

HEINER GOEBBELS

A HOUSE OF CALL  
my imaginary notebook

Material Counter

A research project of the Georg Büchner Professorship  
at the Centre for Media and Interactivity  
with generous support from the Justus Liebig University Giessen

Collaboration: Astrid Schenka, International Research Center  
“Interweaving Performance Cultures” at the Freie Universität Berlin

English translation: Naomi Boyce

Neofelis

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Handwritten draft by James Joyce: the earliest surviving version of the  
“Roderick O’Connor” passage from *FINNEGANS WAKE* (1939).



THE HOUSE OF CALL FOR ACTORS,  
drawn and etched by Theodore Lane (1800–1828) in 1825.

**house of call** *n.* (a) a place, usually a public house where journeymen of a particular trade assemble, where carriers call for commissions, or where a person may be heard of or contacted (now *historical*); (b) (*gen.*) a house (or, in extended use, a place) that a person visits regularly, or that is often visited (now *rare*).

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To go to countries whose languages one can never master.

Elias Canetti · DIE PROVINZ DES MENSCHEN [THE HUMAN PROVINCE]

*A HOUSE OF CALL is a cycle with calls, invocations, appeals, incantations, prayers, speech acts, poems, and songs for a large orchestra. But it is not the orchestra making the call; it is confronted with voices. It presents, supports, accompanies them, answers or objects to them – as though in a secular “responsory.” As an orchestra’s collective response to the many individual voices with their own distinct sounds and languages. They are solely acoustically present. Either they call from the past or from my personal environment: peculiar voices, traditional material, rituals, literature.*

*A HOUSE OF CALL is not an academic media archive, but rather a phonographic collection from my imaginary notebook. It doesn’t follow any system. Its sources arose from many trips, chance encounters, scattered research for artistic projects, some of which were never realized.*

*Voices that touched, unsettled, impressed, and alienated me are given a chance to speak in this concert, and most of them are heard for the first time on a concert stage. Around half of the voices were recorded on wax cylinders using historical phonographs and their genesis is often ambivalent. A range of reasons may have led to these recordings: ethnomusicological or musical and linguistic research, sociological, anthropological interests, but also racist motives whose colonial contexts shaped them. Sometimes the motivations can’t be singled out.*

*I can’t eliminate the contradictions; I can only work on them artistically: what connects or separates the recordings made of an Armenian opera singer in the 1910s in Paris from the recordings of the voices of Georgian prisoners of war in the camp in Mannheim around the same time? What separates the recordings of the music scholar Samuel Baud-Bovy, who spent time traveling through the islands of Greece and recorded Ekaterini Mangoúlia, from those*

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*of a self-proclaimed anthropologist who, at the same time, summoned people to a police station in South West Africa, measured them, violently made casts of their faces and took recordings he was never interested in again? What could the ritualized forms of language in the shamanic discourse of Luciano and Victor Martínez have in common with those of Heiner Müller, Gertrude Stein, or Samuel Beckett? And what happens during the many shifts in media – from the historic cylinders into the digital samples, from the samples into the concert, the concert into the book?*

*The music is a direct answer to the complexity and rawness of the voices, their auras and the histories of these recordings.*

*This book offers a look into the material and its backgrounds – and into questions they give rise to between preservation and appropriation.*

*Both works – the composition of the orchestral work and the material counter of the research in book form – were completed in March 2020.*

*A HOUSE OF CALL is a songbook for an orchestra, divided into four chapters:*

*STEINE SCHERE PAPIER*

*GRAIN DE LA VOIX*

*WAX AND VIOLENCE*

*WHEN WORDS GONE*

Singing is, perhaps, to resume an ancient practice of mammals or whales, which consists, if not of seizing, of at least marking the passing through of a place. Music, as a traversal of a certain number of places, would be a geography of humanity before it is and has a history; and perhaps this geography now needs to be reinvented. Though what would such a reinvention be but giving its peculiarity back to each timbre or – using Roland Barthes' expression – to the grain of the voice, which it has because of all the found elevations and irregularities in the ground?

Daniel Charles • LA MUSIQUE ET L'OUBLI [MUSIC AND OBLIVION]



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