human-sized cigarette. What unfolds in the kitchen (beginning at 4:27) is a slow conversation about the pattern of senseless violence among the

Barbies' boyfriends. While "frenetically" strumming the open strings of a toy guitar in a boomchick pattern, Voice 2 (giving voice to Naomi) sings brief, bluesy melodies in a nasal/folk tone, and Voice 1 (giving voice to Camille) speaks her lines in a whining, brink-of-tears voice: 59

Naomi: was his deal? Can I smoke in here?

Camille: I–I just

Naomi: So I hear that there have been more problems.

Camille: Yes, yes, you may

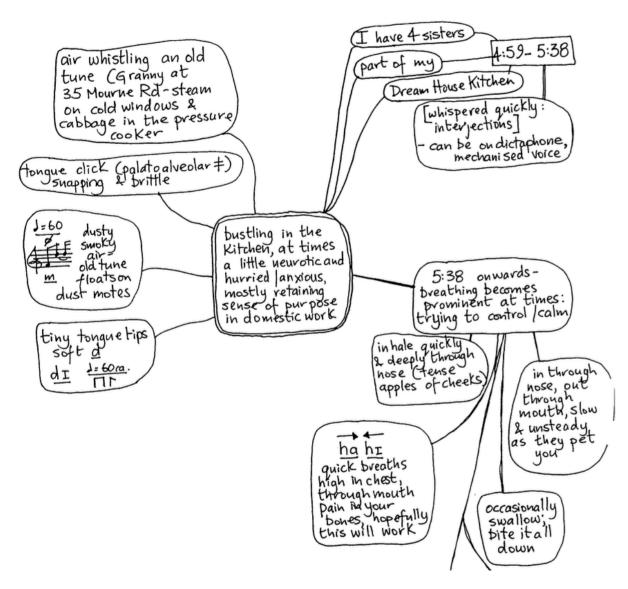
These lines are quite understandable. However, the timing of the lines does not quite line up with the actions of the Barbies. Right after Naomi asks "can I smoke in here?" Camille nods and gets her an ash tray, but she does not say "yes, yes, you may" until 12 seconds later (after Naomi has begun smoking). This moment exemplifies Walshe's convention, asynchronous temporal streams, on a micro level. We can see from the Barbies on stage that Camille has already said the line ("yes, yes, you may") on the visual plane, as evidenced by her actions (nodding and getting the ash tray). By the time she says it in the auditory plane there is a clear delay. Camille says the line at the same time that Naomi sings, "So I hear that there have been more problems." The two characters sing and speak over each other to obscure parts of the sonic data, and perhaps also to imitate real conversation. Walshe uses asynchronous temporal streams, particularly with regard to the visual and the sonic timelines, through much of the piece.

After Naomi's audible line, "So I hear that there have been more problems," Voice 1 begins executing a flowchart score that Walshe calls a MODEL.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 13.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 13.

Example 6: 4:52-6:50, Voice 1 MODEL 1



The singer navigates the written instructions, creating a rapid succession of short, hummed, cheery-sounding melodies interspersed with noisy sounds, including tongue clicks, airy whistles, quick inhalations, and "punchy gulps." At the same time the cello is playing a choreographically-notated mix of wispy bowing on the body and sul tasto open strings, the trombonist changes mutes every few notes, the accordionist types on the amplified typewriter,

⁶⁰ Ibid, Appendix 1.

and the clarinetist obsessively tastes the reed and adjusts the mouthpiece. With all this frenetic action going on, the meaning of the whole can seem bafflingly ungraspable.

The format of the opera also imitates the experience of reading on the internet, with its ability to follow hyperlinks to related articles and websites. For example, after the line "So I heard that they're having more problems," the left camera zooms in and out on a crumpled page of the script on the floor. The text is not readable on the screen, but the image of the script is like a hyperlink on a website, implying that much more information is available if you click on it and follow that path. In this case, the visual "hyperlink" signals to the audience to look at the script to find more information about the "problems" that Naomi mentions.

If the audience members follow the "hyperlink," *and* can locate the current action in the script, *and* manage to read and parse Camille and Naomi's dialogue, they will realize that the Barbies are talking about terrible injuries suffered by their friends Terry and Miranda.

Naomi: (lighting up, blowing out smoke) So I hear that there have been more problems.

Camille: Oh God......

Naomi: G said Terry's in the hospital with exit wounds and water on the—

Camille: (eyes clock, cutting in) –fluid—

Naomi: (stops, looks at Camille until she starts to turn her head back to her)—Whatever.

(beat, begins again briskly) Water on his lung and Miranda had to have five stitches.

Camille: (To self, more forthright) I have four sisters. (To Naomi, closer to normal)

Really? I heard it was fifteen. She'll be using cover-up for the rest of her life (shaking head).

Naomi: Jesus......(gestures to blender) Is that new?

Camille: (distracted)......Where is Gloria? I told her.....

Camille: Yes. (distractedly). It's part of my new Dream, House Kitchen (becoming distracted)......yeah......

Naomi: So where is he now? I mean, don't you worry? Tom came home late, stinking of drink and covered in blood. I got such a fright when—

Camille: (more alert) I know. That's why we're here.⁶¹

Even within the script, the essential information—that Terry and Miranda are seriously injured, Tom is involved, and Naomi and Camille are worried—is obscured by references to

⁶¹ Ibid, I.3.

stereotypically-Barbie concerns of blenders and dream houses. The use of the script as an extramusical source that the audience has access to adds to the work's overwhelming complexity and multiplicity of experiences. The script itself is full of unfinished thoughts, distractions, allusions, and non-sequiturs that add even more to the information overload.

One of the most commonly reported aftereffects of rape is "lessened ability to concentrate." The Columbia rape victim Sara's "energies are not devoted to her academic work, but to steeling herself for an unexpected run-in with Tom in the library hall. Her capacity to 'realize her fullest potential,' stymied." Sara said, "I feel physically ill every time I walk within 100 feet of Tom. I am constantly on edge, fearing he'll be around the corner." In the Walshe piece, the audience feels this sense of distraction and inability to focus, and many times it is expressed as a quick jump from serious concerns to stereotypical Barbie concerns.

Walshe's rapid switching among drastically different vocal timbres creates a delightfully distracting, chaotic, and absurd clash of styles. Between the non-semantic vocal utterances in the first act, the following text comes through (beginning at 5:38):

[in normal speaking voice] Have you got anything to open this [in Christina Aguilera voice] with? [In normal speaking voice] So how did that thing go? Did you? [In folksy nasal singing voice] Where did you get? [In normal speaking voice] This would go nicely with those shoes I have, you know the green ones with the heels?⁶⁵

Thus the overall effect is a simulation of distraction. The main points of the serious discussion about Camille's proposal are obscured by vague small talk, Aguileraian vocal acrobatics, and, again, stereotypically Barbie concerns about fashion.

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⁶² Sedelle Katz and Mary Ann Mazur, *Understanding the Rape Victim: A Synthesis of Research Findings* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1979), 229.

⁶³ Bahr, "Accessible, Prompt, and Equitable?."

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Walshe, XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!, 21-23.

6:05 is an important structural moment exemplifying temporally diverging narratives. The clarinetist says "what's his deal?" and then the clarinet and accordion play a fanfare-like theme while Voice 1 sings a climactic longer phrase in an ornamented, pop-diva style. The camera zooms in on Camille's face and she slowly raises her head as if recalling something traumatic. The puppeteers rapidly shake Gloria and Naomi while Camille holds still. The effect looks like Gloria's and Naomi's movements are being played in fast-forward while Camille is frozen and, in a rare moment of audiovisual synchronization, the tape part contains a stuttering VHS-player fast-forwarding sound effect. Thus, the speed of Camille's timeline is different than that of the other characters.

At this point (6:12), the instrumentalists begin playing low-fi, previously-recorded snippets of themselves on their Dictaphones. Camille's irritated speaking voice comes through with the following audible lines: "What? No!... No, there's something I want to discuss with them. Listen to me! I've been trying to fix this...No, I said I want to fix...huh." She sounds irritated that the others seem less concerned about the violence. Numbly, Camille utters, "there was a...dinner. party." In a moment of precise synchronization, on the word "party," the recordings on the Dictaphones abruptly turn off and there is silence. At this moment (6:53) the right camera zooms in on an elegant invitation to the dinner party that was hosted by Camille. The left camera stays focused on Camille, implying that the content of the other camera is inside her head, in flashback. Eventually both cameras show the dinner party.

At Camille's dinner party Camille, Naomi, Mike, and Tom are formally dressed and sitting at a table with the Princess of Norland (a character made up by Walshe). The sonic texture is very sparse; just the air of bellows and occasional staccato A's from the accordion. The

⁶⁶ Ibid, 25-27.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 28.

characters all embrace, wave to, or bow to the Princess of Norland as she leaves. As soon as the Princess of Norland exits, Camille is visibly relieved and flops down on a chair. At 7:58 the scene erupts into a tussle between Mike and Tom. The music matches the turbulent scene and the narratives are further complicated by musical allusions. The cellist uses a plectrum to aggressively strum famous guitar riffs from bands like The White Stripes and Nirvana, and the trombonist improvises a "crazily active, virtuosic, rhythmically frenetic, insanely difficult solo." Voice 1 traverses the MODEL 2 flowchart at an extremely fast tempo, her words chopped into non-textual sounds, consonants, yelps, breaths, and (hardly recognizable) snippets of the melody from Elton John's "Candle in the Wind."

One of the most discourse-laden and highly-publicized instances of alleged acquaintance rape in recent history is the 2013 case of Columbia student Emma Sulkowicz. Sulkowicz became a nationally-known figure through her performance art piece Carry That Weight, in which she carried her mattress everywhere she went on the Columbia University campus, vowing to continue to do so either until the alleged rapist Paul Nungesser was expelled or until Sulkowicz graduated, whichever came first. The piece and the controversy surrounding it was covered by the New York Times, the New Yorker, the Huffington Post, Elle, MSNBC, Time Magazine, Jezebel, and many more. An article in the Daily Beast defended Nungesser, who claims the sex was consensual. The article's argument hinges on Facebook messages exchanged between Sulkowicz and Nungesser. In the messages, sent two days after the alleged rape occurred, Nungesser invited Sulkowicz to a party and she responded in a friendly tone.

Nungesser: Small shindig in our room tonight—bring cool freshmen.

Sulkowicz: lol yusss

Also I feel like we need to have some real time where we can talk about life and thingz

⁶⁸ Ibid. 30.

because we still haven't really had a paul-emma chill sesh since summmmerrrr⁶⁹

Nungesser and Sulkowicz had a close friendship and in subsequent days Sulkowicz wrote additional friendly and loving messages expressing a desire to see Nungesser. In an article in *Jezebel* rebutting the *Daily Beast* article, Sulkowicz explains that she was distressed and in shock and she wanted to talk to Nungesser about what happened, but she tried to invite him to do so in a friendly tone "so that he doesn't get scared. I don't want him to avoid the conversation."⁷⁰

Even though the main narrative of XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! ends with Camille's rape and the audience does not get to follow her particular story after the rape, Walshe provides a clue that like Emma Sulkowicz, Camille also had this desire to talk, to get her attacker to discuss the issue, and she also felt the need to be nice and civil in her communication. During the scene in which Camille is trying to convince Naomi to agree to the no-sex pact (9:24-11:15) the accordionist is playing the amplified typewriter. Following the score, the accordionist types the following words, haltingly with one finger:

Dear Mike, I think it's finally time for us to sit down and talk to one another about what happened. Hence you I know you may not realize it, but I don't think what you did think what you did was something did was something not right. I don't want to come across as a bi some kind of a bit ------------I think I have every right to ask for an apology from you, especially seeing as particularly in light of what happened⁷¹

The typed text foreshadows the rape, but the audience cannot possibly know what the accordionist is typing; they simply hear the haltingly rhythmic clicks and dings of a typewriter. However, the accordionist has this information and will therefore perform the typing in a pained, conflicted, sad way. Camille is clearly conflicted: she is at least considering reconciliation, and

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⁶⁹ Cathy Young, "Columbia Student: I Didn't Rape Her," *Daily Beast*, February 3rd, 2015, https://www.thedailybeast.com/columbia-student-i-didnt-rape-her, accessed 04/23/18.

⁷⁰ Erin Gloria Ryan, "How To Make An Accused Rapist Look Good," *Jezebel*, February 6th, 2015, https://jezebel.com/how-to-make-an-accused-rapist-look-good-1682583526, accessed 04/23/18.

⁷¹ Walshe, XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!, 35-42.

even though Mike violently raped her, she is worried about coming off as a bitch. In this moment and many others, the ensemble members are tasked with expressing or conveying complex and abstract feelings through their sounds and gestures. Walshe gives them specific tasks to perform that naturally bring out the desired emotion rather that instructing them to simply perform the desired emotion.

Internet comments on the stories about Sulkowicz's alleged rape often veer off-topic by willfully misinterpreting the author's message. A similar situation appears in the third act (at 25:59) while Camille is sitting in the living room with Mike, crying over Naomi's death. The soundscape is composed of loud engine-revving noises, tire squeals, brake sounds, transmission sounds, and distant yelling. It is as though the loud external sounds cover up Camille and Mike's conversation, so Walshe uses intertitles (index cards containing written text) held up next to Mike to communicate what he is saying. The messages are "I think about other women," "I can't be in a relationship with you if you won't give me physical affection," and "I think you should come off the pill and think about what this is doing to me."

That last phrase offers the greatest insight into how Camille's and Mike's narratives diverge. Camille has made it extremely clear that she is taking a principled stand to withhold sex in order to stop the violence. With the line "I think you should come off the pill and think about what this is doing to me" Mike is willfully misinterpreting her actions and implying that the reason she is not having sex with him is because the pill is lowering her libido (a common side effect of the pill). By willfully misinterpreting the reason for her actions, Mike shows that he is

⁷² Walshe, XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!, III.3.

also capable of willfully misinterpreting (lack of) consent which is a common tactic used by rapists.⁷³

As shown though the case studies of instances at Columbia, the webs of stories and voices surrounding acquaintance rapes cross platforms—from the hand-written notes taken on Sara and Natalie's cases, to old-school in-person gossip, to the thousands of internet comments (from insightful to trolling) on articles about Emma Sulkowicz. Walshe utilizes the intensely intermedia nature of XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! to emulate these intertwined webs.

6. DISSASSOCIATION AND THE RAPE SCENE

The title of XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! brings to mind a sign advertising a strip club or a peep show. Such a sign promises a titillating, voyeuristic, sexy, and exciting experience. Yet the reality of a strip club can be more depressing than sexy and titillating. This is the emotional trajectory of XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!; at first a shiny, exciting, and novel concept with a delightful and quirky feast of sonic and visual objects that in the last six minutes constricts its scope to a painfully long scene of rape with emotionally dissonant music that leaves the audience feeling queasy, distressed, and disturbed. The second and third acts each contain less sonic, visual, and narrative information than the acts that precede them. Thus, the piece starts out dense, chaotic, and unfocused and transitions to monolithic by the end of the third act.

This drastic change in the level of sonic and visual information recreates a common victim reaction during rape: disassociation, a phenomenon discussed in *I Never Called It Rape*:

Along with disbelief and denial comes a phase during the actual rape when the woman may feel physically and mentally removed from what is happening. As with denial, dissociation is a protective reaction that helps the victim survive the experience by not feeling it completely. Some women remember most clearly the part of the rape that

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⁷³ Warshaw, I Never Called It Rape, 42.

happened during the time in which they felt dissociated, as if they were watching a movie about the rape rather than experiencing it firsthand.⁷⁴

Because of the drastic constriction of activity and stimuli compared to previous scenes, the rape scene is remembered most clearly and feels the most like "watching a movie."

During the rape scene, the instrumentalists all play together as a temporally-coordinated musical entity for an extended period for the first time in the opera. They take turns playing a jaunty melody and improvising accompaniments in A major.

Example 7: 28:47, Clarinet Muzak Melody



According to the score, the affect is that of "inane Lifetime TV-style music—innocuous lite "jazz," possibly the bloodless muzak soundtrack to an industrial training video."⁷⁵ At first loud car sounds are also present. When the car sounds drop out there is only the cheery muzak, a few breathy vocal sounds and gags, and the image of Mike raping Camille. The extreme emotional dissonance between the music and the event imply that Camille is not present in the moment of the rape, but is instead in the world of the muzak, disassociating from the rape as a survival technique.

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⁷⁴ Warshaw, *I Never Called It Rape*, 55-56.

⁷⁵ Walshe, XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!, 107.

7. CONCLUSION

One of the greatest powers of art is its ability to inspire empathy with situations beyond the listener/viewer's personal lived experience. When hearing and seeing

XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! many audience members, those who have experienced sexual assault, may feel recognition. For those who have never experienced sexual assault,

XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!! offers a deep experience of empathy with those who have. As in real life, there is humor, friendship, and mundanity alongside the trauma of acquaintance rape.

The delayed revelations, the chaos of multiple voices, and the disturbingly disassociated rape scene all offer the audience something beyond factual knowledge. Walshe creates a simulation; a surreal virtual reality that provides a powerful experience of another's reality.

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Microvariations

by Sky Macklay

for Le Nouvel Ensemble Moderne

Program Notes:

In 1825, British conductor George Thomas Smart traveled across Europe and compared his A = 423.5hz tuning fork to the tuning of every musical group he could find. Some ensembles were perfectly in tune with his tuning fork, but others, especially around Vienna, were quite a bit higher and closer to today's standard A = 440hz. *Microvariations* is a fast-forward and transcontinental sonic truncation and fantasy on Smart's journey. Pieces that he probably heard, entire symphonies and sonatas of the common practice period, are distilled to their most skeletal, structural chord progressions and played at hyper speeds. *Microvatiations* begins with material similar to that in my string quartet *Many Many Cadences*: predictable tonal chord progressions recontextualized into fast cells that are constantly changing key. *Microvariations* situates the cadences in two different groups ("towns") playing a quarter tone apart from one another, at first distinct and eventually congealing and blurring.

Performance Notes:

Tuning:

In *Microvariations*, there are two distinct instrument groups: the strings (including piano) which are tuned "normally" (to A=440), and the winds which are tuned a quarter tone lower (about A=428). Thus, all written pitches in the winds sound a quarter tone lower. The timpani play in both of these tunings and bridge the two groups.

The flutist, oboist, clarinetist, bass clarinetist, contrabassoonist, horn player, trumpet player, and bass trombonist should all use their mouthpieces, joints, barrels, reeds, bocals, and tuning slides to lower the fundamental pitch of their instruments by a quarter tone. This should serve as a baseline pitch, though the effect may not be consistent across all registers so the players will also likely need to adjust with their embouchures. The desired effect is to play in tune as a wind choir, but at an audibly lower pitch level than the strings. If the lower tuning makes the instruments sound a bit less refined in some registers, that is welcome and OK!

Accidentals:

Much of the material in *Microvariations* consists of tonal cadences with rapidly changing key centers, therefore the choice of spelling is governed by the particular major or minor key heard at each moment.

- 1. Accidentals apply ONLY to the note they proceed AND to immediate repetitions of that note.
- 2. In the case of repeated notes over a bar line, accidentals will be restated.
- 3. Courtesy accidentals are often provided for clarification.

Quarter Tone and Just Intonation Notation:

When quarter tone accidentals are used, it means that one group is temporarily playing at the pitch-level of the other group and should therefore tune to the other group. For example, in bar 28, the violins and viola gliss to A three-quarters-flat. Since the written A-flat in the winds is a sounding A three-quarters-flat, the violins and violas should tune to the winds.

Arrows and partial numbers are used to indicate pitch adjustments based on just intonation. In spectral chords, partials that deviate significantly from equal temperament are marked with up or down arrows and the partial number (7, 11, 13, 14, 22, 26, etc.). Players should use this information to tune to the harmonic series.

Trills:

All trills are half-step trills.

C score

Microvariations



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