

# Acousmatic Storytelling

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore the idea of relating *storytelling* with *acousmatic music* in the creation of a hybrid vehicle for transmitting stories. The concept of *acousmatic storytelling* is introduced, illustrated by the example of one of my own works which was created with the elements and techniques of storytelling as its conceptual basis. The article continues to investigate concepts of acousmatic storytelling in works from the repertoire of electroacoustic music, with composers such as Ferrari, Westerkamp, Derbyshire, Cousins, and Young providing especially pertinent examples. Acousmatic storytelling integrates interviews, archival recordings, soundscape recordings, sonic icons and music quotations; the microphone becomes a time machine, ‘thought capturer’ and a conduit for conveying cultural information, elements which, combined with the sonic world composed in the studio, create a hybrid form. The concepts introduced in this paper are useful for all those working with recorded sound, offering an approach to sonic creativity based on storytelling techniques and the way we experience past events through memory and sound recording. Acousmatic storytelling transmits a unique version of a story to the mind of the listener, who participates in the creation of the story and acts as co-creator of that story as experienced. In applying the methodology of interviews as well as researching past events and ‘writing’ about them, acousmatic storytelling composers can also be seen as historians and journalists.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The focus of this paper is to relate storytelling with acousmatic music in the creation of a hybrid vehicle for transmitting stories, derived from the incorporation of the specificity of language with the affordances of the manifold structures of sound.

I will present and explore elements of storytelling in specific electroacoustic works and describe the compositional methodology deriving from the exploration of the synergy between storytelling techniques and the acousmatic tradition in some of my own work, integrating archival/historical sound materials, interviews, abstract sound materials, transformed sounds, and referential sounds into a mixed form, which I define as 'acousmatic storytelling'. I will then examine the roots and expression of this style in other works from the electroacoustic repertoire.

This use of archival, referential, as well as community-specific sound, facilitates the reinvention of a sense of experience and memory for listeners using the recording medium as a “thought-capturer” and a conduit for conveying cultural information; as a result, I believe that acousmatic storytelling can be seen as a new medium of historical representation, a form of a study of the past and how it connects with individuals and communities. Elements of storytelling techniques are utilised in order to organise the form of these hybrid works, and also as a conceptual tool to characterise and indicate the function of significant sounds for the works. Verbal narrations exist in recorded form, taken through interviews or from historical archives; the composer (or “acousmatic storyteller”) utilises the electroacoustic studio to construct and ‘orchestrate’ the unfolding of events in a fixed form, creating the “plot” of the story.

## 2. ACOUSMATIC

The term 'acousmatic' is used in this context to refer to the listening condition derived from the reproduction of sound through loudspeakers, incorporating the creative use of recorded sound reproduced and processed in the studio and strategies of sound manipulation.

This approach to the proposed hybrid must be distinguished from 'acousmatic music' as an established genre, as its focus represents a departure from the creative use of recorded sound framed under a morpho-plastic<sup>1</sup> process usually associated with much of the acousmatic genre. Acousmatic storytelling centers on the recorded spoken word as a means for telling stories in conjunction with a composed world that is based in, but departs from, the heritage of acousmatic music. This hybrid approach is not centered on the evolution in time and/or manipulations of sound objects in the formation of works, but rather on the creation of an experience for the listeners that is closer to storytelling, in which verbal narrations and sound objects coexist in the formation of a hybrid; less interested in exploring spectral attributes of sounds, and more aware of the importance of creating a hybrid drama, and thus an acousmatic storytelling form. The resulting works act not solely as a vehicle for the fantastical, intensely detailed timbres of acousmatic music, but as something closer to human experience.

Many acousmatic composers have faced the challenge of working with a narrating voice in their works – for example Trevor Wishart, François Dhomont, and Annette Vande Gorne, to name just a few. Vande Gorne, for

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<sup>1</sup> From the Greek *morpho* = shape, form and *plastikos* = able to be molded. A morpho-plastic process involves the development of the material into a shape by means of molding and sculpting it.

example, in her work *Vox Alia* (Vande Gorne 1995-2000), uses voice as primary material, subject to extensive electroacoustic transformations; however, an approach in which the voice is subject to heavy transformations is not enough to characterise a work as “acousmatic storytelling”, which requires that the voice transmit some form of verbal story to the listener.

Acousmatic storytelling is a hybrid deliberately intended to investigate ways that human beings experience past events, transmitted through recorded reminiscence as well as a composed sound world. Different types of material (verbal narration, composed sound-world, etc.) can be simultaneous; this represents a unique quality offered by the recording medium. In telling a story, the simultaneous events can be mental or verbal and may involve one or more agents. The audience is able to listen and simultaneously experience parallel layers of information: on the one hand, the verbal narration, and on the other the composed sound world which functions either as an embellishment to the story or as an autonomous agent of storytelling.

### **3. THE NARRATOR**

One of the vital elements of storytelling is the presence of a narrator, as his/her voice is actually telling the story. In acousmatic storytelling, the narrator can either be the composer him- or herself or another character. In literature, narrator and author are not the same; the narrator is invented by the author in order to tell the story, existing only within the limits of the text and the context of the work. In acousmatic storytelling, in those instances in which it is the composer who narrates, this presence seems to suggest that the narrator exists both inside and outside the context – i.e., a real person. The participants in the story-world are the “characters”, and the story can be told using different perspectives: first, second or third person, indicating whether the narration

offers a personal testimony imparting immediacy and cogency to the narration, or referring to a character in the second person. In third person narration, the narrator is usually an unspecified entity who conveys the story and is not a character of any kind within the story (Ricoeur 1990: 89). Narrative points of view determine from whose perspective the story is viewed, and determine a set of consistent features regarding the story's transmission to the audience (Card 1988). Narrative point of view does not have to be constant; a number of agents may be involved in the telling of the story and unfolding of the plot.

#### **4. BACKGROUND**

My conception of 'acousmatic storytelling' evolved from my own compositional interests and practice. Beginning from an acousmatic composition background, I have become less interested in exploring spectral attributes of sounds purely for their own sake, and more urgently aware of a need to engage with the issues and themes of the world around me.

With each creative work I engage in, I am attracted by a theme, a need to create a new 'story' that needs to be talked about and exposed in a fresh way. These themes are related to cultural and political events and situations, through which they function as a reflection of the stories presented and as a preservation of content, placing the work itself as a document and 'archaeological' finding for the future researcher or listener. Furthermore, such themes are an attempt to communicate personal experiences to a broader audience, transforming private meaning into public meaning (Jackson 2002: 36). In that sense, the story – which can be seen as “experience being told” — is shared and exchanged with the listeners. My intention is thereby not to create “absolute” stories, in the sense of one ‘true’ version of a story, but rather to represent a personal

interpretation and perspective on the stories I transmit, communicating these views to the society I live in.

These works have diverse thematic content, using an assorted range of sonic materials and resources; each story incorporates a range of sound artefacts used in its telling, including verbal narration, field recordings related to a place, and cultural sound icons, brought together in the studio via sound recording in order to create these new versions of stories. I have come to realise that some of this practice has much in common with that of historians, primarily through the process of collecting material; for example, I have developed an interest in applying methodologies informed by the practice of oral history, making interviews in order to form the content and some aspects of the structure of story-based pieces. This includes, for example, the recording of “oral stories drawn from living memory” (Field, 2007: 3), which the listener can then relate to as ‘stuff of everyday life’, be it cultural or political. As interviewer, I provide an opportunity for the narrator to recall events, to convey details and to reflect while I am listening; in the case of archival material, memory may be an important ingredient in the imagery evoked, but recording also enables a kind of sonic ‘time travel’, bringing past events back into the present and allowing the construction of hybrid combinations of past and present. These materials are then used to build a narration, supported and made possible by the relationships I develop with the interviewees and/or with the community.

The resulting works can then serve as a trigger of memory for people familiar with the stories told, or to ‘create’ memory for those who are not familiar with the particular stories, utilising the unique capabilities of the recording medium to represent, recreate, mirror and stimulate human memory by evoking a collection of incidents and experiences through listening. This extends to audiences both inside and outside of the culture from which the stories are

drawn.

## **5. STORYTELLING AS 'SOMETHING TO HOLD ON TO'**

This is closely related to what Leigh Landy has termed the ‘something to hold on to factor’ (Landy 1994: 50): “...when a composer creates a work he/she makes it available to their audience, offering them something to hold on to in terms of appreciation in word and deed”. The ‘something to hold on to factor’ has to be identifiable, something with which the audience feels comfortable and that provides a greater understanding of the work. Similarly, John Young describes the “capacity for sound recording to function as a mirror held up to lived experience” (Young 2009:1). Sound recording – and the artistic possibilities deriving from it— provides a unique opportunity for the use of this capacity. It can include not only 'neutral' sounds, but also culture-specific sounds, soundscape elements drawn from a local community, and recordings of stories, as well as the sound manipulation of all the above. The act of working creatively with sound recordings and producing sonic works preserves, creates and expands the experience of storytelling through the creation of works where the symbiosis of verbal narration of stories and the composed acousmatic sonic environments play a significant role, through the ability to simultaneously transmit parallel stories with other kinds of sonic development and drama. In this sense, acousmatic materials and techniques expand their nature and heritage, acquiring hybrid attributes and qualities that make them a vehicle for a unique form of storytelling, which serves as a perfect “something to hold on to factor”.

If we extend the range of the “something to hold on to” factor to the “mirror” of lived experience and the cultural/political sonic elements of a community, for example via recordings of voices of community members reciting stories related

to that community, we can directly engage with that community as audience, by making a work directly derived from, and related to, that particular community or culture. This offers the potential for a particularly rewarding form of acousmatic storytelling, whose content is linked to the everyday life of the community.

## **6. *ALEXANDROS***

To shed some light on the themes and techniques described above, and to demonstrate how my own practice drew me to this hybrid genre, we can take my work *Alexandros* as a usefully illustrative example.

*Alexandros* was inspired by the Greek politician Alexandros Panagoulis (1939–1976), who had an active role in the fight against the junta in Greece (1967—1974). He became famous and lauded worldwide for his attempt to assassinate the President of the Regime of Colonels, dictator Georgios Papadopoulos, and also for the tortures he went through during his subsequent imprisonment. The work is dedicated to the memory of Panagoulis and aims to carry the listener on a journey of historical representation of the acts and persona of the man.

To begin the work, I decided to interview the younger brother of Panagoulis, Stathis, and one of his best friends and companions, Veryvakis. Interviews allowed the questioning of narrators, making them reflect upon the content, offering not only facts but also interpretation. The interview with Stathis provided the story with a more sentimental and internal view of the facts — material that enables the audience to witness the perspective of Panagoulis’s family and their experience of the historical facts; on the other hand, the interview with Veryvakis provided a more detached view of the political situation of the time, as well as detailed elements of the persona of Panagoulis



and a description of the historical context around his actions. Both narrators function as characters within the story. Veryvakis had experienced the events personally, which means that his place in the story is factual. As we listen to Veryvakis's narration, there is no reference point as to what is present and what is past; Veryvakis narrates past events in which he was personally involved, reflected as a recalled present, offering a sense of non-time to the story. Stathis's mode of existence is purely subjective and emotional. As he describes in the interview, he heard about the attempt on the radio; his knowledge is based on what his brother told him, so he received the version of events of the protagonist himself. Like Veryvakis, Stathis's verbal narration also presents a parallel, merged condition of present and past.

My own voice is heard twice in the work, functioning as a link between different time scales: the time scale of Panagoulis's voice – a past which is brought into the present, the voices of Stathis and Veryvakis which are the present related to the past, and the composer as a representative of an undefined 'now'.

In addition to the interview material, I also recorded a number of soundscape elements with close ties to the background history of the work, beginning with the general soundscape outside the Greek Parliament in the centre of Athens. Other elements include:

- The march of the Greek Presidential Guards, a military contingent whose role is based around a ritualistic feature of their approach from the barracks behind the Greek Parliament to take their places right outside the Parliament in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The Guard is comprised of an elite of Greek Army soldiers called Evzones (Greek: Εύζωνες), who march with a very particular style, making a distinctive

sound with their shoes, which are known as *tsarouhia*. The sound of *tsarouhia* as a soundmark is used in *Alexandros* to symbolise the oppressive character of the Military Regime.

- Athens Underground Line 2, the terminal station of which, at the time of recording, was called “Alexandros Panagoulis”. Recordings include train whistles and cracklings, sounds of arrival and departure, public address announcements and songs heard in stations.
- The soundscape in the First Athens Cemetery and especially around Panagoulis’s grave.

I carried out research in the Greek National Radio/TV historical archives, where I located various fragments of Panagoulis’s voice, talking about his arrest after the failed attempt against the dictator or giving details about his own life and political views. I also used the Greek National anthem, as an iconic sonic quotation and also to generate other material through transformation. I tried to merge qualities of the Athenian soundscape with the voice of Panagoulis using convolution techniques, allowing for a mental and fantastical projection of Panagoulis’s character merged with the city of Athens.

I began the composition process by editing and segregating the interviews into eight distinct story ‘scenes’ – similar to an extent to the chapters of a novel or the sequences in a film. These scenes were connected by unity of content (within the story), unity of place (all events happening in Athens) and unity of sounds. The next stage involved the creation of a storyboard which helped to organise, divide and assign the composed sound worlds into the respective ‘scenes’ of the work, and began to connect the verbal content with the acousmatic sonic world I was creating.

The plot of *Alexandros* was developed in the form of scenes and transitions,

nested one inside the other, using non-linearity to 'blend' the information inside the listener's mind, eventually enabling listeners to create their own 'version' of the story. The listener experiences different events simultaneously: for example the theme of Panagoulis's character (a low resonant attack mixed with high-pitched sound isolated from the train recordings) is heard at the same time as his voice, together with manipulations of the *tsarouhia*. The Panagoulis leitmotif provides a sonic 'character' that is associated with the hero, with the capacity to be transformed according to the transformations and tasks that the hero is going through.

A number of sonic incidents or episodes function as flashback and/or flash-forward sounds, creating mental bridges for the material in its temporal unfolding: for example, at [0:11], Veryvakis's and later Stathis's voices are heard together with the soundscape around Panagoulis's grave (featuring the sounds of birds), which functions as a flash-forward sound. The soundscape of the grave will be heard again at the end in the last section of the work, creating a connection with the beginning. At [0:16], the sonic space changes, returning back to the indoor space of Veryvakis's office, a move that functions as a bridge between 'then', and its story as told in the 'now', creating a simultaneous narrative of two different time zones. **[Figure 1]**

This combination and coexistence of multiple layers and time scales – a layer of voice-narration, a layer of referential recordings relative to a place, and a layer of abstract, transformed materials and their interconnections – with the political theme of the work are, I believe, a clear example of the characteristics of the hybrid 'acousmatic storytelling' genre described above. However, upon reflection, it is easy to discern works in a similar vein throughout the acousmatic repertoire; it is tempting to retroactively claim these works as constituting a tradition or canon of Acousmatic Storytelling. This list would

likely include, for example, works by Luc Ferrari, Hildegard Westerkamp, Delia Derbyshire, John Cousins and John Young. We will now examine several such works, in an attempt to further clarify the characteristics of the acousmatic storytelling approach. One could also draw connections with genres outside the acousmatic tradition, such as Text-Sound Composition or the radiophonic repertoire; however, for the sake of clarity (and brevity), we will limit ourselves here to representative acousmatic works.

## **7. ACOUSMATIC STORYTELLING: EXAMPLES FROM THE REPERTOIRE**

There are works from the repertoire of electroacoustic music that can be seen from the perspective of acousmatic storytelling, in which we can trace elements of this hybrid form. I will start with three formative examples of acousmatic storytelling by Luc Ferrari, Hildegard Westerkamp and Delia Derbyshire.

Luc Ferrari is perhaps one of the most significant forerunners of acousmatic storytelling. One of his clearest examples, *Far-West News* (1999), is a work in three parts, based on recordings Ferrari made on a trip to the USA. The idea of the author being an integral part of the substance of the work, as well as being present in it – able to influence the environment around him through his interactions with people, places, and sounds – is a key aspect of the way this composition is formed. The plot unfolds in the same way the actual journey occurred: first, stories take place in Santa Fe and Monument Valley, then in the Grand Canyon, and finally in Los Angeles. Ferrari's voice often narrates the 'when' and 'where' of the story to the listener, offering a direct sense of place and/or time, which is combined with the soundscape of the respective place (see for example *Far-West News 1: de Santa Fé à Monument Valley I* – 01'03''; *II* – 00'08; and *Far-West News 2: de Page à Grand Canyon* – 0'16'').

The composer experiments with different narrative points of view in all parts of the work, although the perspective mainly remains in the first person. What is more interesting in this work is the enhancement of the possibilities of narration and expressiveness offered by the electroacoustic studio. The voices heard in the work are mainly Ferrari', Ferrari's wife, and the voices of the people they encounter and have conversations with. But, another voice is heard from time to time; a weird, shadowy voice (an acousmètre) describing the scenery of a respective soundscape, which we (the listeners) cannot be aware of as we are without visual contact with that scenery (Chion 1994). This strange and slightly transformed acousmètre appears without any kind of preparation, and "seems to be able to be anywhere he or she wishes" (Chion 1994: 130). For example, in *Far-West News 3: de Prescott à Los Angeles I* (02'50''), the listener is introduced to the soundscape of a local restaurant with live music, and the acousmètre says: "in this restaurant palace, between modern style and western, there was a huge fresco representing a picture...with Steven McQueen in the foreground, on a life-sized horse and Monument Valley in the background". Additionally, as we can see in the previous example, by using a combination of soundscape recordings and properly shaped oral storytelling, cultural information related to specific communities can be shared with the listener. In acousmatic storytelling, the acousmètre also expresses the inner thoughts of the composer, as for example in *Far-West News 1: de Santa Fé à Monument Valley IV* at 01'12'' when it appears saying: "I finally agreed to take to my benefit all my past experiences. Before, I always thought that everything again from 'zero'. I agreed to consider all these crossings: serialism, minimalism, tautology, random architecture, post-modernism and so on..." Also in the same part of the work, at 02'10'', it seems like the composer's voice – in the form of the acousmètre – is using the microphone as a confession box, revealing a 'truth' that has remained hidden from the listener: "I've done electronic

compositions, compositions for orchestra, I have done pictures, radio art, reports – true and untrue ones...” In other words, he here confesses to the listener that what has seemed to be a form of documentary truth, may in fact be a more complex blend of truth and fiction, and that our acousmètre may in fact be an “unreliable narrator” (Booth 1961: 158).

Hildegard Westerkamp is another likely candidate in our quest for precursors to acousmatic storytelling, with some similarities to the approaches just described in Ferrari’s work. For example, in Westerkamp’s seminal *Kits Beach Soundwalk* (1989), the composer is again present in the work. She places herself in the story without experimenting with different narrative points of view. Her voice remains untransformed throughout the work and she uses a first-person perspective of narration, giving information of the place and time in combination with the soundscape recordings of the place: “...I am on Kits Beach...” (00’22’’), etc. Her calm voice creates the expectation for an unfolding of a story as she takes listeners into a story of techniques in combination with awareness: “I could shock you or fool you by saying that the soundscape is this loud... but it is more like this” (01’42’’). Westerkamp’s story has an educational character; she intends to leave for the listener a trace of knowledge and a seed of will for further exploration into how they experience the soundscape they live in. Westerkamp provides specific ways of learning how to experience the soundscape: “...but I am trying to listen to those sounds in more detail now” (02’29’’). It is obvious that her intention goes beyond creating an artwork based on the formation and transformation of sounds, but rather for the work to acquire a pedagogical aspect and be an object of heritage.

In *Kits Beach Soundwalk* we find parallel descriptive and informative levels of storytelling, expressed by her voice and the composed sounds simultaneously. The composer informs the listener about the existence of band-pass filters and

equalisers and their ability to change the nature of sounds as well as to change the content of the listening experience. "...Pretend we are somewhere far away..." (03'19"). The plot of the storytelling in *Kits Beach* is an interplay between real and non-real mental projections, from the presentation of Vancouver's soundscape to a dream-world, to Xenakis, Mozart and back to Vancouver. The composed sounds sometimes function as an embellishment of the narration, emphasising its meaning. At 04'49", previously introduced crackling textures, together with a high frequency gesture, are increased in amplitude and panned from left to right, identifying with – and highlighting – the phrase "it sounded like a million tiny voices...". This gesture is apprehended as 'being' the million voices, allowing for the listener to experience a second, parallel level of storytelling. The work also acquires attributes of more traditional forms of storytelling, such as when grandmothers used to tell tales to children; the listener is transformed into a child again, for example by the repetition of the following phrase: "Smacking and clicking and sucking and spitting... and singing and laughing and weeping and kissing... and whispering" (05'36"). At 06'55", Westerkamp demonstrates the ability for the recording medium to create a multiple-layered storytelling, taking the listener through a mental experience in which multiple information – simultaneously verbal and non-verbal – is transmitted, as information about Xenakis' *Concrete PH* succeeds the dream-worlds.

Moving to a significantly earlier example, Delia Derbyshire's *Invention for radio No. 1: The Dreams* (1964) is a radiophonic work comprised of a group of edited and restructured interviews of people describing their dreams. The composer attempts to re-create some of the specific impressions of dreaming, for example the experiences of running away, falling, new landscapes, being underwater and colour, thereby dealing with themes that offer archetypes of human behaviour and nature that correspond to common sensations and

perceptions. In terms of the perspective of the stories being told, all testimonies were taken from real life, and the personal stories of dream experiences are in the first-person. Throughout this work there are two parallel stories: the verbal, untransformed narration, and the composed world. The personal experience being related is an experience for the listener to relate to and identify with. At the opening of the work, right after the overture, we hear the characters describing their experience of “running” in their dreams (01’06”) or falling: “then... I was falling over a cliff...” (07’54”) or “I am standing on an embankment” (07’00”). The idea of non-linear unfolding of the story (by using flashbacks) is important to the work. At 25:43, we hear the phrases “seems to go down, down, down” and “it was very deep”, which were heard earlier at 13:19 & 13:50. This flashback comes again at 28:19 (“down, down, down”). While stories are all presented in the first person, narrative time is uncertain. The stories described by the interviewees have no historical or chronological factor surrounding them. The listener experiences reminiscences in the ‘now’, but with stories taking place in the undefined ‘past’, providing an example of the temporal narrative fluidity made possible by the acousmatic storytelling form.

We find a similar fluidity in other, more recent examples. John Young’s *Ricordiamo Forlì* (2005), for instance, explores “...the interaction of memory and experience, narrative and evocation bringing sounds and voices from the past and the present together in imaginary soundscapes” (Young 2007). This work is, I believe, the epitome of acousmatic storytelling, demonstrating inventive ways of exploiting the potential of both acousmatic music and storytelling practice. The work has a strong emotional theme: it is based on the story of the composer’s parents and how they met during World War II. It uses as primary materials a recorded interview of the composer’s father, soundscape recordings of Forlì, piano recordings and verbal narrations/reports taken from historical recordings (from the New Zealand Sound Archive and the Sound and



Film Archives of the Imperial War Museum), thereby simultaneously using verbal narrations, field recordings and transformed sounds to tell the story. Various soundscape recordings and soundmarks are carefully placed as part of the plot, offering a sense of place for the listener. For example, the soundscape of Piazza Saffi in Forli is introduced right from the beginning of the work, and the untransformed bells of Forli's Duomo are heard for the first time at 02'19''. Another element used in this piece's storytelling is musical quotations, such as Verdi's 'bacio' theme from *Otello*. Young says that "the theme is presented complete at various points in the work, but the notes are also reordered into a new thematic identity that seeps through much of the work" (Young 2008: 326). In acousmatic storytelling, the material leads to the dramatization and emphatic representation of the story being told. Utilising the infinite possibilities of the studio, Young blends soundscape recordings with music quotations, offering a set of mental projections to the mind of the listener. Fragments of a music quotation can be used in combination with other materials of the work; for example, the 'bacio' theme in *Ricordiamo Forli* is linked to one of the main materials, the church bells. As the composer puts it, "a useful connection between these two sounds was the significance of the note C-sharp in the 'kiss' theme, which is one of the approximate spectral centres of the bell of the Duomo that is used extensively as a sound icon and as a component in mixing and signal processing".

At the core of this work are the ways we experience past events through memory, conveyed through oral storytelling and its "mirror" in sound recording (Young 2008: 328). The testimonies given by Alex – Young's father – collected during the interviews regarding his memories of Forli, the soundscape of Forli, and the bells of the Duomo together with the transformation honed by the composer, together help the listener to experience past events in a new, imaginative way, and possibly to undergo a virtual time travel back to where the

events took place. The work explores the potential of recorded audio information to trigger imagination as well as to create memory of specific stories for the audience. The composer combines his personal experience of a story with other versions of the same story (in this case, his parents' version) and re-transmits it in a new form. The material gathered through interviews, archives and field recordings are seen and presented under a new prism offered by acousmatic techniques. The emotional content of this material is augmented by utilising the expressive tools of the electroacoustic studio (such as convolution). For example, speaking about his in-studio merging of the bells with Verdi's theme, Young states that "linking these two sonic identities materially has the potential to evoke for the listener not just a sense that the sounds are inhabiting the same 'mixed' space, but that they are fused metaphorically" (Young 2008: 326). The narrator is heard together with transformed 'leitmotifs' derived from the Duomo's bells, such as the attack-resonance sound heard at the beginning of the work or the sounds of the Duomo bells which start to emerge around 0'39"; this broadens the storytelling potential of the piece, as the listener takes in simultaneously the verbal storytelling, the soundscape and the composed sonic world, all contributing to a sense of what can be called holistic acousmatic storytelling experience. An example of this holistic experience can be found at 45'15, towards the end of the work; right after the end of Alex's story about the death of the "little girl", we experience a sonic world simultaneously composed out of the Duomo bells, transformed sounds based on harmonics of those bells, and various gesture-like sounds derived from various materials which have already been presented in the work. This leads to the final section, where the soundscape of the Piazza Safi is introduced once again (just like in the beginning) with the narrator making his final comments in today's 'now', while at the same time various transposed material is heard. Young is creating a composed world that functions simultaneously on two levels. The first is as an embellishment of the narration,

as at 06'22' where the narration is accompanied by an emerging drone-chord, which continues throughout the historical reports occurring at 06'54. This embellishment serves as a secondary “agent” of the story, but without any protagonistic role; the priority is for the listener to listen to the verbal story. The second, is as an autonomous compositional process, creating another layer of storytelling: the “journey” of the transformed sounds. Since the beginning of the piece, a set of materials that form the basis of the composed world have been exposed: the bells, the Verdi quote, the various soundscape recordings, etc. Throughout the work, these materials are put through various morpho-plastic processes, and/or re-presented from different perspectives, extended to form new textures, acquiring the quality of an autonomous – but not insulated – entity. The reception of this autonomous entity is a second, parallel, layer of storytelling: a story of the sounds themselves; sounds that have a direct and vital relationship with the story told. This consistency and inter-relation of the sonic material offers a holistic storytelling experience that is at the core of the acousmatic storytelling idea. In the first section of the work, up until 02'17'', the composed world functions more like an embellishment of the oral story being told, while from 02'17'' (after the narrator has stopped) onwards, it seems like it is ‘taking over’ the role of storytelling, with the listener experiencing the sounds of the bells together with gestural and textural material (especially from 02'26'' until 03'15'', when the piano enters just before the narrator begin his narration again). The composer constructs the balance and alternation between oral storytelling and “composed world” storytelling, which ultimately results in the holistic quality of the acousmatic storytelling form.

Another recent example is John Cousins' *Doreen* (2007), a sonic portrait of the composer's mother that “concerns her meeting her future husband Ted during wartime...” (Young 2016: 75). Cousins is present in the work as an interviewer, while Doreen is the narrator, unfolding the storytelling in a first-person

perspective. Cousins combines most of the elements of acousmatic storytelling – verbal narration, music quotations, field recordings and transformed sounds – in a single work. Abrupt sonic gestures interrupt the story being told, emphasising the meaning of the moment and highlighting the added value that acousmatic techniques can bring to the experience of acousmatic storytelling. A characteristic example can be found at 08'03" when Doreen says "...and then that particular night we watched the fireworks". That phrase triggers a set of abrupt firework explosions (scaring the listener) that amalgamate with Doreen's extreme laughter and cough. That sudden gesture changes our comfortable state of listening to an old lady telling her love story, and at the same time highlights the previously told story about her making love with Ted. The music quotation used in *Doreen* is the song *It's a Sin to Tell a Lie*. Here, Cousins chooses not to include an audio recording taken from elsewhere, but rather to have the protagonist of the story perform the quotation by singing it. Further, just like in the cases of *Alexandros* and *Ricordiamo Forli*, in *Doreen* the composer takes advantage of the electroacoustic studio's expressive tools, merging fragments of the protagonist's recorded expressions (like laughter and coughing) with other sonic material, for example at 14'10" when an abrupt explosion is combined with Doreen's cough.

Through all of these expressive means, *Doreen* provides another example of acousmatic storytelling in which the emotional theme, the parallel storytelling layers of oral and composed-world stories, the expressive tools of the electroacoustic studio, and the method of interviewing, have all been utilised in order to shape a new form for the story being told, from the subjective perspective of the composer.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

From my own practice, as well as looking at other works from the perspective

of acousmatic storytelling, I have come to realise that this hybrid is an attempt by composers to create a subjective reading of specific narratives and to share these by revealing them to listeners. It is an effort to connect the personal experience of a story with other versions of the same story, into a new interpretation of the content. In the cases of *Alexandros* and *Ricordiamo Forli*, the use of historical recordings offers direct access to the historical time, material for sonic transformation, and content helping the development of the storytelling. By utilising the expressive tools offered by the electroacoustic studio, composers can underline and augment the emotional content being related, and the works can be considered as a form of ‘saved’ cultural information, preserving content of varied themes and making it accessible to future generations. It could be argued that this hybrid has much in common with the view of the Ancient Greek historian Thucydides, who considered his work to have been written not as an essay which is to win the applause of the moment, but as belonging to all time. Some of the methodologies of acousmatic storytelling have much in common with those of historians, primarily the processes of collecting material as well as of researching and ‘writing’ stories as accounts of the past. Furthermore, acousmatic storytelling can also have a pedagogical value, as in the case of Westerkamp’s *Kits Beach*; and the composer in some cases can function as a journalist, interviewing potential narrators as in the cases of *Far-West News*, *Alexandros*, *Ricordiamo Forli* and *Doreen*.

As seen in a number of the works discussed, *acousmatic storytelling* is directly related to recorded memories and their relationships with time. Listeners in this very ‘now’ communicate with stories taking place in the past, experiencing a network of various sound manipulations that lead to a dramatization, embellishment and highlighting of the stories being told, as well as offering aural projections of those stories into the mind of the listener. Works of this

kind have the ability to evoke for the listener an allegorical (as well as literal) mixture of characters, recorded and manipulated sounds, transforming the story being told verbally into a unique listening experience in which different sonic stimuli coexist, offering a holistic storytelling experience.

*Acousmatic storytelling* as a practice could potentially broaden the concept of what acousmatic art can achieve, and possibly be taken and applied as a model for educational purposes and for making acousmatic music more accessible to wider audiences. The use of oral storytelling, historical recordings, soundscape recordings, music quotations, sonic icons and transformed sounds, all in one holistic work, encourages the active imagination of the listeners, who imagine the scenes, the setting, the characters, the story and their relationship to the sounds. A story is formed in a unique way in the mind of each listener; the listener participates in the creation of the 'final version' of the story, thereby becoming, in a sense, its co-creator.

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