Geographies

An interview with Giacomo Grassi

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Alex Hofmann: *Your piece 'Geographies' has the intention to translate vastness into music; how did you go about writing this piece?*
Giacomo Grassi: The piece evolved very slowly. It all started with intense research into all topics: research about sound first, together with a search for the meaning of everything.

At the beginning there was just one need and a strong desire about communicating something. This something had no defined boundaries, and the more I searched, the more I was discovering vast spaces. I like to imagine in the piece to be flying over the earth. I see all the things one does not see when on the surface. From this derives the title "Geographies". I have tried to represent the lines of the earth with sound. In this I am trying to reflect nature more than the

world itself but also the lines of myself and humans generally. Who knows which is bigger, which contains which? Besides the easy distinction, one draws the lines of the other in only one way. There is a lot of French existentialism in it, I reference Merleau-Ponty in this for instance.

Alex Hofmann: *How would you describe the form and development of the piece?*

Giacomo Grassi: The piece begins with shaped trails that converge into a dome of sound. Out of this climax, there is a sudden depression, an empty floating space where one can start to listen what I like to call interferences. These increase quickly and build to another climax, where most of the pathos is, for the impetus of the sound and the use of the voice. It all ends with the same overview of the intro, this time in a lighter way, like flying where it is no longer visible.

Alex Hofmann: *Technically, it sounds to me, that the piece evolves from FM-sounds to granular-based-sample processing, which thus explores two different worlds of sound synthesis. Was this a decision you made right at the beginning or did it evolve during the development process of the piece?*

Giacomo Grassi: Yes, there is a radical change of sound synthesis technique along the different

sections. What you perceive as FM are just a lot of linsegs in the Csound code; linsegs of many sounds with slight differences of pitch. There are few proper granular sounds; the granular effect has come about as a consequence of the multiplication of different signals: so-called *ring modulation*, which gives a sort of aggressiveness to the climax of the piece. Usually I don't have a lot of ideas *a priori*, except a general idea, even if it is not particularly defined. The various techniques chosen arise during the process of composition. I reflect on how to create a specific quality of sound that could give the right meaning and expressiveness at a particular part of the piece and this then suggests an appropriate technique.

Alex Hofmann: *You decided to use voice-samples from Jean-Luc Godard's movie "Masculine Feminine" (1966). Has this movie a special meaning to you? Why did you decide on these parts?*
Giacomo Grassi: Well, in that period I was watching many movies of the *Nouvelle Vague*, and I felt very close to the main character of "Masculine Feminine", concerning the way he feels about life. In the centre is his relationship to the world, to others, the other key character

being the woman, with her beauty but also the frequent misunderstandings. The nuance of the first scene sets the mood for the entire movie. The parts I've taken for my piece are some lines read by the young man in the café, where shortly after, the girl will appear. In those lines he expresses the impossibility of a total communion among different human beings. Now, coming back to the piece, it is not just about this. These lines and the music sketch a terrain where the man had never been before, and where he is alone. He is adjunctive to the nature, and yet he could stand there as the moon shines above.