BLACK AMNESIA

In Seven Fragments

For Soprano Voice, Bass Flute, Bass Clarinet,
Percussion, and Electronics

Douglas McCausland

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Program Note:

Written for the TAK Ensemble's February 2019 residency at Stanford University, *Black Amnesia* is a work composed for soprano voice, bass flute, bass clarinet, percussion, and electronics which explores themes of identity, mania, and catharsis.

Compositionally, the work utilizes fragmentation and interpolation as methodologies for crafting relationships between musical materials and text / syntax; concepts which are augmented through the use of live electronics in order to expand the sonic capabilities of the ensemble. The result of this is a chaotic work in which thematic gestures and timbral materials continuously fracture, in which antecedent musical ideas are not necessarily presented with their consequent, and in which excerpts from seven texts are continuously integrated with broken speech.

Black Amnesia is a reference to the first of seven texts utilized in its composition, which is an excerpt (lines 18 through 21) from *The Night Dances* by Sylvia Plath.

> "… So your gestures flake off-
> Warm and human, then their pink light
> Bleeding and peeling
> Through the black amnesias of heaven …"

The remaining six texts were collected from the works of Mark Z. Danielewski, Charles Baudelaire, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Marguerite Duras, Joseph Conrad, and Dylan Walker of the band Full of Hell.

Acoustic Instrumentation:

Soprano Voice
Bass Flute
Bass Clarinet
Percussion
    Instrument List:
        Snare Drum (moderate / high tuning, dry)
        28" or 32" Timpano
        Cymbal(s)
    Implement List:
        Snare Sticks
        Snare Brushes
        Superball Mallet
        Bass Bow

Electronics Notes:

The electronics for *Black Amnesia* are primarily created through real-time processing using Cycling 74's Max/MSP, and are further augmented by the triggering of short fixed-media audio files. Ideally realized in an eight-channel ring with a dedicated subwoofer, the careful preparation of the electronic components of *Black Amnesia* are integral to its successful performance. However, there is also a stereo version of the work available to accommodate smaller venues and / or technical limitations. Visually, the electronics are represented in the score with cue markers and textual descriptions, and there is further a larger-format study score which reveals more intimately the relationships between individual acoustic performers and the live-processing components of the piece.

In regards to mixing levels, the internal settings of the patch have been preemptively set to as optimal a default as possible, however the electronics operator should feel free to adjust them in order to create a successful mix between all of the elements of the piece. Additionally, the overall volume of the piece should be set moderately loudly, though never to the degree to cause a listener pain and or hearing damage. Please take care to monitor levels accordingly; while the music is occasionally intended to cause discomfort, it should never cause a listener pain.

While the patch can be operated entirely by the computer keyboard, it is also optimized for both the Novation Launchcontrol XL and Korg NanoKontrol2 MIDI controllers. Potential users for these devices can obtain information for the mapping of functions from the composer at '*domccau@gmail.com*'.

Performance Notes and Patch Operation:

For performance, the electronics are encapsulated within a "patch", which is run through a dedicated programming environment created in Max/MSP 7; and can be downloaded for free on the internet. The patch serves both as an environment to provide the real-time processing, and as an environment to trigger fixed-media samples throughout the piece. As such, the timing of the patch performance is integral to the musical success of a performance of *Black Amnesia*, and should be appropriately rehearsed in order to achieve a seamless listening experience.

To start the piece, the following steps must be taken:
1. Open the patch in Max/MSP
2. Turn on 'Digital Signal Processing' (lower right-hand corner)
3. Adjust volumes to desired level (as seen in the appropriate mixer sections of the patch)
4. Set the first cue by typing "1" and pressing enter into the "Set Cue" command
   > *NOTE: This can also be used to start a rehearsal at ANY cue point throughout the piece's duration.*
5. Press the appropriate "GO" button to advance cues, using either the space bar or appropriate MIDI controller begin the piece.
6. Continue...

At the end of the piece...

1. End with the final cue.
2. After final fadeout, lower output volume
3. Turn off 'Digital Signal Processing" (lower right-hand corner)
4. Close the patch

Note: In performances utilizing the patch, it is HIGHLY recommended to thoroughly test and rehearse beforehand. If the patch starts to generate feedback, take care to lower the amplification levels specifically. If there is a significant malfunction in which an immediate stop needs to occur, a "panic" button is built into the patch designed to cut digital signal processing entirely; this triggered with the keyboard key 'esc', or with the appropriate MIDI controller "Stop" button.

Technical Requirements:

The patch for this piece is unfortunately relatively CPU-intensive, and should be tested thoroughly in advance; even on most platforms that can run Max/MSP 7. Additionally, the performance will require four appropriate microphones in order to amplify the performers and bring their sound into the patch. The piece will also require a USB audio interface with a minimum of four channels in and eight channels out (or alternatively two out), and an eight-speaker ring with subwoofer (or alternatively minimum of two

speakers and a sub). The speakers should be placed in a ring formation with the output channels numbered as follows:

1. Front Left
2. Front Right
3. Front-Mid Left
4. Front-Mid Right
5. Rear-Mid Left
6. Rear-Mid Right
7. Rear Left
8. Rear Right

Any questions in regards to technical requirements such as mic choice, patch operation, larger speaker diffusions, and so on – and questions about performance practices of the piece can be directed to the composer at 'domccau@gmail.com'.

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Transposed Score
Performance Version

Black Amnesia
In Seven Fragments

Douglas McCausland

Fragment One: Nebulous (♩ = 60 app.)

8 seconds

6 seconds

In time

air → fry → sung

Soprano

Exhaled breath, punctuated by strong initial 'h'

gradually introduce vocal fry pitched / voiced low

slowly shift from 'k' to 'g'

je

ne vois

allow note to fall away into air sound

Bass Flute

Breath sound through instrument, increasing and decreasing in intensity to match dynamic markings / phrasings.

slowly fade-in multiphonic, from air sound

(HT) tongue ram

Bass Clarinet

Breath sound through instrument, increasing and decreasing in intensity to match dynamic markings / phrasings.

slowly fade-in multiphonic, from air sound

slap tongue

spectral multiphonic, keep fundamental quiet

Percussion

snare drum with brushes, snares on

edge → center → edge

strike head with hand, dead stroke

(switch to stick and superball)

rimshot

snares off

superball scrape

left hand continuous brush...

left hand continuous...

Electro-acoustics

C. 1

C. 2

C. 3

C. 4

C. 5

C. 6

FM: 'Impact' followed by disintegrating synthesis

9

5 seconds

6 seconds

Sop.

slowly shift from 't' to 'th'

t   th

this is not __ for you

sung   spoken, low

I   am   mis-sing in-num - er-a - ble   shades

sung   spoken, low

Exhaled breath

B. Fl.

Breath sound

flutter

allow note to fade into air

B. Cl.

spectral trill, performed using LH thumb; or alternatively with LH index finger (will change second fundamental from F to Eb)

allow note to fade into air

Perc.

on rim

superball

(snares on, brush and stick)

Elec.

C. 7

C. 8

C. 9

C. 10

A **Fragment Two: Pointillistic / Friction (♩ = 116 app.)**

Sop.

Exhaled breath,
punctuated
by strong initial 'h'

qu'in - fi - ni yet de - so - la - tion   stalled   in paint

spoken, almost whispered

Je ne vois qu'in - fi - ni par toutes

B. Fl.

bend pitch, introduce
flutter

whistle tone, introduce
slowly from multiphonic

slap tongue

B. Cl.

slap tongue

rising spectral trill, wild;
performed with LH index finger

wild spectral multi-
phonic, opt. sing for
additional interference

Perc.

swipe brush on head

strike head with hand,
dead stroke

rimshot

rimshot

(snares off, superball
and stick)

Elec.

C. 11

C. 12   C. 13

C. 14 *LP: Synthesis swells*
        FM: Vocal sample

C. 15

C. 16

LP: Very low pitched
synthesis

FM: 'Impact' followed
by disintegrating synthesis

20

Sop.

les fe - nê - tres

SSSSSSSSSSSSSSsssssss

gradually shift from 'sss' to breath

dddddddd

accelerating
rolled 'd'

B. Fl.

let die away

overblown
harmonic

gliss.

pizz.

slap

SSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSsssss

let ring, allow a little tone

B. Cl.

let ring, allow a little tone

slowly shift from 's' to 't'

let ring

Perc.

superball
scrape

on rim

sudden cut

(switch to hands,
opt. w/ wax for increased friction)

strike head with hand,
dead stroke

brush with
fingertips

with other hand, apply pressure to head while sliding w/ fingertips
to create friction rhythm; notation reflects general idea of increasing
friction slowing the produced rhythm down into a more gentle timbre

Elec.

C. 17   C. 18

C. 19

C. 20

C. 21 *LP: High damp duffing oscillator enters*
        FM: Friction / tension sample enters

20 seconds

In time →

B Fragment Three: Spectral / Breaking (♩ = 65 app.)

25

Sop.

Improvise: Swelling rolled 'd' timbres, and / or swelling vocal fry timbres. Feel free to introduce more fully voiced sound as the section continues, and as the sounds swell in intensity. Section should start sparse, and gradually increase in intensity (density, harmonic pitch, dynamic)

f   *ff*

air → rising fry ('ah' vowel)

B. Fl.

Improvise: Swelling multiphonic timbres, flutter tongued if possible. Feel free to introduce more aggressive timbres as the section continues, and as the sounds swell in intensity. Section should start a bit sparse, and gradually increase in intensity (density, harmonic pitch, dynamic)

flutter, let pitch roll

slap

f   *ff*   *p*

B. Cl.

Improvise: Swelling spectral multiphonics with low fundamental tones, occasionally flutter tonguing them if possible and ending each with a slap tongue. Section should start a bit sparse, and gradually increase in intensity (density, harmonic pitch, dynamic)

aggressive flutter, let pitch roll flat ("skronk")

slap

f   *ff*   *p*

Perc.

Improvise: Swelling friction timbres, created with fingertips and / or superball. Feel free to introduce more aggressive ideas as the section continues, and as the sounds swell in intensity. Section should start a bit sparse, and gradually increase in intensity (density, harmonic pitch, dynamic)

ON Timpano: Apply and slowly release pressure with hand (or stick) to head with swelling superball scrape; also while decreasing pitch with foot-pedal.

(place cymbal upside-down on head of timpano, set drum pitch to middle range)

mf   *ff*

Elec.

C. 22 LP: Increasing duff texture ensues, swelling for 20 seconds
FM: "Friction" sample continues, leading to end of section

C. 23 LP & FM: Huge swell

C. 24   C. 25

LP: All processing cuts
FM: MASSIVE impact

33

Sop.

Initial C♯ can be picked up from bass flute

p   *pp*   *spoken*

al - les   nä - he   wer-de fern

B. Fl.

same fingering   slur to octave harmonic

slur to octave harmonic

hollow sound

mp   *p*

B. Cl.

same fingering

spectral multiphonic, keep fundamental quiet

simile

mp   *p*

Perc.

bow cymbal on timpano head, graphic indicates pitch manipulation with pedal

let ring   simile   let ring

mf

Elec.

C. 26   C. 27   C. 28

Fragment Four: Seismic / Manic

8 seconds | *2 seconds* | *9 seconds* | *8 seconds*

57

Sop.

Spoken Word (suddenly animated; furtively):

"Who has never killed an hour?

... Not casually or without thought

but carefully;   a premeditated

murder   of   minutes."

remain completely silent and still...

Spoken Word (increasingly anxious):

"... they were so   difficult

to render into colorless words;

bleeding and peeling through the black

amnesias of   heaven."

B. Fl.

remain completely silent and still...

Complete Chaos: As before; very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials. The result should be completely incoherent; at an heightened intensity than before.

ff

remain completely silent and still...

B. Cl.

remain completely silent and still...

Complete Chaos: As before; very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials. The result should be completely incoherent; at an heightened intensity than before.

ff

remain completely silent and still...

Perc.

remain completely silent and still...

Complete Chaos: As before; very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials. The result should be completely incoherent; at an heightened intensity than before.

ff

remain completely silent and still...

C. 40 | C. 41 | C. 42 | C. 43

LP: Duffing synths erupt into full nonlinear activity
FM: Chaotic granular sample

Elec.

---

3 seconds | *10 seconds* | *3 seconds*

70

Sop.

Spoken Word (fracturing, as though someone else is speaking. perhaps even partially sung):

"La maison, c'est la maison de famille..."

"It is the personality of the host that the home expresses"

"L'odeur du silence est si vielle..."

Spoken Word (unhinged, manic, partially covered up):

"And then for better or for worse you'll turn,

unable to resist"

B. Fl.

breath through instrument, all keys depressed

p   *ff*

remain completely silent and still...

Complete Chaos: As before; very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials. The result should be completely incoherent; at an heightened intensity than before.

ff

B. Cl.

breath through instrument, all keys depressed

p   *ff*

remain completely silent and still...

Complete Chaos: As before; very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials. The result should be completely incoherent; at an heightened intensity than before.

ff

Perc.

brush on head, snares on

p   *ff*

remain completely silent and still...

Complete Chaos: As before; very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials. The result should be completely incoherent; at an heightened intensity than before. Additionally start making use of timpano / cymbal as desired.

ff

C. 44 | C. 45 | C. 46 | C. 47 | C. 48

LP: Duffing synths erupt into full nonlinear activity
FM: Chaotic granular sample

Elec.

Trigger each successive cue immediately following each break in the text

79

6 seconds | *2 seconds* | *2 seconds*

Sop.

Spoken Word (whispered, frantic):

"though try to resist you still will, fighting with everything you've got not to face the thing you most dread"

Spoken Word (completely incoherent):

"the creature we all are…"

B. Fl.

p

Complete Chaos: As before; very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials. The result should be completely incoherent; at an heightened intensity than before.

ff

B. Cl.

p

Complete Chaos: As before; very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials. The result should be completely incoherent; at an heightened intensity than before.

ff

Perc.

on snare with stick, snares on;
apply pressure to head to change pitch with cresc. - release with decresc.

rim ⟶ center of head ⟶ rim

pp   *f*   *pp*

Complete Chaos: As before; very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials. The result should be completely incoherent; at an heightened intensity than before. Additionally continue making use of timpano / cymbal as desired.

ff

Elec.

C. 49 — *LP / FM: Electronics drastically reduce in intensity*

C. 50 — *LP: Duffing synths erupt into full nonlinear activity*
FM: Chaotic granular sample

C. 51

D   **Fragment Five: Shattered (♩ = 60 app.)**

86

2 seconds | *6 seconds* | *In time* ⟶ | *8 seconds*

Sop.

Spoken Word (completely incoherent):

"buried in the nameless ∧black"

$\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ *silent* $\frac{2}{4}$

B. Fl.

Complete Chaos: As before; very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials. The result should be completely incoherent; at an heightened intensity than before.

ff

whistled into flute, first pitch app. (intervals are more important)

$\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$

p

improvise high whistle-tones

B. Cl.

Complete Chaos: As before; very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials. The result should be completely incoherent; at an heightened intensity than before.

ff

$\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ *silent* $\frac{2}{4}$

Perc.

Complete Chaos: As before; very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials. The result should be completely incoherent; at an heightened intensity than before. Additionally continue making use of timpano / cymbal as desired.

ff

$\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ *silent* $\frac{2}{4}$

Elec.

C. 52 — *LP: Duffing synths erupt into full nonlinear activity*
FM: Chaotic granular sample

C. 53 $\frac{3}{4}$ C. 54 $\frac{4}{4}$ C. 55 $\frac{2}{4}$

E Fragment Six: Lush / Ephemeral (♩ = 45 app.)

F Fragment Seven: Return to... (♩ = 85 app.)

Sop. *(strong 'd')*
when at last it is o-ver there is no e— vi-dence

spoken

Complete Chaos: Very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials such as: harsh consonants, plosives, nonsense syllables, angular leaps, wild glissandi, air sounds, and so on. The result should be completely cacophonous.
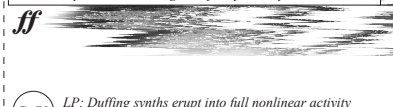
B. Fl.

Complete Chaos: Very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials such as: slap tongue, flutter tonging, air sounds / jet whistle, pitch glissando, microtones, etc. The result should be completely cacophonous.

B. Cl.
let ring, allow a little tone
spectral multiphonic

Complete Chaos: Very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials such as: slap tongue, flutter-tonging, air sounds, spectral multiphonics, pitch glissando, playing while singing, etc. The result should be completely cacophonous.

Perc.
rim shot, snare (snares ON)
rim, portion of stick close to hand → *rim, tip of stick*
with brush
strike head with hand, dead stroke

Complete Chaos: Very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials such as: finger scrapes, rimshots, head pressure / foot-pedal pitch shifts, and so on. Feel free to use any additional implements as desired, etc. The result should be cacophonous. (Use snare and timp / cymbal)

Elec.
C. 73   C. 74   C. 75   C. 76   C. 77

FM: Low-level synthesis...

Something's coming.

6 seconds — *4 seconds* — *6 seconds* — *13 seconds (app.)*

132

Sop.

Spoken Word (serenely):

"And when at last it is over,

there is no evidence."

remain completely silent and still...

Spoken Word (serenely):

"The only clue might be the shadows beneath your eyes
or a terribly thin line near the corners of your mouth
indicating something has been suffered, that in the privacy
of your life you have lost something and the loss is
too   empty
                        to
                                    share..."

B. Fl.

remain completely silent and still...

Complete Chaos: As before; very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials. The result should be completely incoherent; at an heightened intensity than before.

ff

remain completely silent and still...

B. Cl.

remain completely silent and still...

Complete Chaos: As before; very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials. The result should be completely incoherent; at an heightened intensity than before.

ff

remain completely silent and still...

Perc.

remain completely silent and still...

Complete Chaos: As before; very erratic gestural improvisation; make use of widely varying timbral materials. The result should be completely incoherent; at an heightened intensity than before. Additionally continue making use of timpano / cymbal as desired.

ff

remain completely silent and still...

Elec.

C. 78

C. 79 — *LP: Duffing synths erupt into full nonlinear activity*
FM: Chaotic granular sample

C. 80 — *Elec: Surge*

C. 81

C. 82 — *Elec: Fade...*