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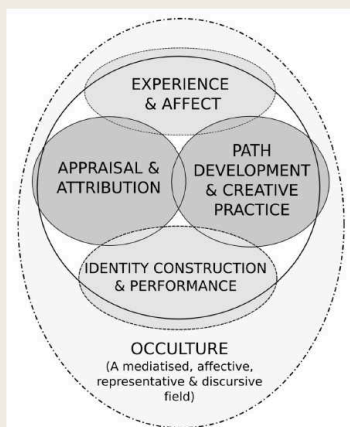
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Xenis Emputae Travelling Band (2001-2010)



Despite being called a ‘band’, this was a one-person group: the other theoretical contributors were drawn from various rural *genii locorum*, or spirits of place, which I felt myself to be in touch with: the music being viewed as the product of magical encounter: either by channeling the spirits musically, or using the music to imaginatively enter their spiritual domains.

Occulturally-Situated Creative Seekership



Model for occulturally-situated creative seekership
(Legard, Phil, 2023. *The Occultural Orpheus: An Autoethnography of Esoteric Musicianship*. PhD Thesis, Leeds Beckett University, submitted March 31 2023).

My doctoral research ultimately yielded the development of a theoretical model for what I have called ‘creative seekership’ within contemporary occulture, but today I would like to concentrate on the areas at the top of my model, particularly touching on some experiential dimensions of musical practice and the ways they are emically interpreted.

Events: Special and Origrinary



Men-an-Tol (Cornwall Guide, cornwalls.co.uk)



Ithell Colquhoun, *Sunset Birth* (1942)

"I passed through the ancient ruined tomb of Men-an-Tol [...] Within a moment **the landscape had been transfigured**... an experience I can't quite put into words [...] I think that is the moment in which the project began - a *sort of birth into a new world*."

– Extract from an event narrative describing the Origrinary Event which 'made me a musician'.

Porous Practices: Emic Ascriptions to Musical Absorption

When considering connections between musical practice and esoteric experience, the work of Ann Taves and Egil Asprem suggests a variety of insightful theoretical and methodological perspectives. Taves has built much of her work on the general attributive theory of religion, suggested by Spilka et al in 1985 (Spilka et al, in Taves 2009: 169-71). Central to this theory are experiences or events, and the ways in which they are explained and elaborated on by those who have them. Such events are, in Taves' terminology, deemed 'special': a word chosen over often culturally loaded terms such as the sacred, religious, mystical, etc (:27-28). For some, special experiences may also become Origrinary Events: performatively recounted as life-changing or revelatory narratives, which may further be developed into 'paths of practice', where some facet of that special experience is re-created through practices deemed efficacious (:140-43).

In my own work, I would often present such an Origrinary Event narrative describing an experience I had at Men-an-Tol: a Neolithic or early Bronze Age monument in Cornwall. Visiting the location in 2001, and crawling through the holed stone initiated an experience of ecstatic unification with the landscape. And although I did not attempt to impose a concrete attribution to the event – such as earth energies – I did associate it with what my earliest written version of the narrative describes as a 'birth into a new world'. This experience was credited with initiating a new approach to music-making: a path of practice involving improvising in rural locations, and using the altered states of consciousness resulting from absorption in musical-making to draw closer to spirits in the landscape, which I had also perceived as sensed-presences in the aftermath of the Origrinary Event.

It is not unusual for such events to be presented as spontaneously occurring, life-altering experiences, and they often serve as foundational narratives for esoteric practice as well as having a performative role in personal myth-making and discourses on authenticity. However, such emic presentations often underplay the lengthier processes of occultural socialisation, perceptual priming, and informal practice that precede the Origrinary Event. While my Origrinary Event became central to my self-presentation, the musical approaches were fundamentally a re-negotiation of earlier practices which I had been engaging with in a less-structured manner. Following the Event, however, these practices moved from my home studio and into the landscape of Yorkshire, also developing a corpus of explanatory theory around them.

Absorption and Porosity

"In addition to **fantasy-proneness**, **imagery ability**, and **hypnotizability**, absorption has also been related to **synaesthesia** (Chun and Hupe, 2015, Glicksohn et al., 1999, Rader and Tellegen, 1987), **empathy** (Wickramasekera and Szlyk, 2003, Wickramasekera, 2007), **creativity** (Manmiller, Kumar, & Pekala, 2005), **flow** (Marty-Dugas & Smilek, 2018), **emotional brain processing** (Benning, Rozalski, & Klingspon, 2015), **feelings of self-transcendence** (Cardeña & Terhune, 2014), and **experiences of dissociation and hallucinations** (Glicksohn and Barrett, 2003, Perona-Garcelán et al., 2013, Perona-Garcelán et al., 2016)." (Lifshitz et al 2019)

Reference	Event	Absorption Characteristics	Porosity Explanations
A2.9.9.	Recording <i>The Pyramonic Glass</i>	Musical absorption, mental imagery	Imagery developed into discourses with 'spirits' in a 2009 chapbook <i>Abat!</i>
A2.10.13.	Recording on Felixstowe beach	Musical absorption, diminished agency, mental imagery	Related my vision of Roman soldiers to Robert Graves' 'analeptic' method: throwing the mind back in time to receive impressions from the past.
A2.14.2.	Recording <i>Grotto Grove and Shrine</i>	Musical absorption, diminished agency, mental imagery, sensed presence	Sense of the mind entering a communion with the underworld (Anwn), experience of sensing a spirit behind me.
A2.17.2.	Use of 'psycheographs' to re-engage with place	Revisiting memories, mental imagery	Implication that these can be used not just to stimulate memory, but to re-engage with the place <i>itself</i> (and its spirits).
A2.17.4.9	The shade of Robert Lenciewicz as a familiar spirit	Mental imagery, sensed presence	Spirits of the dead can 'speak' to the minds of the living

Examples of absorptive experiences and porosity explanations from my autobiographical narrative.

Both prior to this experience, and in the practices which followed, absorptive engagement with musical listening was a major component of my musical-magical practices. This continued a practice of intense, imaginative listening which had begun in my childhood with books on tape, and in my early teens with heavy-metal and progressive rock music. These intuitive forms of mental imagery cultivation (Noll 1985) found their natural fit with esoteric practices of visualisation, pathworking, and imaginative journeying that I would discover via chaos magick in my later teens – and, although my seekership journey took me from chaos magick, to grimoire purism, to folklore and earth mysteries, an absorptive engagement with sound has remained a consistent feature in my practice.

Absorption itself has often been typified as a dimension of personality, described by Lifshitz et al (2019) as a 'willingness to be engrossed in the contents of awareness while relinquishing a sense of active control' (:3). Research suggests a potential relationship between absorptive tendencies and engagement with arts, attachment to nature, positive emotions when listening to music, dissociative experiences, the thinness of mental boundaries, the production of vivid mental imagery (Luhmann et al 2021), and transliminality – "a largely voluntary susceptibility to, and awareness of, large volumes of inwardly generated psychological phenomena of an ideational and affective kind" [Lange et al 2000: 593]).

Furthermore, the attribution of such absorptive experiences to sources beyond the self has recently been posited as a cross-cultural phenomenon by Lurhmann et al (2021), who suggest that socio-cultural concepts relating to porosity inform the interpretation of absorption experiences. Within occulture itself, a variety of common motifs suggesting a porosity between the self and the wider physical and spiritual worlds, can easily be found via presentations of channelling, the reception of visions, astral travel, the visitation of dream-worlds, and so on: one needn't read Agrippa or Fludd to be well acquainted with such concepts even within the supposedly materialistic culture of late modernity.

Flow Experiences and Porosity Explanations

“The compositional process can include sessions of **improvised recording while in a state of invocation nearing possession**, receiving ideas instinctively while the channels of communication are open. These **raw ideas imparted from the Acausal** can be later deciphered, refined, and put to use. Thus is the dialogue between myself and the Acausal intrinsic to the process of crafting Hvile I Kaos ritual hymns.” (Kakophonix, Hvile I Kaos)

“When you start playing, just forget all about that shit and **be in the moment**. Listen. Listen to your heart, your soul, and your feelings. Channel. Channel your heart, your soul, and your feelings. **Channel the other impulses that come from beyond you**. Listen; **be a vessel and let them flow through you**.” (Oraklet. Häxkapell)

In my own work, I suggest that the experience of absorption – during both playing and listening to music – resulted in a variety of porosity explanations: attributing altered states of consciousness to transpersonal or intermediary agencies. There are also many experiential accounts from occulturally-situated composers and musicians which also suggest tendencies to link the absorptive experiences of music-making to porosity explanations. Most common is the connection between states similar to Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of ‘flow’, in which the sense of effortless control over musical production, loss of self-awareness, and seemingly ‘automatic’ nature of the output, take on a spiritual dimension and are attributed to the channelling of energies, or the loss of self-awareness in the flow state associated with mystical analogues such as ego-death, no-mind, or neither-neither states.

Such descriptions particularly abound in the overlapping genres of ritual ambient and black metal, where a theology of the inhuman transcendent supports discourses on humanity’s place in nature and the cosmos, primarily from perspectives of misanthropy and anti-modernity: these discourses often necessitating either a transcendence or negation of modern humanism through a return to a primal source, which the experience of musical absorption seems to convey for many artists.

Sonically-Evoked Mental Imagery and Porosity Explanations

“[U]pon first hearing [black metal] **something aligned within me** [...] It resonated and reverberated through this **previously untapped inner sphere of ethereal presence**, it **dislodged my mind from my body** and I descended into **apocalyptic visions** of raging fires, demonic faces appearing and dissolving in strange patterns, skeletal shadows, and contorting featureless shapes.” (Joel. Monstraat)

“I’d initially resign it’s effects to *just* subconscious spelunking. Until, **The void** began to generate what felt like other environments entirely; **gardens that would grow geometric genies, ghosts that flash-formed into uncanny beings, that whispered rhythmically at me**.” (Keats Ross)

“As a child, I noticed that certain sounds would have a strange effect on me. A sound, as well as the acoustical properties of a particular location, created mental images that **transported me to an imaginal world**. These images weren’t shapes or textures— although that occurred later on—but **images of a location**, like a scene from a cinematic dream sequence.” (Kim Cascone)

Less prominent than porosity attributions to flow states, are porosity attributions to forms of music-evoked mental imagery arising from absorbed listening or playing. In my own work, this form of experience became particularly important: leading me to associate musically-evoked mental imagery with visions imparted to me by the *genius loci* of the places where I recorded, or as forms of visionary insight into the domains they inhabited. Similar instances, of which these are a few examples, can be found within the corpus of occultural music-making.

Here, mental imagery arising from listening experiences is not dismissed as merely imaginary, rather, it is ascribed to and discursively framed as an experience of a spiritual reality: encounters with ethereal presences, the void, or the imaginal, which lead to the development of a musical paths of practice that are claimed to give the practitioner visionary experiences.

Experiencing the Musical Surface: Representation and Affect

Partridge's Affective Space:

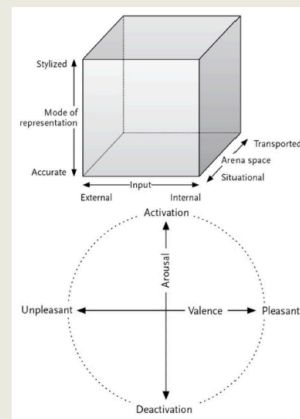
Constructed between listener and auditory surface; Evoking responses related to the 'internal and social worlds'. Often describes more complex ideas, e.g. 'music evoking the affective spaces of religion'.

Weinel's Representative-Affective framework:

Focus on sonic representations and core affect: Not necessarily excluding individual, social, cultural factors etc.

Arcangeli's Sensory Imagination:

Mental imagery (often effortless, unwilled), as a subset of sensory imagination (often entailing 'imagining that...' through a variety of sensory recreations).



Representational and affective spaces from Weinell (2018)

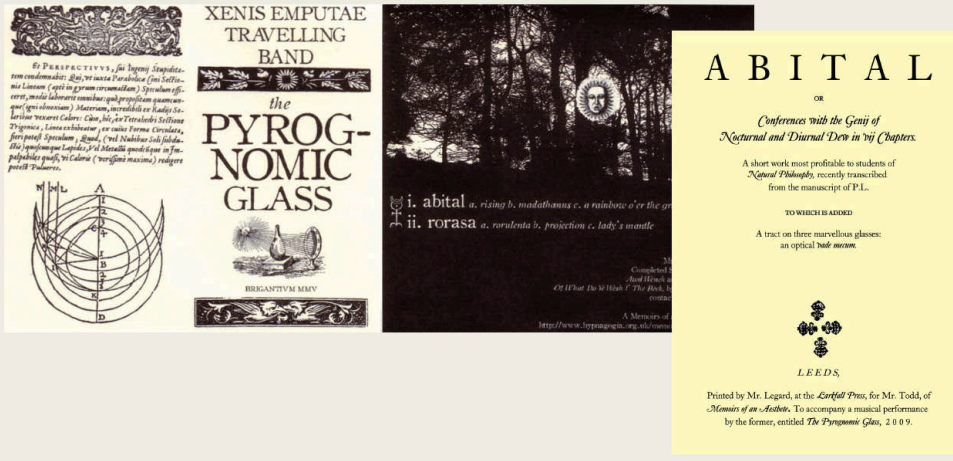
Affective Space and Imaginative Listening

When we involve ourselves in listening to music, we construct what Christopher Partridge calls 'affective space' (e.g. Partridge 2014: 38, 43). This 'affective space' describes the relationship between music and its listener: what responses does the music evoke from what Partridge describes as our 'internal and social worlds'? These 'internal' worlds potentially include a variety of emotional, cognitive, and reflexive responses to music, many of which are also contingent on the social and cultural backgrounds of the listener.

While Partridge's 'affective space' encompasses a wide variety of phenomena, Jonathan Weinell has used an affective-representative framework to map listening experiences to altered states of consciousness. Here, affect refers to the core affects evoked by music in terms of melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre, and so on, while the representative layer describes the extra-musical associations evoked by the music – often through the use of real-world sounds or more poetic or stylised allusions (e.g. phasing effects in psychedelic music, suggestive of the ethos of an altered state of consciousness).

For artists shown on the previous slide, the imagination also clearly plays a key part in their engagement with the affective space of music. Following Aspren (2017), my work strongly connects 'imagination' with the production of mental imagery, and Richard Noll's proposal that the vividness of such imagery may be cultivated with practice (2017: 3). I suggest that in imaginatively-engaged listening to sound, we broadly deal with two forms of imagination as distinguished in the phenomenological observations of Arcangeli (2019): firstly, the production of mental imagery; and secondly, the practice of volitional sensory imagination. In Arcangeli's examples, mental imagery is often associated with almost unwilled, effortless objectual recreation (e.g. think of a lilac), but it is a subset of a broader form of sensory imagination concerned with the mental recreation of states of affairs (e.g. imagining a particular lilac bush and where it might be moved in the garden, and even mentally recreating its scent) [ibid.:14-15].

The Pyrognomic Glass (2007) & Abital (2009)



Transliminality on the Spectral Surface: Musical Mental Imagery and the Analysis of Recorded Work

While in many respects the subjective domains of imaginative listening are something of a ‘black box’, I would like to make some observations drawn from the analysis of recorded music in my own autoethnographic work. These relate to how we may potentially approach the relationship between representative-affective spaces, and the interplay of mental imagery arising from musical absorption.

The object of analysis was my 2007 album *The Pyrognomic Glass*, and a text written to accompany its re-release in 2009. The broad theme of *The Pyrognomic Glass* is the magical properties of dew, which had become a particular obsession during a period involved in the intense study of John Dee’s *Hieroglyphic Monad*. The dew – rising in the night, and being infused by the sun in the morning – was symbolised by two spirits, whose names I had divined were Abital and Rorasa. It was to these spirits that the two tracks on the album were dedicated. I had written often of music as providing access to ‘imaginal’ domains inhabited by spirits: particularly those associated with the landscapes and weather. So, when asked to produce an accompanying book, I set about using the two tracks on the album to explore the domains of Abital and Rorasa through absorbed listening.

Connecting Spectromorphologies and Mental Imagery in *The Pyrognomic Glass*

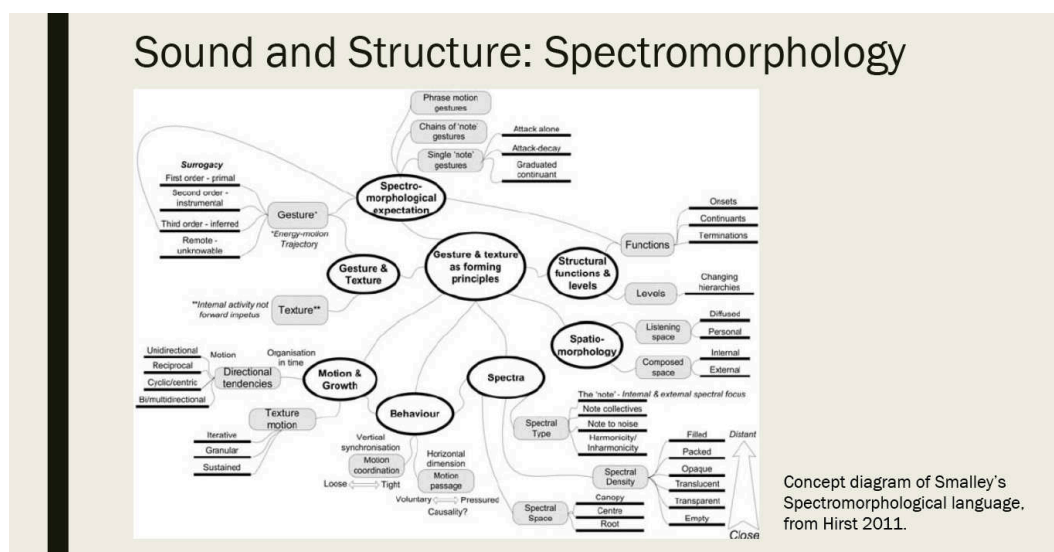


Analysis of ‘Abital’, the first track on *The Pyrognomic Glass*.

A sonogram with annotations describing the spectromorphological forms, and their structuring functions, is juxtaposed with text from the book *Abital*

In the analysis, a sonographic representation of the music was generated – showing a frequency plot on the vertical axis, and time on the horizontal axis. Against this, the narratives appearing in the book were organised, demonstrating correspondences between the musical surface and the imagery presented in the accompanying text: recreating the sessions of absorptive listening from a decade earlier. One notable finding from the is process was the potential for merging representative-affective

frameworks with what is known as spectromorphology: a language for the description of electroacoustic music, conceived by Denis Smalley in 1997.



The problem that faced composers and analysts of this form of electronic music was that there was no language to accurately describe the abstract sounds which constituted the compositions. Spectromorphology intended to establish such a language, describing different sound parameters, and their potential presentations and movements. Fundamental are what Smalley called the two 'structuring principles' of gesture and texture. Gestures are those sounds which suggest a body in motion, or energy being expended, undergoing spectral and morphological change: these sounds are dynamic, and are concerned with 'moving time forward'. A texture, on the other hand comes about when sounds move from 'events on a human scale' to 'events on a more worldly, environmental scale' (Smalley 1997: 113) – textures (such as drones) often suggest sonic environments which a composition moves, and gestures often interrupt these, or effect change between these environments.

Imaginative Spectromorphology

Gesture	Texture
Strongly representational	Strongly affective
Strong causality	Weak causality
Change of state/progression	Exposition of a state
Dramatic/quickly resolved	Sustained/unfolding
Unwilled Mental Imagery or Episodic Memory Associations	Volitional Sensory Imagination or Musical Mind-Wandering behaviours
Immediate aesthetic response	Emergent response

What my analysis revealed was the strong connection between gestural events and dramatic events in the narrative – a gesture often suggesting some sort of action or movement, sometimes thoroughly representative of something known to our experience, sometimes more abstract, but always evoking some immediate, largely unwilled mental image. The longer, often droning or musical, passages in the work connected to more descriptive passages in the narrative, providing moments of repose, where preceding images could be volitionally developed, or else musically-induced mind-wandering engaged with to develop transliminal responses to the sound. Smalley's structuring principles therefore not only provide a way to talk about how the music is organised, but may also imply the structure of imaginative narratives and experience attributed to it.

Forms of Creative Engagement in Occulturally-Situated Music Practice

Automatism

Experience of highly absorbed **creative flow states**. May be ascribed to transpersonal influence, e.g.: the acausal (Kakophonix), the devas (Giacinto Scelsi), the beyond, channelling (Oraklet), non-being, etc. Highly related to **core affects** (e.g. valence, arousal).

Manticism

The experience of the absorbed listening to, or **interpretation of, sonic objects** (recordings, field recordings, source materials). High correlation to **mental imagery**, as well as broader forms of imaginative and affective response. May also be ascribed to transpersonal influences such as cosmic intelligences (Coil), the unconscious, or 'imaginal' (Kim Cascone), the Void (Audiomancer).

Speculativism

Ontological attitudes and theoretical perspectives describing the relation of music and musical parameters (e.g. harmony) to the individual and cosmos. Particularly prevalent beyond 'popular' music, e.g. in modern composition: Stockhausen, Radulescu, Panufnik, etc.

Weinel's representative-affective framework can therefore be expanded into a form of imaginative spectromorphology as a potential tool for exploring what I have called 'mantic' listening in occultural music production.

I describe manticism as a form of practice, in which an artist attributes meanings to a visual or auditory surface – as such, it particularly involves the use of mental imagery and sensory imagination to develop a sense of what the material evokes. This is in contrast to the attributions of automatism which often accompany flow experiences, or the theoretical approaches to composition which I typify as speculative. Of course, in practice boundaries between these forms of creativity often blur, but they all invoke some form of porosity explanation to describe the ways in which they are set apart from mundane music-making.

Conclusion

- Absorptive traits suggest tendencies for practitioners to engage in to flow states and heightened listening experiences.
- Occulture invokes porosity explanations for these, often discursively (e.g. as 'proof' via experience)
- Such experiences may even become Originary Events, or lead to the establishment of 'paths of practice'.
- Mental imagery is potentially an important aspect of absorbed, 'mantic' practice for some artists.
- Engagements with mental imagery may be unwilling or volitional.
- Structural factors in the music influence the forms of mental imagery experienced.
- Imaginative Spectromorphology may be a useful approach to occultural musics that do not follow standard musical parameters (tempo, harmony, etc).

To conclude: absorption points toward less glamorous states of altered consciousness than those associated with extreme asceticism or entheogenic drugs. The pervasiveness of porosity ascriptions associated with various modes of musical absorption almost make it seem quotidian: evocative of what Partridge described as occulture's ordinariness – in which enchantment runs parallel, and is finely braided, with our daily experiences. Yet the connections between music, absorption, porosity explanations, and mental imagery also suggest tantalising ways to explore subjective domains in contemporary esotericism. While my own research into the possibilities of these models is still developing, I would nevertheless encourage fellow scholars of to consider such approaches for exploring music, particularly where conventional resources such as scores and theoretical writings are not available owing to the primacy of recorded media and digital production methods in the non-classical musical landscape.

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