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Rethinking Meredith Monk.

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RETHINKING MEREDITH MONK

By

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B.M., California State University, Northridge, 2016

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ABSTRACT

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Meredith Monk's decades of work embody an interdisciplinary art that exists at the intersection of sonic, visual, and kinesthetic artistic media. To date, scholars and critics of music and dance have only studied aspects of her work in isolation and have tended to omit the other critical aspects of Monk's compositional language. For example, music scholars omit analysis of movement in their analyses, while dance scholars omit musical analyses. This has led to inappropriate categorization of her work, particularly into the vein of minimalism. My project represents the most in-depth study of all aspects of Monk's music to date by analyzing musical, visual, and stylistic facets of her work. The project also considers Monk's work alongside social philosophies and will argue that Monk scrutinizes gender and embodied voice in order to challenge socially constructed gender norms.

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INTRODUCTION

In her "Mission Statement," Meredith Monk claims that her goals are "…to create an art that breaks down boundaries between the disciplines, an art which in turn becomes a metaphor for opening up thought, perception, experience. An art that is inclusive, rather than exclusive; that is expansive, whole, human, multidimensional."[1] In contrast to aesthetic goals of other composers who are considered "experimental," Monk gravitates toward a breadth of compositional techniques that map an experiential musical language, making her work not just intellectual, but embodied. [2] Her departures from traditional idioms and practices of art music, particularly vocal art music, include the use of movement as melodic content, singing using non-languaged syllables and extended techniques, and extremely limited use of scores. These and other canonically subversive aspects of her music have been present throughout her long career, but because of them, her compositional aesthetic is inherently difficult to study using conventional

[1] Meredith Monk, "Mission Statement," in *Art + Performance, Meredith Monk*, ed. Deborah Jowitt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 17.

[2] The marginalization of the body in favor of the intellect by many mid-century experimental composers, as part of the alignment of music with ideas of scientific or philosophical exploration, is well documented. For example, Henry Cowell states that he seeks to align composition of new music with theory, science, and logic in his *New Musical Resources*: "My interest in the theory underlying new materials came about at first through wishing to explain to myself, as well as to others, why certain materials I felt impelled to use in composition, and which I instinctively felt to be legitimate, have genuine scientific and logical foundation." Henry Cowell, *New Musical Resources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), xxi.

musicological methods. In this thesis I examine Monk's aesthetic, both from a musicological perspective and in terms of previously unexplored connections with gender and feminist theories, in order to address the wide miscategorization of her work as simple, when it instead it is complex and sophisticated. Monk's intricate work also explores expressions of gender that are unrepresented in the body of scholarship on her compositional methodologies and musico-gestural language.

Even though she has often been categorized with the New York School and American minimalist composers throughout her five-decade career, Monk and her work have been considered with some regularity by critics and journalists but less by academics. Perhaps prompted by the wide release of the 1983 release of Monk's album and video *Turtle Dreams*,[3] the first scholarly studies of her work appeared in dissertations in the late 1980s and early 1990s and viewed Monk as a choreographer rather than a composer.[4] The first musicological studies to engage analytically with Monk's music were by Myrna Schloss in 1993, Rebekah Pym in 2003, and Janice Mowery Frey in 2006. In her dissertation, Myrna Schloss provides an in-depth discussion of Monk's innovative contributions to Western vocal music via extended techniques and the malleability of her works.[5] Schloss uses short score examples (up to eight measures); some of the score

[3] Critical interest in Monk's work has oscillated over her career and most often corresponds with releases of new works, awards received, or life events. For example, a spike in journalistic articles about Monk can be seen during the 2014-2015 performance season, coinciding with her birthday celebration performances and recognition as the 2014–2015 Richard and Barbara Debs Composer's Chair at Carnegie Hall.

[4] Jeanie Kay Forte, "Women in Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1986); Kathryn Martin Sarell, "The Performance Works of Meredith Monk and Martha Clarke: A Postmodern Feminist Perspective" (PhD diss., University of Colorado at Boulder, 1993).

[5] Myrna Schloss, "Out of the Twentieth Century: Three Composers, Three Musics, One Femininity" (PhD diss., Wesleyan University, 1993).

examples are from Monk's sketches, and Schloss compares these to her own transcriptions of Monk's pieces to illustrate performer-specific composition as a representation of feminist composition. Rebekah Pym's dissertation examines Monk's compositional style and vocal gesture in three scenes from her 1991 opera, *Atlas*.[6] In her study, Pym uses only brief score examples of one to three measures each to show small musical gestures, rather than larger excerpts from the partially-realized original score. Janice Mowery Frey provides a more extended analyses from *Atlas* in her dissertation that is supported by larger score excerpts to highlight Monk's departure from "traditional" methods of operatic composition.[7] Because the score from which she drew her examples was neither finished nor published, Frey's source material had a limited amount of musical information, but her reading of the opera is thorough and well-researched. Marie-Anne Kohl's more recent and extensive German study of Monk's music from the years 1964 to 1979 includes some analytical discussion but no musical examples.[8]

Richard Taruskin's discussion of *Atlas* in *The Oxford History of Western Music* includes only a four-measure score excerpt to show an ostinato figure that he uses to illustrate the instrumental music in Monk's opera,[9] not as an example to support musical

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[6] Rebekah Pym, "The Voice as Gesture in Meredith Monk's '*ATLAS*'" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2003).
[7] Janice Mowery Frey, "Volume I. Between the Cracks: Meredith Monk's Philosophy, Creative Process, Compositional Techniques, and Analysis of 'Atlas,' Part 1. Volume II. 'Skeleton Woman' for Choir and Chamber Orchestra," (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2006).
[8] Marie-Anne Kohl, *Vokale Performancekunst als feministische Praxis: Meredith Monk und das künstlerische Kräftefeld in Downtown New York, 1964–1979* [Vocal Performance Art as Feminist Practice: Meredith Monk and the field of art in downtown NY] (Transcript Verlag, 2015).
[9] Richard Taruskin. "Millennium's End," *Mus*ic *in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Retrieved 24 Sep. 2019, from https://www.oxfordwesternmusic.com/view/Volume5/actrade-9780195384857-div1-010007.xml.

analysis. Very few articles, dissertations, or books opt to analyze her music at all. Perhaps, though, the option has rarely arisen. Since an aspect of Monk's compositional methodology is composing and teaching her music without a physically realized score, musical analysis has proven difficult as there is extremely limited source material from which to draw.

Taruskin implies that Monk's 2001 contract with publisher Boosey & Hawkes helped to disseminate many of her pieces;[10] however, the bulk of her five decades of work remains unscored, and none of her scores are widely available. Composing without a score and teaching her music by rote have historically been integral parts of Monk's compositional methodology and these techniques are intentional subversions of canonic norms.[12] We might read the purpose of Monk's methods as connecting music to the body making the music.

Often, we see that her compositional style integrates music and movement so that one must be performed or perceived with the other and their divorce might mean a lesser experience of her work. Monk herself speaks of the exclusivity of the Western art music tradition: "Early on I also realized that—because the world that we live in is so complex—that to separate art forms seems to not be really reflective of that world. Western European traditions are the only art that separates these elements."[13] Monk's synthesis of musical and physical gesture disrupts some of the traditional concepts of art in Western cultures, including the idea that—historically, the visual or the aural—is

[10] Ibid.
[12] In a pre-concert talk, Monk noted that her compositional methods are intentional subversion of the norms of the European art music tradition. Meredith Monk, Yuval Sharon, and David Gere, "Pre-concert lecture" (Upbeat Live, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Los Angeles, CA, June 12, 2019).
[13] Meredith Monk, "Meredith Monk," in *Eight Lectures on Experimental Music*, ed. Alvin Lucier (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2018), 108.

privileged over others. Musical analysis of her work, then, also requires attention to the movement composed as an extension of musical material.

Video recordings are crucial to the critical study of Monk's work. Videos of many of her pieces are extensively archived at the Meredith Monk Archive, housed at the New York Public Library. Archival videos, though available through limited access, range the scope of her compositional career, from *Education of the Girlchild* (1972) to *Atlas* and *Facing North* (1991), to *Songs of Ascension* (2008, a re-imagining of *Juice* from 1969). Excerpts of her work appear in several documentaries, paired with discussion and often interviews with Monk. The film *Four American Composers*, directed by Peter Greenaway, discusses Monk alongside three other composers noted for their musical innovations or experimentation—namely John Cage, Robert Ashley, and Philip Glass.[14] Michael Blackwood's *Making Dances: Seven Postmodern Choreographers: A Film* contextualizes Monk's work in relation to other New York-based choreographers and suggests that Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham serve as main influences.[15] Widely available videos online, presented by Monk's House Foundation, include only very short excerpts of her work, most of which vary from one to eight minutes in length. The only works easily available online in their entirety are the film version of Monk's 1983 work *Turtle Dreams*, directed by Ping Chong, and as of April 14, 2020: her 1966 multimedia piece, *16 Millimeter Earrings.*[16]

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[14] *Four American Composers*, directed by Peter Greenaway (Berlin: Absolut Medien, 1983), DVD.
[15] *Making Dances: Seven Postmodern Choreographers: A Film*, directed by Michael Blackwood (New York: Insight Media, 2006).
[16] Meredith Monk, *Turtle Dreams*, filmed September 1983, YouTube video, 28:16, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBlnrRUVfo0; Meredith Monk, *16 Millimeter Earrings*, filmed 1980, Vimeo video, https://vimeo.com/407733067.

Although scholarly materials are few, Monk gives lectures and interviews, many of which have been compiled and published by authors who identify as music critics. The common thread in these collections seems to be a fascination with the uniqueness of Monk's compositional approach and not the compositions themselves. One of the best collections of this kind is *Meredith Monk*, a volume edited by American dance critic Deborah Jowitt that contains some of Monk's personal composition notes and journal entries.[17] These collections are valuable, but they also have shortcomings; for example, in many of the interviews and lectures, Monk repeats herself, as if she is being asked the same questions by multiple interviewers. Still, Monk offered and continues to offer answers about her creative process to Jowitt,[18] to music critic Bonnie Marranca,[19] to Jennifer Kelly,[20] and in 2019 to the audience for a pre-concert talk at the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles before the first production of *Atlas* in 26 years.[21]

In the scholarship to date, Monk's compositional practice and some of her resulting idiomatic musical components are often commented on not as musical pursuits, but through the lens of dance and performance art. In a representative and recent example in *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Theater*, Amy Strahler Holzapfel suggests that the "archeological landscapes" Monk conjures in the scenes and movement of her works allude to the audience's bodily perception and contemporary placement in relation to

[17] Deborah Jowitt, "Meredith Monk: Journal Entry 1970," *Art + Performance, Meredith Monk* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997),30-31; "Meredith Monk: Notes for *Vessel* 1989," *Art + Performance, Meredith Monk*, 41-43.
[18] Merce Cunningham, Meredith Monk, and Bill Jones, *Art Performs Life: Cunningham/Monk/Jones* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1998), 68-78.
[19] Bonnie Marranca, *Conversations with Meredith Monk* (New York: PAJ Publications, 2014).
[20] Jennifer Kelly, *In Her Own Words: Conversations with Composers in the United States* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2013).
[21] Monk, Sharon, and Gere, "Pre-concert lecture."

historical events.[22] In further examples, Kathryn Sarell Martin finds links to the feminist theory of French feminists Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray in Monk's work, framed as performance art, while Jeanie Forte's dissertation examines historical stories and the feminist subversion of patriarchy in the productions and movement in several of Monk's works like *Juice*, *Turtle Dreams*, *16 Millimeter Earrings*, and *Vessel*.[23] Rather than suggesting that the vocality present could be a vital musical aspect of Monk's aesthetic, Forte declines to seriously consider the vocally phonated sounds as music; for example, she refers to some vocal sounds in Monk's *Turtle Dreams* as "howling."[24] Theatricality and movement, rather than music, are the focus of these studies. However, in Monk's work, bodily gesture is dependent on, and an extension of, its sonic counterpart. Therefore, a thorough discussion of only one gestural aspect is incomplete, as Meredith Monk considers music to be the core of her work.[25]

Monk's work has curiously received little attention within the growing literature on music and the body. For example, Monk is not mentioned at all in the recent *Oxford Handbook of Music and the Body*.[26] Conceptions of music and the body or music and embodiment have been subjects of several recent musicological studies, like Jonathan De Souza's *Music at Hand: Instruments, Bodies, and Cognition*, *The Routledge Companion to Embodied Music Interaction*, Clemens Wöllner's *Body, Sound and Space in Music And*

[22] Amy Strahler Holzapfel, "From Landscape to Climatescape in Contemporary Dance-Theater: Meredith Monk, The Wooster Group, and the TEAM," in *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Theater*, ed. Nadine George-Graves (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 401-428.
[23] Forte, "Women in Performance Art."; Sarell, "The Performance Works of Meredith Monk and Martha Clarke."
[24] Forte, "Women in Performance Art," 179.
[25] Kelly, *In Her Own Words*, 188.
[26] Youn Kim and Sander Gilman, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Music and the Body* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Beyond: Multimodal Explorations, and *Music-Dance: Sound and Motion in Contemporary Discourse* by Patrizia Veroli and Gianfranco Vinay.[27] None of these recent works discuss Monk or her work.

Feminist musicologists including Suzanne Cusick, Susan McClary, Marcia Citron, Heidi Epstein, and Sally Macarthur have engaged with Monk's work, touching on issues like compositional principles, categorization, and representation. Marcia Citron has pointed to *Atlas* as an opera that "focused on a woman's quest that challenges boundaries beyond the here and now, thereby challenging traditional patterns of female socialization in Western society."[28] Susan McClary and Linda Dusman have debated in print over the usefulness of the terms "postmodern" and "avant-garde" for Monk as well as Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, and Steve Reich.[29] McClary has also discussed Monk alongside Pauline Oliveros and Joan Tower as case studies in "how individual women have negotiated workable relationships between their gender [and] the musical options available to them."[30] At the same time, these scholars generally have not undertaken extensive analysis or study of Monk's works.

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[27] Jonathan De Sousa, *Music at Hand: Instruments, Bodies, and Cognition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Lesaffre, Michaline, Pieter-Jan Maes, and Marc Leman, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Embodied Music Interaction* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Clemens Wöllner, ed., *Body, Sound and Space in Music And Beyond: Multimodal Explorations* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Patrizia Veroli and Gianfranco Vinay, eds., *Music-Dance: Sound and Motion in Contemporary Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

[28] Marcia Citron, "Feminist Approaches to Musicology," in *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music*, ed. Susan C. Cook, Judy S. Tsou, (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 31.

[29] See Susan McClary, "Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition," *Cultural Critique* 12 (Spring 1989), 57-81; Linda Dusman, "Unheard-of: Music as Performance and the Reception of the New," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1994), 130-146; and McClary, "Response to Linda Dusman," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1994), 148-153.

[30] Susan McClary, "Different Drummers. Interpreting Music by Women Composers," in *Frauen- und Männerbilder in die Musik. Festschrift für Eva Rieger zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Freia

However, Monk's work does exemplify many of the broad concepts that feminist musicological scholars and scholars of music and the body introduce. For example, Heidi Epstein paraphrases Suzanne Cusick when she posits that the male-associated act of composition and the female-associated act of performance present a hierarchy between score and bodily performance: "If composition is 'mind,' and performance is 'body,' then the association of body with woman…would explain why performing bodies are less valuable…than the 'male-identified' musical score."[31] Suzanne Cusick also conceives of music in an embodied way, by experiencing it as the physical pleasure associated with sexuality.[32] While in this thesis I do not read Monk's work through a lens associated with sexuality specifically, it is a possibility. Still, a foundational aspect of Monk's compositional language is the marriage of music and the physical body. Susan McClary also argues for the essential combination of music and body, as she suggests that music is understood through embodied experience.[33] Monk's active subversion of compositional norms in Western music embodies Cusick's musicologically feminist perspective, seen in inclusion of physical gesture as an extension of melody and tendency to disassociate from a completed, musical score.

Musical and physical gesture paired with temporal space and corporeal-spatial manipulation are not merely themes in Monk's work but also constitute her

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Hoffmann, Jane Bowers, and Ruth Heckmann (Oldenburg: Bibliotheks- und Informationssystem der Universität Oldenburg, 2000), 115.

[31] Suzanne Cusick, "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 1 (Winter 1994), 8-27), paraphrased in Heidi Epstein, *Melting the Venusburg* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 131.

[32] Suzanne Cusick, "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music, a Serious Effort Not to Think Straight," in *Queering the Pitch, The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 1994), 73.

[33] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 24.

compositional practice. Regardless of Monk's own extensive discussion of her processes and techniques, scholars and critics do not know how to synthesize the music, movement, and philosophical ideals that pervade her oeuvre. I suggest that considering Monk's use of physical gesture and musical gesture, wordless vocal communication, and extended techniques along with critical voice theory and critical gender theory illuminates a facet in Monk's music that has evolved to include an exploration of gender identities that are different from cisgender. In this thesis I draw parallels to Monk's works from Judith Butler's theories of bodily performativity and gender,[34] Nina Sun Eidsheim's theory of listening to vocal timbre, and Adriana Cavarero's work on vocality and gendered politics,[35] as well as feminist musicological studies.

In the last decade, three musicologists have offered more complete analyses of aspects of Monk's work, although in no case are examples from a score provided, and only excerpts of video used. In *Sensing Sound*, Nina Sun Eidsheim argues that the experience of sounds and music depends greatly on the mediums through which the sounds travel, and she relates this argument to Monk's work. Using *Songs of Ascension* as a case study, Eidsheim discusses Monk's practice of making compositional decisions and adjustments based on a specific site or person/performer as an example of the importance of acoustics as part of the sounds' identity.[36] Like many composers, Monk expects a certain specificity in the performance of her work. Unlike many composers, because she largely does not score her pieces, her compositions are malleable and often change based on in what space the work is being performed and which performer is

[34] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990); *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
[35] Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).
[36] Nina Sun Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 75.

singing. The identity of the sounds relies on specific performance spaces, voices, and bodies. Eidsheim does not, though, provide an analytical reading of Monk's work.

Ryan Dohoney proposes that aspects of Monk's musical language parallel aspects of Adriana Cavarero's discussions of voice and gender. He posits that, like Cavarero, Monk's works suggest that voice matters in how we perceive distinct gender. He cites Cavarero's idea of a signifying voice, *phone semantike*, as a voice that is "meant to be heard and be seen,"[37] but does not necessarily depend on language to convey the signification. Using examples from Monk's large-scale work *Vessel* from 1971 and her contrastingly smaller-scale *Dolmen Music* from 1981, Dohoney considers the way both Monk and Cavarero communicate without the presence of words (as tools of the symbolic) but with signifying voice and body.[38] He also discusses how Monk uses musical voice and body to delineate gendered differences and relation, but his discussion notably omits consideration of Monk's manipulation and negotiation of vocal timbres. I suggest that Monk uses timbre rather than gender to indicate how subjects or characters in her work relate or differ.

Ryan Ebright draws on Dohoney's work as well as personal interviews with members of Monk's performance company, Meredith Monk and Vocal Ensemble. He suggests that the formation of the Ensemble initiated a change in Monk's musical style and its connection to her concept of theatricality. Monk's access to more personnel, with whom she is familiar, means a wider scope of instruments for whom she could compose.

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[37] Ryan Dohoney, "An Antidote to Metaphysics: Adriana Cavarero's Vocal Philosophy," in *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 15 (2011), 76.
[38] Dohoney refers to Greenaway's documentary, *Four American Composers*, for Monk's *Vessel* excerpt and adds Blackwood's *Making Dances: Seven Postmodern Choreographers* to discuss *Dolmen Music*.

Like Dohoney, Ebright uses *Dolmen Music* as a case study. Ebright traces a historical line through the creation of the Ensemble, including a discussion of Monk's need for a performance collective that reflected her rejection of hierarchical musical operation, like her tendency to base compositions on individual voices.[39] Though he does not state this, Ebright's idea that Monk and Vocal Ensemble created and occupied the nonhierarchical, artistic space Monk needed for her style to evolve parallels Dohoney's reading of Cavarero's philosophy which sought to base a vocal communicative space of societal reimagination, but rather on a reconstructed social space in which a distance from systemic, masculine language can thrive. Ebright also proposes that in the company, vocal timbres matter so gender matters. However, I argue that because wordlessness and compositional malleability so often appear in Monk's work, adherence to a gender binary is not required in its performance.

In June 2019, Monk's opera *Atlas* was staged at Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, California, as part of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra's centennial season. The three-performance run marked the second staging of the work, the first staging being its premiere and brief tour in 1991-1992. The opera's original production was a commission from Houston Grand Opera, Walker Arts Center, and the American Music Theater Festival; its original cast included Monk in the principal role, in addition to her creative responsibilities as composer/orchestrator, stage director, choreographer, and scenario designer.[40] The LA Phil's production of *Atlas* was a significant departure

[39] Ryan Ebright, "Assembling Meredith Monk and Vocal Ensemble, 1975–1991," in *Contemporary Music Review*, forthcoming. Many thanks to Dr. Ebright for sharing his article in advance of its publication.
[40] Also credited with orchestration is Wayne Hankin; also credited with scenario design are Yoshio Yabara and Pablo Vela.

from Monk's typical compositional procedure: Monk herself was involved in the opera's production very little, forcing direction, movement, and music to take shape independently from her input. Her limited involvement also necessitated the realization of the opera's full score, which marks perhaps the most notable departure from her typical process.

By ceding control, Monk gave Yuval Sharon (the director of LA Phil's production), the performing musicians, and other personnel an opportunity to experience the process of preparing a performance of her work in an unprecedented way.[41] The new production also afforded me personally a rare degree of access to Monk and her work. Because I was in attendance at all three nights of *Atlas's* 2019 run, had an opportunity to meet Monk and to hear her discuss her work in person, and obtained a copy of the fully realized score, I have a unique opportunity to study the opera. Because of this opportunity, I will use *Atlas* as a focal point in discussion throughout this thesis.

Since Meredith Monk's work is a challenge to classify, the first chapter of the thesis introduces a discussion of the categorization of Monk's fifty years of work to understand the cultural context in which her work is situated. Although she resists the label, many scholars and critics classify Monk's music as minimalist. Some scholars have attempted to define minimalism or musical qualities that contribute to the categorization of minimalist music. Using a formalistic and stylistic definition by the editors of *The*

[41] For the bulk of the preparation of the 2019 production of *Atlas*, Monk was not present. Even though casting was quite an involved process, for which Monk was present, she was not involved in the rehearsal process, design, music direction, choreography, or stage direction. She was in attendance for run-through rehearsals beginning June 6, 2019 for the opera's June 10 opening. Monk, in collaboration with Wayne Hankin and Allison Sniffin, were responsible for the realization of the full score required for the production. Hankin was the musical director and conductor for the original production of the opera and was involved in the orchestra in the 2019 production.

Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music and a somewhat conflicting definition by Patrick Nickleson, I examine Monk's music and how it interacts with minimalism, broadly defined. I propose that while her work does exhibit some stylistic minimalistic tendencies, neither her music nor her compositional methods lend themselves to strict minimalism.

In Chapter Two, Monk's musical language and compositional techniques are introduced and discussed in depth. The foundation of Monk's musical language throughout her decades of work includes the use of extended techniques, wordless vocality, and physical gesture as an extension of melodic material. We find these musical features in both smaller-scale works like *Education of the Girlchild* (1972) and *Facing North* (1990) and in large-scale pieces like *Atlas* (1991) and *Cellular Songs* (2018). These hallmarks of Monk's works have often frustrated classifications of her artistic identity (composer, choreographer, or performance artist?), her style (avant-garde or minimalist?), and the genres of her works. The problems in categorization have impacted issues of visibility of and familiarity with her work in American music perhaps because the canonic subversion inherent to her compositional practice invites incomplete interpretations of her musical language and methods.[42] It is not uncommon for critics and scholars to focus on one or two features of her compositional aesthetic, rather than all of them, even though each feature is inextricable from the others.

[42] Monk has experienced obstacles to her career because of the difficulty of classifying her work. For example, winning National Endowment for the Humanities grants has been a challenge because the category to which she should apply is unclear. She has, however, won several prestigious grants and awards for which there are less constrictive application criteria, like the MacArthur Fellowship in 1995 and the Gish Prize in 2017.

In this chapter, my close reading of a scene from *Atlas* is provided as a case study for these issues because it represents a full picture of her musical language: Monk classifies the work as an opera but uses elements that resist traditional conceptions of opera. In *Atlas*, Monk employs non-traditional singing and storytelling, she asks singers to gesture both vocally with extended techniques and with their bodies as an extension of the music, the "libretto" is nearly all vocally phonated sounds one might associate with glossolalia, and the 1991 score is not fully realized. Using the 2019 version of the *Atlas* score and the video recording of the 1991 production, I analyze the music, physical gesture, and non-languaged syllables in a scene in the beginning of the opera and track how those elements evolve as the opera's narrative and characters progress.

In *Atlas*, Monk's work has evolved and expanded in her treatment of voice, corporeality, identity, and gender relative to her earlier work. Chapter Three examines Monk's works through the lenses of three theorists of voice and gender—Adriana Cavarero, Judith Butler, and Nina Sun Eidsheim—using examples from *Atlas* and *Dolmen Music* as examples. Reading these two works with consideration toward the three philosophical perspectives mentioned above initiates a discussion of the evolution of Monk's treatment of gender and vocal timbre. Monk's work, specifically her extended techniques, relies on singers' ability to physically make non-traditional vocal sounds rather than adhering to voice type classification. In one of her early works, *Dolmen Music*, we find gender to be prioritized over vocal timbre. While roles are specified with suggested gender identities, the narration and dramatic arc in *Atlas* are not contingent on the gender of the opera's characters; i.e. the performance is not of a gender but of the

vocal sounds. As Monk continues to produce new works, we can observe a continued prioritization of timbre over gender presentation through her extended techniques.

CHAPTER ONE

CATEGORIZING MONK

The tendency in Monk discourse is overwhelmingly that she is a "minimalist" composer, or a composer of minimalist music. It seems that because her works are so difficult to define, they tend to be discussed alongside composers of the minimalism movement of the 1960s-1980s for lack of more appropriate placement. The claim can be found in journalistic music criticism, as in this typical quotation from Adam Shatz's article in The Paris Review: "Monk is the perhaps the best-known female member of the generation of New York minimalist composers who revolutionized American concert music in the 1970s."[43] As well, aligning Monk with minimalist composers like Steve Reich and Philip Glass has for decades been a tendency in scholarship on the composers of minimalism and the genre's musical characteristics. For example, in 1984 Gerhard Koch suggests that "[t]he periodicity of purely minimalist music is bound to tend towards monotony. But Reich, Glass, and Meredith Monk are not, after all, only monotonists…"[44] Koch, like many scholars, sees Monk as a stylistic peer to the quintessential minimalist composers Reich and Glass.

[43] Adam Schatz, "Gotham Lullaby," *The Paris Review,* 2016 https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2016/11/18/gotham-lullaby/.
[44] Gerhard Koch, "Reich's 'The Desert Music,'" *Tempo* 149 (June: 1984), 44.

Further, her music is discussed in more recent scholarly works that also categorize Monk with Glass and Reich.[45] For example, Monk is discussed in K. Robert Schwarz's book, *Minimalists*, thoughts on *Atlas* are included in Arved Ashby's chapter on minimalist opera in the *Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*, and in his dissertation examining minimalist opera, Ryan Ebright posits that Monk belongs to the category: "A fuller history of American minimalist opera might also include works by Robert Ashley, Michael Gordon, Joan La Barbara, David Lang, Meredith Monk, and Julia Wolfe, to name but a few composers."[46] Her inclusion in these and other publications is significant, making clear that the broad opinion of music critics, journalists, and music scholars is that Monk composes music that should be categorized as minimalist, and that her music is comparable to that of composers like Steve Reich and Philip Glass.

While some musical elements in Monk's work can be used as evidence to suggest a minimalist musical nature, I dispute the trend of claims made by the scholars and critics who categorize her music as simply minimalist. Monk's compositional style over her 50-year-long career has certainly evolved, as we will discuss in Chapter Three, but also retains salient stylistic components that situate her outside of the genre of minimalism while still having some minimalist characteristics. I suggest that because Monk's multifaceted musical language and interdisciplinary compositional approach is paired

[45] An exception to this tendency is the exchange between McClary and Dusman. Susan McClary, "Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition," 57-81; Linda Dusman, "Unheard-of: Music as Performance and the Reception of the New," 130-146; and McClary, "Response to Linda Dusman," 148-153.

[46] K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists* (New York: Phaidon Press, 1996); Arved Ashby, "Minimalist Opera," *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 244-266; Ryan Ebright, "Echoes of the avant-garde in American minimalist opera" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2014), 8.

with minimalist trademarks like repetition, negative musical space, and collaboration, Monk's work simultaneously defies categorization and references the familiar. My claim supports Monk's own feelings about how she prefers her work to be defined.

Is She a Minimalist?

Monk herself is uncomfortable with the association with minimalism, or with association to any musical genre at all. As though to imply that the completeness of her work is too multi-faceted to force into a singular category, often in interviews she defends her work and its complexities by stating that she does not think her work is minimalist. For example, when asked if the association of her music to the minimalist movement is personally resonant, Monk says, "I always have a hard time with any kind of categorization at all, and I feel like anything that becomes a kind of movement, I'm very skeptical about…"[47] Monk consistently tries to avoid being lumped in with the minimalist composers who came out of New York in the 1970s and 1980s. In a 2010 interview, she says of minimalism, " Minimalism was so much the currency of that time…I could never do it. But my mind went in a different direction. I was much more interested in layering of different sense mediums or perceptions."[48] Working in the same city and time period as composers who were considered pioneers and stars of the minimalist movement, Monk almost had to engage with the movement's stylistic components; however, she expanded on minimalist ideas by adding extended techniques,

[47] Meredith Monk and Frank J. Oteri, "Meredith Monk: Composer First," *New Music Box*, March 16, 2000. https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/meredith-monk-composer-first/#minimalism
[48] Meredith Monk and Isla Leaver-Yap, "Meredith Monk Interviewed by Isla Leaver-Yap," "The Voice Is A Language, A Reader." https://voiceisalanguage.wordpress.com/2010/04/19/text-meredith-monk-interviewed-by-isla-leaver-yap/#comments.

non-languaged syllables, and physical gestures to her music.[49] She also adopted a collaborative compositional method that differed from the collaboration used by her contemporaries. The inability to fully classify Monk's music into the minimalist camp, or any other musical generic movement, supports the claim she has about her own music: that it challenges categorization.

Yet, despite her continued insistence that her work should not be thought of as minimalist music, critics and academics discuss her work in the contexts of minimalist composers, and often without formal examples to solidify their claims. For example, in Eric Salzman's survey of twentieth-century music, he discusses Monk's work in relation to new media and theater and posits that her music is "simple and often associated with minimalism..."[50] Salzman does not offer a rationale as to why her musical style is aligned with the minimalist movement other than his suggestion that the perceived simplicity of Monk's music situates it into a minimalist camp. In a more focused instance, Arved Ashby specifically includes discussion of Monk and her larger-scale pieces *Quarry* and *Atlas* alongside discussions of works by Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Michael Nyman, and John Adams. His introduction to the chapter focuses on the concept of musical repetition as a foundation for minimalist opera and his inclusion of Monk in the chapter should suggest that because her operas contain repetition, they are minimalist operas. [51] However, while Ashby argues that repetition in Glass's *Einstein on the Beach* serves to elongate harmonic changes and displace temporal activity in order to release the opera

[49] The setting of non-languaged syllables by other composers like Richard Wagner and Steve Reich, as compared to Monk's settings, is a rich area that requires further exploration.
[50] Eric Salzman*, Twentieth-Century Music, an Introduction* (New York, Prentice Hall: 2002), 255.
[51] Arved Ashby, "Minimalist Opera," 246-249.

from its dependence on narrative,[52] his analysis of Monk's works is less substantial. He suggests that narratives in Monk's work arise from "simple instrumental ostinatos,"[53] but does not expand on how the narratives and ostinato are connected or how the ostinato as a representation of the minimalist operatic repetitive gesture might fit into her works.

Like Ashby, scholars tend to group Monk in discussions of the music of Philip Glass and Steve Reich. In his previously mentioned dissertation, Ryan Ebright situates Monk in relation to Glass and Reich as he examines the creation of Monk's Vocal Ensemble.[54] In his more recent article on the subject, Ebright discusses the contrasting compositional and working methods of Monk with her contemporaries, though he does not explicitly state that her music is minimalist. Ebright takes a historical approach to Monk's working relationship with her colleagues in Meredith Monk and Vocal Ensemble, while the tendency of other scholars is to categorize her work.

In Robert Fink's monograph on minimalism and its social impact, Monk is discussed not as a composer but only as a choreographer who, like the experimental choreographers he mentions, preferred Glass's minimalism as accompaniment to the dances that physicalized musical minimalism in repetitive movement.[55] Fink's inclusion of Monk as a choreographer with a repetitive style supports his claim that American minimalism and disco share some of the same formal properties. The commonalities between disco and minimalism manifest not only as musical material, like ostinato bass

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[52] Ibid., 249-250.
[53] Ibid., 254.
[54] Ryan Ebright, "Assembling Meredith Monk and Vocal Ensemble, 1975–1991." Meredith Monk and Vocal Ensemble and/or its formation is also briefly mentioned by Salzman and Ashby, but Ebright's article provides a thorough look at her unique compositional methods when working with more than one musician.
[55] Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimalism as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 28.

figures, but each musical style is also associated with its own signature style of dance. The dance styles of both disco and minimalism are choreographed in parallel to their respective musics, but not by the composers of the music. However, Monk's physical gesture is crafted specifically for her music, and so the two are intrinsically linked and entirely self-contained.

Frameworks of Minimalism

To understand how Monk's work both challenges and exemplifies minimalist qualities, we must first understand the formal, stylistic, and methodological components that are typically attributed to the minimalist movement. In their work, Fink, Ashby, and other scholars suggest that minimalist style is contingent on the repetitive nature of the music in question. Expanding on available scholarship of minimalist music by suggesting a stylistic definition of minimalism, Kyle Gann, Keith Potter and Pwyll ap Siôn propose eight other musical features in addition to repetition they find as tropes of minimalist music that could aid in its categorization.[56] The musical features other than repetition they suggest are harmonic stasis, drones, gradual process, steady beat, static instrumentation, metamusic, pure tuning, and audible structure.[57] Each of these features

[56] In the introduction, the editors credit Monk with shaping the early minimalist movement. We can assume that their inclusion of her name in the chapter that attempts to define minimalist music suggests their categorization of Monk as a minimalist composer, but discussion of the defining minimalist features as they specifically apply to her music does not appear in the introduction, nor throughout the rest of the volume.

[57] Kyle Gann, Keith Potter, and Pwyll ap Siôn, "Introduction: Experimental, Minimalist, Postminimalist? Origins, Definitions, Communities," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music* (New York: Routledge, 2016) 1-16; this list draws on but differs from Kyle Gann's list of defining features of musical minimalism that he wrote in 2001 in a post for New Music Box. The earlier list includes three different kinds of process: additive process, permutational process, and linear transformation, and the later list includes these under the umbrella term gradual process. The later list also adds drones but removes "influence of non-

describe aspects of minimalism that exist as compositional choices. In other words, the nine features that serve to define minimalist music apply only to the scope of the music itself in individual elements, rather than a broader compositional approach or methodology. The editors are aware of the difficulty of defining minimalist style, noting that the proposed defining features of minimalism should not suggest universality across works.[58] With the caveat that the terms used to define minimalism may not apply, the proposed definition of "minimalist music" is allowed to remain open-ended and somewhat loose, despite the many musical features that can be used to help narrow the definition.

Patrick Nickleson calls attention to the limitations of the terms of Gann, Potter, and Sion's definition and proposes a different approach to discuss minimalism. He problematizes the formalistic definition and posits that rather than a genre classified by musical theoretical elements, minimalism is a political aesthetic across composers' methodologies. He writes,

> I propose that more coherent, non-formalist reasons can be located for the designator 'minimalism' as it is shared across many of the composers and musics. These include: the fact of collaboration as evinced in eventual disputes over authorship; the return to composers performing their own work; the decision to form bands (including the composer) to not only perform, but also develop their music; the rejection of published or even complete scores in favour of oral and rote development in rehearsal; and the way that this music exists, ontologically, more often on magnetic tape (whether released professionally or stuck in archives) than on manuscript paper.[59]

Nickleson's argument suggests that minimalism cannot be defined by its musical aspects, regardless of their austere nature, but instead exists as a method of aesthetics classified by

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Western cultures." The post can be found here: https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/minimal-music-maximal-impact/2/.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Patrick Nickleson, "The Names of Minimalism: Authorship and the Historiography of Dispute in New York Minimalism, 1960–1982" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2017), 10.

the unique approaches taken by some composers that he finds to become unifying trends. Taking both the formalistic musical qualities of minimalism, as quantified by the authors of *The Ashgate Research Companion*, and Patrick Nickleson's methodology-focused definition of the movement, we can examine Meredith Monk's musical language and compositional methods to see how each definition of minimalism might apply.

And the Category Is:

Although Nickleson does not specifically characterize Monk as a minimalist in his dissertation, he draws from the work of other scholars who do classify her in that way. The discourse surrounding Monk's work that classifies it as minimalist, while not entirely considerate of all aspects of her work, is understandable: some musical components of Monk's work could suggest characteristics of minimalist musical style as defined by the editors of *The Ashgate Research Companion*, while some of the politics of her compositional method potentially align with Nickleson's defining suggestions, as well. Further, Monk's chronological and geographical relationship to Glass, Reich, and Young (that they lived and worked in similar artistic circles in New York in the 1960s-1980s) is another framework within which her work and theirs can be understood as stylistically related.

Scholars frequently cite the repetition in Monk's music as a criterion to label her a minimalist. Accompaniment in her pieces, whether it is orchestral as in *Atlas* or a singular instrument like piano in *Education of the Girlchild,* or cello in *Dolmen Music,* often appears as a musical figure that cycles through several repetitions. Monk explains this in an interview:

> When I began exploring my voice, I became interested in composing non-verbal, abstract song forms. So when I was using repetition (and I still do, to this day), I was thinking more about the way that folk music has a verse and chorus and the underlying instruments, which play repeating patterns [as] accompaniment.[60]

Per Monk, repetition does occur in accompaniment to her vocal musical lines, but it also appears in the vocal music that is paired with the accompaniment, or vocal music in which voices are paired with each other, as in "Long Shadows (1)" from *Facing North* (1990) (Example 1). In "Long Shadows (1)," one voice repeats a gesture made up of skips or stepwise motion three times with small rhythmic changes at the end of the third repeat but with identical pitches and register. After the first hearing of the vocal melody, another repetitive vocal line is introduced. It acts as a countermelody, even though both parts move largely in parallel motion at the same speed. The second vocal line creates a distorted counterpoint against the first vocal line's cantus firmus, almost disconnecting each part from the other.

While "Long Shadows (1)" has certain elements that are repetitive, the piece is also filled with change. Monk provided articulation markings that indicate a timbrally subtle extended technique: vocalizing on an inhaled breath. To achieve this, singers must relax their vocal folds enough so that inhaled air will vibrate the folds on a pitch, but the singer must also create appropriate tension in the folds so that the pitch is controlled and intentional. The inhale on pitch also serves as the singer's breath to support the pitch sung on the exhale. The extended technique of inhaled pitch destabilizes the pitch's integrity, opening the opportunity for microtonal variance between the two simultaneous vocal lines. This variance invites a fluidity to the intervallic harmony and challenges the harmony's steadiness.

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[60] Oteri and Monk, "Meredith Monk: Composer First."

Vocal figures change rhythmically in the third measure of the third system by adding an additional attack to the rhythmic figure, but also retain repetition of the established pitches. As if the rhythmic variance provided permission for additional change, the second vocal line is the first to deviate from the established set of pitches in the following measure. In the second half of the same four-bar phrase, the first vocal line follows suit to enact change both on pitch and melodic contour. In this piece, Monk introduces normativity and its other. Both vocal lines examined simultaneously can be understood to represent this idea. The first vocal line can be seen as normative, and the second can be understood as the other in that it operates as the agent of musical change, driving the development ultimately in both voices. While the piece does show some qualifying aspects of minimalism, it also contains musical attributes that disassociate it from that classification.

Other types of repetition—particularly steady beat and harmonic stasis—that Gann, Potter, and ap Siôn include as formal aspects of minimalism can be found in *Atlas* as well. In the opera, however, the elements that could be perceived as musical minimalism are deceptive. The scene "Forest Questions" in Part II of the opera (Example 2) begins with a swift, arpeggiated orchestral introduction. In F♯ minor, the first two measures arpeggiate F♯ minor seven, with the E in m. 2 replaced by D before the return to C♯ in the melodic figure. The D might be interpreted as a change in harmony to a D major seventh chord, but because the remaining arpeggiation is identical to the first measure and tonicizes the home key, the D can be understood as neighbor tone that connects the minor I chord to the harmony in the next two measures. Measures 3–4

arpeggiate D♯ minor, incorporating mode mixture. Measures 5–6 return to the music found in mm. 1 and 2.

The orchestral introduction of "Forest Questions" can be read as minimalist and also not minimalist. For example, the harmony of the opening measures exhibits both change and stasis. Change is found in the rapidly shifting chords, but stasis is also conveyed by the oscillation between the chords F♯ minor seven and D♯ minor seven. Common tones and mode mixture are present in the shift, and the closeness of pitch classes E and A from the F♯ minor seven chord and D♯ and A♯ in the D♯ minor seven chord show relative stasis in the prolongation of the music's tonic. In other words, even though harmonic movement is present, the trajectory of the harmony is stalled rather than dynamic. The vocal line introduced in measure 6 challenges the harmonic stasis of the passage with a glissando to C♮ against D♯ minor's C♯ that destabilizes the tonality.

In this introduction, Monk also challenges the minimalistic idea of steady beat. The quick tempo of the orchestral accompaniment does provide a steady eighth note pulse. However, the time signature shifts in the music from 4/4 to 3/4, which do not follow a rigid pattern and resist predictability, also shift perception of the beat away from steadiness to something almost erratic. Because the tempo is fast, we might hear the music in hypermeasures rather than the notated meter. We can hear the first two measures to establish one hypermeasure in 4/4 with a completed two-bar melodic motive. The next measure, though, is in 3/4 and begins the same melodic motive, completed by measure 4, which returns to the 4/4 notated meter for another measure (measure 5). Motivically, measure 3 and measure 4 belong together to complete the melody, but metrically, measure 4 and measure 5 belong together to complete the hypermeasure in 4/4. If we

divide according to rhythm by discontinuing hypermetrical division for measure 3 and resume in measures 4-5, steadiness of the beat is compromised because the downbeat of the hypermeasure beginning in measure 4 is in the middle of the motivic phrase established in measures 1-2. If we divide according to motive by creating a hypermeasure made up of measures 3 and 4, the steadiness of the beat is dissolved by a missing quarter note in the hypermeasure. Additionally, Monk throws off perceived rhythmic steadiness by randomizing the appearance of the 3/4 notated meter. She begins a pattern of measures of 4/4 and one measure of 3/4, but then breaks the pattern by adding one measure of 4/4 before the next measure of 3/4 and continues the remainder of the scene with no more occurrences of 3/4 meter. The effect of shifting metrical and motivic gestures in the introduction of "Forest Questions" gives the listener a disjointed sense of pulse that undermines the perception of steady beat. Furthermore, the unpredictability challenges the elements of audible structure and gradual process. This passage of *Atlas* shows both tendencies of and deviations from formalistic characteristics of minimalist music. These tendencies and deviations are present in different ways and degrees in much of Monk's work.

Patrick Nickleson focuses on the commonality of authorship disputes as a way to classify minimalism as a political aesthetic rather than a formalistic one. To Nickleson, the frequent disagreements between composers associated with minimalism, like Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and Philip Glass, about compositional contributions and musical influence are salient events that shaped the minimalist movement. Though the above composers seem to consider themselves open to collaboration, in regard to some of the pieces most often associated with minimalism, they disagree on authorship. For example,

Nickleson provides quotations from both Steve Reich and Terry Riley that discuss the compositional process of Riley's *In C.* In the quotations, both composers take credit for contributing integral parts of the piece, though the authorship is attributed to Terry Riley without consideration of authorship to any collaborators. Nickleson posits that despite this, the working relationship between the two composers was more collaborative than the authorship of *In C* suggests.[61]

Meredith Monk collaborates extensively during her compositional process. To Monk, collaboration is "98.9% of the time negotiating how to work together and 1.99% making the piece. In a very equal collaboration, there are two pillars around the door, and then it is what you are willing to let go of to make something else happen that you wouldn't do yourself."[62] Monk's practice is one that entails understanding her collaborative partners and composing with the partnership in mind. She also credits her collaborators; for example, Ping Chong is also credited for writing *The Games* (1984). Further, because Monk composes for specific voices, like those in Meredith Monk and Vocal Ensemble,[63] or instrumentalists, she credits those individuals as well. Smithner notes that in the process of writing *Atlas,* Monk used the cast to mold the opera into form. She writes, "Monk had to train the group to adjust to her methods of collaborative exchange in creating material, as well as helping her to expand her musical and theatrical language…"[64] During the compositional process for *Atlas*, Monk used the abilities of the individual singers to craft the opera based on their strengths. Monk continues to credit the original cast of *Atlas*, including the group in notes in the 2019 realization of the score.

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[61] Nickleson, "Names of Minimalism," 160-163.
[62] Smithner, "Meredith Monk: Four Decades," 103.
[63] Ebright, "Assembling Meredith Monk and Vocal Ensemble."
[64] Smithner, "Meredith Monk: Four Decades," 105.

While Monk's collaborative methodology is in line with the collaboration Nickleson cites as a pillar of minimalism, she differs in that credit is attributed to collaborators and there are no authorship disputes surrounding her work.

Even though Meredith Monk attempts to thwart the identity of being a "minimalist" composer, scholars and critics still attribute the term to her and her work. They point to characteristics, like repetition, that are associated with minimalism. However, the definitions of minimalism that address formal/stylistic and political/aesthetic aspects of the musical genre simultaneously describe aspects of Monk's work and contrast with other aspects. The ways in which Monk's work elude the definitions of minimalism make her identity as a minimalist unstable.

CHAPTER TWO

MONK'S COMPOSITIONAL LANGUAGE

Layering and synthesis: these two compositional principles characterize much of Meredith Monk's music. Her singular approach to synthesizing music, movement, and other visual aspects is best understood as an attempt to achieve a balance between performance media rather than as originating in a meditation on the Western canon.[65] One example of that balance includes Monk's exploration of the voice as an instrument woven into the texture of, rather than accompanied by, extra-body instruments (cello, trumpet, etc.). Realizing the capability of the voice this way began with Monk discovering the scope of her own vocal instrument. In a lecture to a Wesleyan University music history class, Monk cites the inception of this treatment as a kind of play: "One day I started vocalizing, and suddenly I had a revelation that the voice could have the flexibility of the spine, it could have the articulation of a hand…it didn't need words. It was an eloquent language in itself."[66] She also notes that her method of using the body flexibly as an expressive medium transfers to the exploration of the voice, and through

[65] Myrna Frances Schloss makes a similar observation about Monk's music in her dissertation, "Out of the Twentieth Century: Three Composers, Three Musics, One Femininity," 1-2.
[66] Meredith Monk, "7, Meredith Monk," in *Eight Lectures on Experimental Music*, ed. Alvin Lucier (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2018), 109.

that exploration, she developed a new, organic, vocal vocabulary built on her own instrument.[67] Ultimately, Monk's artistic vocabulary does pose challenges to the traditional Western canon, though these challenges do not constitute the primary motivation behind her work.

Vocal Lines Sung on Non-Languaged Syllables

Monk's compositional language focuses on three main stylistic hallmarks: vocal lines sung on non-languaged syllables, physical movement in concert with sung musical material, and invention/practice of extended vocal techniques. These characteristics appear as in works as early as *16 Millimeter Earrings* and continue to be tenets in her present work. Where Monk's work largely rejects textual "language," it still retains meaning. Though the sung syllables of one of her vocal lines are rarely in English, French, or any other language, the listener still gleans a narrative meaning, particularly in her works that contain explicit narrative elements. However, Kyle Gann posits that Monk's work includes "whimsical streams of humming, glissandi, nonsense syllables, and tongue clicks,"[69] suggesting, like many other scholars tend to do, that Monk uses a kind of gibberish as a placeholder for language. The opposite is true: Monk selects the non-languaged syllables deliberately, and they are not nonsensical. "Nonsense" implies that the syllables Monk uses are randomly selected or meaningless. Though the syllables do not always have a dictionary definition, Monk uses them strategically to create an understanding for the audience in conjunction with the rest of the musical elements that

[67] Monk, in *Eight Lectures*, 109.
[69] Kyle Gann, "Ancient Lullabies," in *Meredith Monk*, ed. Deborah Jowitt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 164.

occur concurrently. For example, Monk might sometimes use the syllable "loo," in context of other aspects of her musical language, to connote a sense of tenderness or melancholy while at other moments "loo" could indicate frustration, pleading, or fear.

In Monk's vocal writing, non-languaged syllables allow emphatic flexibility of melodic contour unattached to standard syllabic emphasis and pronunciation. Using non-languaged syllables to replace specified language, Monk can layer vocal textures that interact with each other, or instrumental accompaniment, with more density because diction to support textual clarity is irrelevant. In ensemble pieces, the effect is often a complex weaving of polyrhythmic, percussive vocal onsets that leans more toward instrumental orchestration than the monolithic texture of a traditional, operatic ensemble number. However, even in music where textual clarity is not a concern, Monk will sometimes include quite specific instructions for diction, for example, when a syllable might be unfamiliar. In "Part 1: Personal Climate: Travel Dream Song" of *Atlas*, Monk asks Young Alexandra to sing the syllable "d'" for several beats of rapid sixteenth notes. At the initial sounding of technique, Monk's diction note reads "soft 'd' (between 'th' and 'd'), vowel 'uh.'"

Monk sometimes writes syllables from which the listener might extrapolate a standard, English word. In the solo "Part Two" of *Education of the Girlchild*, Monk presents a portrait of a woman's life, but the narrative is told from back to front. In other words, the work begins sung in the voice of an elderly woman whose life story is told in reverse. In the beginning few minutes of *Girlchild*, the singer vocalizes on the wordless syllable that sounds something like "Nnn-doh-ah," and soon graduating to "Nn-dah-nn." When the singer's melody repeats the simple descending motion from C4 to A3 on

triplets, she sings “Nn-dah-nn.” Some might hear the rapid succession of those syllables as “dyin’, dyin’, dyin’,” as the falling melodic figure mimics the word’s syllabic emphasis. If the listener does not hear those syllables as the word “dyin’,” the narrative is still clear because of the gestures and extended techniques.

We can find a prominent example of wordless syllables that suggest English words in *Atlas*. During the first full company number, “Part Two: Night Travel: Agricultural Community,” Alexandra and her travelling companions have found a commune of farmers who are working together. This scene is one of the longest in the opera. As the company engages in a community dance, the farmers’ contrapuntal vocal lines are sung on the syllables “ay yo eh ee ay oh ee oh oo wah.” The vocal parts are arranged so that for 38 measures, one section (sopranos, altos, etc.) singing the syllable “oo” on beat five precedes another singing “ee” on the downbeat in an upward leap from D (“oo”) to C (“ee”). The gesture creates the impression that the company of communal farmers repeatedly sings the word “we” (see Example 3 for a representative passage of this number). The aggregate sharing of responsibility for singing a word that represents a collectivity is a striking expression of the idea of community.

At times (though not often) Monk will deviate from her typical operational method of non-languaged syllables. For example, we occasionally find English words in some of her works, but notably the words do not always serve as carriers of meaning. Often, the English words depart from their ascribed meanings either for ease of diction for the singer or to create a non-languaged utterance. The word “you” in Monk’s opera *Quarry* is repeated rapidly many times. The repetition of the word “you” suggests the concept of semantic satiation, the psychological phenomenon in which frequent repetition

of a word releases its meaning. Words with understood definitions in Monk's work largely are present to serve the purpose of a chant or a mantra, not to advance narration.

During the scene "Choosing Companions" in *Atlas*, all characters sing the English words "hey" and "yo" as the main lyric of the passage. However, the words do not function as part of the English language but are rather meant to convey a wide range of communication between the characters. Monk uses "hey" and "yo" in the libretto to help singers pronounce the non-languaged words, but Monk sets the syllables in different musical contexts to emphasize some sounds over others. For example, Monk sustains the vowel in the word "hey" before a descending minor third to the word "yo" which elides the two syllables. The melodic emphasis on the sustained vowel and the elision between the syllables effectually removes the accent from the syllable "yo" so that it is almost inaudible, making the musical gesture gentle. Using the same syllables later in the scene, though, Monk distinguishes pronunciation between them. She plays with the diction of each syllable by manipulating the diphthongs and aspirated consonants through musical accents. Accenting each the consonant "h," the diphthong at the end of the word "hey," and the diphthong at the beginning of the word "yo" highlights how each syllable can convey different sentiments. The elided "hey" and "yo" thus transform into an excited exclamation rather than a gentle murmur.

Uniquely, in *Atlas*, English words do occur throughout the opera, in both voiced and visually projected capacities, and they serve a narrative purpose by indicating the characters' foundational desires. For example, the first English word we hear is spoken by Alexandra in m. 81 during "Travel Dream Song." She speaks the words "mountains, cities, steamships, grass skirts, cinnabar," sandwiched between passages of non-

languaged vocalization, not just to evoke ideas of travel to faraway lands but to present her intense desire to do the travelling and see the faraway lands. The English words allow us to infer what the dramatic action of the opera will entail.

Through the structuring of non-languaged syllables, Monk creates a sense of character development. During Part 1 of the opera, few different syllables are used, and many are simply sustained vowel sounds. When she is a young girl, before she embarks on her journey around the world, Alexandra's range of syllables is limited. Similarly, the syllables sung by her parents make up only a few compared to the rest of the opera. As Alexandra matures throughout the opera, her vocabulary of syllables expands. Some characters are introduced with a wide variety of syllables, like the Ancient Man in "Forest Questions." His syllabic vocabulary is so vast that, for this character, Monk almost creates a fully realized language to indicate his wisdom. Throughout the opera, Monk develops the narrative of *Atlas* by showing the characters' life experience or closeness to spiritual awakening in their relationships to non-languaged syllables.

Extended Vocal Techniques

Another facet of Monk's work that often clarifies dramatic action is her invention and use of extended vocal techniques. Philip Gentry suggests that the situating of "the body" as a centrality in the music of 1960s and 1970s avant-gardism influenced Monk's vocal exploration.[70] However, Monk indicates that her training beginning as a young

[70] Philip Gentry, "The Body," in *Grove Music Online,* ed. Deane Root, 2001, accessed December 6, 2019, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002227818?rskey=UvIAU0.

child in Dalcroze Eurythmics taught her to integrate vocal music and bodily flexibility.[71] From a young age, Monk has understood embodied agility as an amalgamation of the musical and bodily, and when she began composing music, the two facets fused and manifested in extending the voice's musical vocabulary.

Monk's exploration of the full capacity of the voice often manifests as yowls, glottal stops, yawps, and controlled shrieks and is as far from the traditional operatic technique as possible. But for singers of Monk's work, development of this new and expressive vocal idiom, as David Sterritt points out, "…has meant stripping away years of training—not technique, which is more necessary than ever, but incrustations of habit and conventional wisdom—and substituting new methods based on the artist's own discoveries."[72] Monk's work requires sustaining good vocal technique like breath support, muscular placement, and vowel tracking, while also requiring safe practice of the extended vocal techniques that Monk writes into her music. The fact that Monk continues to perform at a high level as she approaches her eightieth birthday is in and of itself a testament to her mastery of technique and healthy vocal practice.

To quantify some of these techniques, I have compiled a chart of extended techniques Monk uses in *Atlas* and where they are located (Figure 1). A few of the techniques are named in the score by Monk, seemingly as an expression marking or instructive information, but I have ascribed names to the remaining techniques that she does not specifically label. Just as Monk varies non-languaged syllables based on each character's spiritual or emotional development, so too does she use extended techniques

[71] Meredith Monk and Ross Simoni, "An Interview with Meredith Monk," *The Believer*, July 1, 2014, https://believermag.com/an-interview-with-meredith-monk/.
[72] David Sterritt, "Notes, Meredith Monk," in *Art + Performance, Meredith Monk*, ed. Deborah Jowitt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 107.

to indicate varying existential planes. For example, characters who sing techniques that are far extended from traditional, operatic singing, like the vocal fry, scream, low growl, and goat trill in the Ice Demons' "chirp conversation" (Example 4), are often associated with danger or a dangerous situation. Contrastingly, the role of Alexandra's father requires singing relatively few extended vocal techniques and is associated with the concept of safety. Monk's large catalogue of extended techniques is, according to Jennifer Kelly, developed out of experimentation with her own voice as a flexible instrument.[73] Because Monk's vocal experimentation certainly continued after writing *Atlas*, it should be noted that the chart of extended techniques is in no way an exhaustive list of the techniques Monk uses in all of her works. In other words, while some of the extended techniques found in *Atlas* also appear in other of her works, a wider variety of Monkian extended techniques exist across her compositional catalogue than appear in *Atlas*. Monk also employs vocal techniques that are uncommon in Western operatic technique but are used in music from other cultures, like overtone singing or hocket. Because those techniques are not "extended" in the cultures from which they originate, they are omitted from the list.

Extended techniques appear in the breadth of Monk's works, but sometimes their function differs from their function in *Atlas*. In both *Atlas* and *Education of the Girlchild*, the "goat trill" is used. In *Atlas*, we might align the technique with a sense of danger, while in *Education of the Girlchild* the same technique is associated with agedness. "Multi-hocket" appears in both *Atlas* and *Songs of Ascension* (2011) in different contexts as well, but both instances suggest that the several levels of hocketed vocal lines parallel

[73] Jennifer Kelly, *In Her Own Words*, 176.

the cellular nature of the example from *Cellular Songs* (2018): individual, self-contained gestures fit together as a kind of jigsaw puzzle to make a unified, collective gesture.

Two methods of extended techniques clearly extend from Monk's use of non-languaged syllables. In the removal of organized language, she neutralizes the split between embodied and extra-body instruments by writing vocal parts that behave as if they were instrumental parts. Instrument-like vocal writing is a typical musical gesture for Monk, occurring frequently in works across the many decades of her career. We can find a recent example of Monk's tendency to write instrument-like gestures for voices in *Cellular Songs*. In composing this work, Monk drew inspiration from functions of cells making up organic matter, each cell working independently and particular cells working together.[74] In "Happy Woman" from *Cellular Songs*, Monk writes a syncopated vocal line with six leaps over two measures, with the largest leap being a tenth. The contrasting violin part, a near complete retrograde inversion of the vocal line, similarly contains six leaps over the same two measures. Each part is heard independently, repeated, and then layered with the other. Like organic cells, the parts simultaneously self-perpetuate and complete each other (Example 5). While a tenth is not a particularly difficult or an uncommon interval for a violinist to play, to sing an in-tune tenth leap is challenging and rarely found in operatic vocal figures.

Physical Gesture

Physical gesture is central to Monk's music as a compositional extension and is discussed at length in dance- and theater-related publications. Amy Strahler Holzapfel

[74] John Schaefer, Meredith Monk, "Live In Studio: Meredith Monk," streamed October 2018, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lee3TFChZyY.

analyzes Monk's 1976 work *Quarry,*[75] a piece that commented on the horrors of World War II. Holzapfel largely discusses the visual aspects of the piece, focusing on Monk's gesturally and spatially constructed landscapes. She reads the gesture as specific choreography and relates the embodied movement to the concept of landscapes, either the body or the earth, wounded by war.[76] Holzapfel's reading is thorough and offers a perspective on the symbolism of the movement in *Quarry* that might not be apparent at first experiences of the work. She briefly acknowledges that Monk considers the musical score to be equally as important as the visual aspects of *Quarry*[77] but declines to comment on Monk's musical landscapes constructed into the piece.

The technical aspect of Monk's gestures[78] behaves, in one sense, like the non-languaged syllables of Monk's texts. Dance scholar Sally Banes notes that "Monk… wrenched quotidian movements and objects from the context of the everyday world, transmuting rather than presenting ordinary things by exposing them in new frameworks…"[79] To Banes, the physical gesture of Monk's works contrasts the choreography of some of her contemporaries in her recontextualization of almost pedestrian gestures by arranging them in a new way into an unfamiliar, physical space. Similarly, we can hear the vocalized syllables that accompany the gestures and music appear as fragments of ordinary words recontextualized to create a new carrier of narrative meaning in an extended sonic space.[80]

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[75] Monk calls *Quarry* an "opera epic."
[76] Amy Strahler Holzapfel, "From Landscape to Climatescape," 408-409.
[77] Ibid, 408.
[78] That is, technique as the foundation of dance as a discipline.
[79] Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1977), 151.
[80] Monk as a choreographer is most often discussed along with the choreographer Martha Clarke, and occasionally with Merce Cunningham. Cunningham and Monk have contrasting approaches to dance and music.

However, Banes does not recognize gesture in Monk's work as an aspect of narrative, even in her narrative works like *Quarry*, *Education of the Girlchild*, and *Vessel.*[81] Banes does note that the composed gesture does show aspects of community and the individual in her works. To Banes, Monk's gesture indicates people being people: "Each character has his or her special, emblematic identity. People eat, or cook, or sit together around a table. People labor together, and collectively encounter cosmic events: births, deaths, rites of passage."[82] The gesture of the characters, though, while certainly providing insight to the character's or community's sense of being and operation, also can and should be understood as furthering a narrative framework. The importance of Monk's use of gesture to her construction of narrative only becomes evident when paired with the other aspects of Monk's compositional language, because in her works gesture, non-languaged vocals, and music are interdependent.

Theater critic Bonnie Marranca also overlooks advancement of narrative as a function of Monk's gestures. Marranca views gesture in *Atlas* as "used less to give steps to a character than to create a movement pattern."[83] To Marranca, Monk's physically gestural vocabulary acts much like the appearance of English words in many other of her works: to form a kind of physicalized version of a mantra through patterned movement. Gesture is then used not as a device to advance narrative, but to show a kind of constant hum of the everyday through repetition from which we can extrapolate characterization of an individual or of a community. In *Atlas*, and in other works, however, some gesture

[81] While Banes's article was written before *Atlas* premiered, many of the other works Banes discusses certainly follow a narration. Additionally, Monk's musico-gestural language as compared to gesture found in Baroque opera warrants further discussion.
[82] Sally Banes, "The Art of Meredith Monk," *Performing Arts Journal* 3, no. 1 (Summer 1978), 16.
[83] Bonnie Marranca, "Atlas of Sound," in *Meredith Monk*, ed. Deborah Jowitt, 176.

serves a narrative function by becoming diegetic within its scenic context. If we return to the "Agricultural Community" scene in *Atlas*, for example, the gesture of the group of people Alexandra and her travelling companions meet does not appear as fragmented parts of folk-like gestures recontextualized into an illustration of community operations. It does appear as an intentionally active group dance. Because the dance is diegetic, Alexandra and her companions join in the dance and thus participate in the narrative of the agricultural community they meet. The participation then shapes the experience of the travelers' continuing narrative in their quest.

The following close reading of a scene from *Atlas* shows how intricacies of all three of Monk's hallmark compositional techniques weave together to form a complex musical entity. When considering Monk's works, scholars and critics tend to separate the interconnected compositional devices that define her musical language and focus on only one of its aspects. In separating the parts, such discussions become inherently reductive. For example, critic Greg Sandow discusses Monk's music in a chapter of a 1983 edited volume about women and classical music. Sandow suggests that extended techniques are the most salient aspect of Monk's work. He mentions neither physical gesture nor non-languaged vocals, and claims that she is a "limited" composer, suggesting that her music is simplistic.[84] To refute claims like these, Monk defends her work, stating that it seems simple but instead is quite complex.[85] With few exceptions, Sandow's opinion is representative of the broader discussions surrounding Monk's work. As I hope is clear in

[84] Greg Sandow, "Invisible Theater: The Music of Meredith Monk," *International Women in Classical Music* 1 (1984): 147. Sandow's entry pre-dates the premiere of *Atlas*, so the opera could not inform his opinion.
[85] Euan Kerr, "Meredith Monk Lifts Up the Emotional Power of Voice," MPR News.org October 4, 2018. https://www.mprnews.org/story/2018/10/04/meredith-monk-lifts-up-emotional-power-of-voice.

the next pages, the intricate combinations and density of compositional devices that define Monk's musical language indicate that readings of her music as simple are not fully informed.

Techniques in Action, a Close Reading

Atlas, premiered in 1991, tells the story of Alexandra, who is loosely based on the French explorer Alexandra David-Néel, and her journey of self-discovery. Per Monk, in the synopsis of the opera included in the 2019 score,

> In *Atlas*, travel is a metaphor for spiritual quest and commitment to inner vision. The opera centers on the life cycle of one character, Alexandra Daniels, a female explorer. In the expedition made by Alexandra and her travelling companions, there are adventures, encounters with spirits from other realms, and struggles with personal and societal demons. The explorers are initiated and taught by Guides who lead them finally into a realm of pure energy.[86]

The opera in three parts follows Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey archetype with slight deviations. Young Alexandra wishes to travel the world and convinces her parents to let her go. Alexandra 2, played by another, older singer, selects her fellow travelers and, aided by two Spirit Guides, they set off together on a journey. During their travels, they visit several different climates and cultures, experience danger, and search for answers to life's questions. Alexandra's journey ultimately helps her know herself.

"Part 1: Personal Climate: Future Quest" is the fifth scene in the opera. For the following close reading, I analyzed the fully realized, 2019 version of the score, created for the Walt Disney Concert Hall production, and the video of the 1991 production at Houston Grand Opera. (For reference in the close reading, please see Example 6, where the score for "Future Quest" score appears in its entirety.)

[86] Monk, *Atlas*, "Synopsis" (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 2019).

The set stages the interior of an upper-middle class home. A young girl, Alexandra, is in her room on one side of the stage and two adults, her parents, are occupied with reading or housework far on the other side. Unaccompanied, Alexandra sings her first theme that I call the Daydream Music. The Daydream theme is a two-bar arpeggiated melody that tonicizes F major, and Alexandra sings it twice as she sits on her bed while holding a guitar. The syllables glide between "la, "ah" as an extension of "la," and humming to indicate that the song is diegetic. At m. 5, Alexandra repeats her phrase and accompanies herself on the guitar,[87] cementing the diegetic nature of the opening of "Future Quest." The guitar accompaniment rhythmically supports Alexandra's Daydream Music, with each bar of the two-bar phrase alternating between chords on two half notes in the first measure of the phrase and one half note and two quarter notes in the second. The harmonic accompaniment, however, is more easily understood to tonicize D minor rather than its relative major key of Alexandra's Daydream Music, as the chords of the repeating phrase begin on D minor, move to A major, to B flat min7, then back to D minor.

Without language to advance dramatic narrative, Alexandra's Daydream Music and its accompaniment of the first twelve measures immediately establishes several musical elements that enable our understanding of the scene. First, we associate Alexandra with F major and her Daydream Music. Then, the introduction of bitonality in the D minor accompaniment foreshadows both bitonality as a musical device and D minor as a tonality at odds with Alexandra. Because this part of Alexandra's music is

[87] The score indicates that guitar chords may be played on the keyboard using the acoustic guitar patch if the singer does not play guitar. In that case, the singer would use the guitar to pantomime playing along with the keyboard chords as if accompanying herself.

diegetic, we can also note that the actions of singing a melody in one tonality and self-accompaniment in another embody a kind of loneliness and disagreement, which we might read as Alexandra's outward portrayal of internal conflict or uncertainty that she wants to address. Monk's stage direction situates Alexandra alone in her room,[88] while her parents are in their living room across the stage. The disconnection between Alexandra and her parents then suggests that Alexandra's music is only heard by her. Visually, the lighting and direction further shows the dichotomy between Alexandra and her parents. The lighting is such that the two sides of the stage are bright, while the middle of the stage is in dark shadow, as if the characters in each of the two lighted sides are in private and unrelated vignettes (Figure 2).

The tonal and dramatic uncertainty continues in measures 13-21 with the initial hearing of the Spirit Music, the theme associated with Alexandra's Spirit Guides who assist her journey throughout the opera. During these measures no vocalization occurs. Instead, cello, bass, and keyboard play a theme that is rhythmically identical to Alexandra's guitar accompaniment from the previous eight measures. And, as before, we find a bitonal gesture: the right hand of the keyboard tonicizes A♭ major (whose relative minor key is the parallel minor to Alexandra's key) and moves in parallel fifths, while the bass, cello, and left hand of the keyboard tonicize F major and move in parallel octaves. As we do not see the Spirit Guides upon the initial hearing of their music, and because

[88] In Monk's 1991 staging at Houston Grand Opera, the proscenium stage allowed for Alexandra's room to be set far on stage left, while her parents occupy far stage right. Because Walt Disney Concert Hall lacks a traditional "stage," for the 2019 staging Yuval Sharon suggested Alexandra's solitude and her parents' lack of involvement at the beginning of "Future Quest" by wedging barriers in between the characters. Alexandra's mother and father are seated on chairs, engrossed in knitting and newspaper-reading, respectively, with their backs to Alexandra.

neither Alexandra nor her parents recognize music during these moments of the scene, music has changed from being diegetic to being nondiegetic, which could suggest distance between Alexandra and her Spirit Guides.

However, Alexandra's music is ensconced into the Spirit Music in three compelling ways. First, by tonally connecting the F major of the Spirit Music to that of Alexandra's Daydream Music, Monk suggests that the Spirit Guides are connected to Alexandra as soon as we meet them. A further musical link is found in the motivic contour of the Spirit Music and Alexandra's own previous guitar accompaniment. The left hand/bass/cello octaves of the Spirit Music ascend stepwise from F to G to A, while we find the inverse of that motion in the chords of the guitar from mm. 5-12, which move from D down to C, then to B♭. The inversion of the music that represented Alexandra's conflict is resolved in the inversion of that gesture, which then makes up the Spirit Music connected with Alexandra. Additionally, the stepwise gesture F, G, A of the Spirit Music is composed out in accented pitch content of Alexandra's Daydream Music, further establishing the link between Alexandra and her Spirit Guides. With the octaves of the Spirit Music, Monk both establishes a threefold connection between Alexandra and her Spirit Guides and situates both the Spirit Guides and Alexandra in opposition to sonorities that do not share that connection.

The Spirit Music ends at measure 21, and Alexandra sings a slightly developed iteration of the Daydream Music. Alexandra has put down the guitar. While the accompaniment mirrors the chords of the initial hearing of the theme, they are now played on the keyboard with support from the cello. The removal of guitar pushes the music that served in an actively narrative capacity as a representation of Alexandra's

voiced expression to turn inward to a nondiegetic gesture. In measures 29-32, the Spirit Music returns as before, and takes one repeat. This time, the Spirit Guides are seen behind a scrim on a platform above the family vignettes. Alexandra acknowledges them. In measure 33, the clarinet superimposes a melodic line based on D Dorian over the continuing Spirit Music, adding a sonority that pulls the harmony back to a D minor area. The Spirit Guides gesture during this music, adding a kind of physicalized, visual melody to the musical accompaniment. They stand shoulder-to-shoulder and gesture with their outside arms in a slow, beckoning motion, as if they are two parts of one being calling Alexandra to join. The guides then lower their arms to a 45-degree angle and make an accented downward gesture, pointing their fingertips to the floor with palms to the audience. They repeat the gesture at a 90-degree angle and then at a 135-degree angle, where they then flick their wrists in an acute beckoning motion.

The accompaniment of the Daydream Music returns at measure 47 as the clarinet melody finishes and the lights go down on the Spirit Guides, but it is in a developed form. Rather than focusing on tonic chords, the chords fluctuate in a perpetual state of movement between G minor and A major, without cadencing on D minor. Similarly, when Alexandra resumes singing at the pickup to measure 49, her melody is developed. The phrasing for the theme that I call Daydream 2 is like that of Daydream Music, but the developed theme includes the additional syllables “loo” and “hoo” as an extension of “loo.” The arpeggiated melody of Daydream Music is now largely filled in with quick stepwise runs on octuplets or quintuplets; however, neither in Daydream Music nor in Daydream 2 does the melody contain a B or a B♭. Alexandra’s melodies consistently skip both of those pitches.

As she sings, Alexandra repeats a physicalized melodic gesture: she stands with her feet firmly planted in the middle of her room while her arms and upper body undulate and roll, but the gestures are not wild. She reaches each arm to the ceiling as if to grab something and then brings each arm to her chest as if to protect it. Like Alexandra's voiced melody and accompaniment, Alexandra's planted feet and gesticulating upper body conflict with one another but work to amplify that conflict. The physical and musical gestures of Daydream 2 retain an amount of control but lean toward breaking from the seemingly determined Daydream Music from the beginning of the scene. However, while Alexandra sings Daydream 2, her mother crosses to join her in the girl's bedroom. Alexandra's mother sings the original Daydream Music theme as if to establish it as an authority, rather than an idea that can grow. In doing so, she almost weaponizes Alexandra's music against her.

In measure 65, though, Alexandra's father introduces a new melodic figure, which I call the No Theme, on the syllable "lee." The music of the No Theme tonicizes D minor, the key representing opposition to Alexandra. The establishment of this melody recontextualizes her mother's vocalization of the Daydream Music to indicate a kind of empathy and understanding, as if she is familiar with Alexandra's sentiments. We can find a whiff of empathy in the No Theme, too, if we look at the syllable Monk chose for it. Even though the vowel sound of the No Theme's "lee" is opposed to Daydream 2's "loo" and Daydream Music's "la," the common consonant gives us a sense of unification across the themes. Because each theme operates in relation to Alexandra and her desire to leave home, we could read the unification as an empathetic gesture between the characters. A physical manifestation of empathy occurs between Alexandra and her

mother: when Alexandra's father sings the No Theme, Alexandra and her mother embrace.

Alexandra repeats Daydream 2 beginning in measure 73 as if to explain her wishes to her father, while her father continues to sing the No Theme to explain why her wishes are not valid. At measure 77, Alexandra's father ends his melody and from 77-80, Alexandra and her mother repeats Daydream 2 and Daydream Music, respectively, while her father crosses to join his family in Alexandra's room. All characters then sing their respective themes concurrently. Meanwhile, Alexandra's physical gesture intensifies as she stretches her arms in front of her, trying hard to grasp something she cannot quite reach. Her father pulls her hand into his, and the three of them walk in a circle, hands joined. Alexandra stops walking, crouches and, leading with her shoulder, jumps into the air to break free.

Alexandra's mother sings a new, but short, melody at measure 89. The phrase starkly emerges from the densely textured passage while Alexandra and her parents then stand still and simply stand facing downstage to turn focus to the new two-bar phrase. The first bar of the mother's solo, still accompanied by the G major seventh chord (now extended to a G 9^{th} chord, including A) and an A-minor seventh chord, is an F-major seventh chord arpeggiated in descending motion after an initial ascending leap. Instead of a leap to C, however, the F only leaps to B♭, as if the gesture cannot quite express what it is meant to express. The second bar of the phrase does initiate a leap to C in the first half of the measure, completing the full F-major arpeggiation, but returns to the F to B♭ gesture for the second half of the measure. The phrase is sung on two sustained syllables, "oo" and "loo," with heavy, but not mocking, vibrato. In the roundness of the syllables

combined with the descending motion of the melodic gesture, we hear something that almost sounds like weeping.

In the previous measures, Alexandra's mother has repeated music already stated by Alexandra, but this melody is new to us. The phrase firmly tonicizes F major rather than D minor. With the introduction of the mother's new motivic event, the tonality that has previously guided Alexandra transfers to another character. At measure 91, Alexandra's mother reiterates the Daydream music with slight ornamentation, tonally closing the phrase. Because of the strong F major tonicization, mm. 89-92 represents the moment that Alexandra's mother resolves to allow her child to leave home. However, Alexandra does not recognize this resolve, as during this brief moment, all characters stand still and flat-to-front, with Alexandra several feet downstage from her parents, her back to them.

Alexandra expresses her frustration in measures 93 to 97 with the introduction of a new theme that is fragmented both rhythmically and melodically. The melody includes large leaps and short rests splintered into the melodic figure, almost presenting a breathless quality. It also marks the first use in "Future Quest" of somewhat extended techniques.[89] Here, Alexandra's melodic line is written as if it is meant for an extra-body instrument, with large, angular leaps on quintuplets and a wide melodic tessitura, not unlike the zig-zagged vocal melody from *Cellular Songs* we saw in Example 3. While Alexandra sings this new melodic idea still tonicizing F major, the repeated A minor and

[89] Monk hints at extended technique in a previous scene and will use many throughout the opera. She seems to reserve extended techniques in *Atlas* for characters that are perceived as adventuresome or relating to adventure, which would suggest that based on the extended techniques in "Future Quest" we are to recognize Alexandra's father as not adventuresome and Alexandra's mother as having limited affinity for adventure.

G minor harmonies played by the orchestra point to C Mixolydian mode. During the previous hearing of the Spirit Music, the clarinet's D Dorian solo during the Spirit Guides' beckoning gestures equates modal music with the idea of a journey. In measure 94, the return of modal sonorization foreshadows the return of the Spirit Guides and their music and, because the Spirit Music is associated with modal harmony, suggests that Alexandra might soon get permission from her parents to leave their home and begin her expedition.

At measure 98, Alexandra's jilted melody ends, and her mother sings a variation of the Daydream 2 theme that also draws on instrumental writing as an extended vocal technique. In the first two-bar phrase of the variation, Monk writes a repeating F-G-F-C figure on duodecuplets in the first half of the bar that travels to A in the second half of the bar. Because the orchestral accompaniment at m. 98 is an A minor seventh chord, the tonic of the melody is hazy: even though it begins on F, we might analyze the Am7 pointing to a D minor tonic that could show the character reassessing her previous decision in mm. 89-92, or we might find that the melody, like Alexandra's *do*, tonicizes F major against another sonority in the orchestra. In measure 103, however, an E♭ major chord is introduced that shifts the orchestra into C Dorian mode, suggesting that Alexandra's mother is still in support of her journey and also offers a less ambiguous implication that the Spirit Guides will return. While her mother sings, Alexandra reaches her hands above her head for another unattainable thing, but her father pulls her arms down and draws her to him.

In a final expression of doubt, Alexandra's father sings a developed iteration of the No Theme at measure 106. On this hearing, his previous melodic material is inverted

to imply that his mind has almost changed. His gestures show that Alexandra has his sorrowful permission. He stretches his arm out in front of him, palm down, at about chest height, and traces large, clockwise circles, as if imagining an expanse of land. Alexandra skips backward into a front *passé*, then leans her upper body far back, with her arms stretched upward. She then skips forward in between her parents to gesture to the ceiling, as if to show them how much moving around she wants to do.

Beginning at measure 114, Alexandra restates Daydream 2 music downstage from her parents as the E♭s in the orchestra give way to E♮s, returning the accompaniment to C Mixolydian mode. In measure 118, Alexandra's parents sing an austere, unison gesture beginning on C that supports both the C Mixolydian accompaniment and also Alexandra's F major Daydream 2 music. Alexandra's mother and father step upstage and together to observe their daughter and support each other. By measure 121 when Alexandra finishes Daydream 2, her parents' continuing gesture decrescendos to the end of the scene at home. The Spirit Music and the Guides return once again to help Alexandra start her journey, resolving the C Mixolydian heard at the end of "Future Quest" with Alexandra's F major heard in the cellos and the piano's left hand of the Spirit Music, which returns to begin the immediately following scene.

Monk thinks of herself as a mosaicist,[90] fitting artistic media together (music, gesture, video, performance) to make complete pieces. The media that make up the works themselves function as self-contained mosaics. Monk uses parts of words to create a non-languaged, developing set of syllables rather than using recognizable language in text. As

[90] Meredith Monk, Yuval Sharon, and David Gere, "Pre-concert lecture" (Upbeat Live, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Los Angeles, CA, June 12, 2019).

Sally Banes points out, Monk repurposes gesture into new contexts that can illuminate developmental aspects of Monk's work. Monk's complex and experimental aural techniques, sometimes disguised as simple, are made up of layers of traditional and non-traditional musical elements that provide insight to character motivations. When each aspect of her compositional language is examined in isolation, as per the perspective most scholars have taken on her work, Monk's art can only be assessed in a limited way as an innovative and evocative aesthetic endeavor. As the close reading has highlighted, considering the fullness of Monk's compositional language collectively, however, shows the richness of narrativity and depth of detail in works like *Atlas*.

CHAPTER THREE

AN EVOLUTION OF GENDER EXPRESSION

Meredith Monk thinks about her own body of work and compositional process as a response to the historical separation of artistic and creative outlets in the Western European tradition. On this topic in an interview, she says:

> I think the Western European tradition has separated one function from the other. Now, these are singers over here, these are dancers over here, and these are instrumentalists over here, and these are actors over here. And it has the philosophical basis that the universe is finite and we have to connect to a system that is also fixed, like a geometric system, and we fit our bodies and voices into that system. For example, with singing, I always think why is everybody, on some level, supposed to sound alike?

Monk goes on to problematize dualism and conflict between voice and body, humanity and nature, and listening to and experiencing music.[91] She finds that delineations promote a sense of blockage of experience. In response, Monk's work unifies compartmentalized creative facets in opposition to what she sees as a system designed to separate them.

In 2001, Monk defined a tenet of her compositional language, extended techniques, as "[a] vocal approach which pushes through the parameters of the way people think about the human voice, dealing with all possibilities in terms of gender, age, character, persona, [timbre], texture, breath, landscape."[92] Monk's explanation of the

[91] Jennifer Kelly, *In Her Own Words*, 179-180.
[92] Nancy Putnam Smithner, "Meredith Monk: Four Decades by Design and by Invention," *TDR* 49, no. 2 (Summer, 2005), 97.

extended techniques that she developed suggests her belief that a wide scope of musical and social identities is possible. In interviews when Monk is asked about gender-related issues, typically the question asked is meant to elicit a response about being a woman in classical music. While Monk does not discuss the concept of gender in her work extensively, it does seem to be one of the factors that informs her holistic process. However, I find these two Monk quotes to be related as both exhibit her discomfort with a binary system. Monk's music represents a relaxation of traditional musical systems that are meant to encompass more than the cultural norms and might illuminate how she conceptualizes gender. We can find evidence of her values about gender in casting decisions, which have historically shown an evolution from a focus on binary-exclusive to more gender -inclusive casting.

In forming her vocal ensemble, which Ryan Ebright has traced from its early iterations established in 1968 as the House, a collective of artists and group for business operations led by Monk,[93] she opted to invite performers spanning an inclusive range of representations. Nancy Putnam Smithner notes that "[f]or The House, Monk chose people of all shapes, sizes, genders, races, and ethnicities."[94] However, Ebright notes that Monk's 1979 work, *Dolmen Music*, was her first to include male voices, and he suggests that gender was more significant in *Dolmen Music* than vocal timbre because masculine presentation functioned as a dramatic device.[95] In recent iterations of her work, though,

[93] Ryan Ebright, "Assembling Meredith Monk and Vocal Ensemble 1975-1991," *Contemporary Music Review*, forthcoming.
[94] Smithner, "Meredith Monk: Four Decades," 98.
[95] Ebright, "Assembling Meredith Monk."

Monk has actively allowed for non-cisgender voices and performers, [96] suggesting that vocal timbre rather than a binary gender normativity is prioritized.

In other words, we can view *Atlas* as a moment in the evolution of how Monk has treated gender in her work over the course of her career. By examining her work in light of theories on the recognition and presentation of gender through visual and aural cues, we can consider how Monk makes musical space for more than two genders. I use the work of three scholars who have written about theories of voice and gender, as a framework: Judith Butler's theory of recognizing gender, Nina Sun Eidsheim's theory of listening to timbre, and Adriana Cavarero's theories of voice (as distilled and applied to Monk's work by Ryan Dohoney). Each scholar's work is both revealing in their fundamental theories and objectives and problematic in their omission of the possibility of nonbinary gender identity. I use their theoretical frameworks to analyze *Atlas* as a work that shows the evolution of Monk's representation of gender, which begins with a focus on binary gender that progresses throughout her career to allow space for more gender identities.

Sexual Difference and *Dolmen Music*

Ryan Dohoney finds a connection between *Dolmen Music* and the concept of sexual difference. He notes that "Monk composed *Dolmen Music* for three female singers, three male singers, and cello," and suggests that in the piece, Monk begins the

[96] According to a casting notice from 2018 in *Backstage*, Monk encouraged non-cisgender people to audition for a new production of Quarry, set to open in the Spring of 2020. Due to the global effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the production has not yet opened. https://www.backstage.com/casting/casting-meredith-monks-quarry-258804/?role_id=816686&role_id=816688&role_id=816690&role_id=816691&role_id=816694&role_id=816696&role_id=816701&role_id=816699&role_id=816698&role_id=816697

piece with clear divisions for male and female spaces in both sound and physical position, highlighting the differences between the two groups through spatial positioning and musical gestures, but by the end of the piece the vocal gestures of the groups combine in harmony and homogenous rhythm.[97] Dohoney filters his argument through the lens of Adriana Cavarero's philosophy of voice, which she developed from her ideas about sexual difference. As Dohoney explains, Cavarero's concept of sexual difference is a response to the male-centered philosophical space in which patriarchal masculinity is represented as a non-gendered, universal construction that Cavarero looked to change. Her work is both philosophical and political, and centers on two main arguments. Cavarero casts (and essentializes) masculinity as a trait of maleness and femininity as a trait of femaleness, asserting the two are separate and distinct from one another.[98] Second, she seeks to empower women, not by advocating for the infiltration of the male-centered space but by creating a separate space in which women were allowed room for their own ideas.[99]

To Dohoney, the link between Cavarero's two theories is significant because, he suggests, Cavarero equates voice with selfhood and sexual difference appears as a "natural" facet of that selfhood that connects individuals with their community.[100] Cavarero believes that factors that might comprise one's identity (like sexuality, employment, or class) are not embodied by the individual, but rather, identifying factors that join individuals together. Voice is to be included as representative of an individual's

[97] Ryan Dohoney, "An Antidote to Metaphysics: Adriana Cavarero's Vocal Philosophy," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 15 (2011), 83.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid., 73.
[100] Ibid., 76.

right to take up space in the community, but Cavarero suggests the community is reimagined according to sexual difference. Dohoney argues that both Cavarero's idea of sexual difference and philosophy of voice can be read in Monk's *Dolmen Music*. He finds that Monk gives the men and the women each their own sonic community: the men sing with men and women sing with women. Within those communities, voices form what Dohoney calls a "relational space,"[101] which aligns with Cavarero's notion of individual spaces for men and women to communicate and be heard. In *Dolmen Music*, the separation of the gendered voices is an essential part of how we understand the piece. It seems, then, that Monk means for vocal timbre and the timbral contrast between male and female voices to be a part of the piece's foundational identity.

While Dohoney's reading of *Dolmen Music* does seem to intersect Cavarero's philosophy, both Dohoney and Cavarero understand timbre to be gendered. First, I suggest we reframe Dohoney's reading of Cavarero's argument from "sexual difference" to "gender difference" to include gender identities rather than assigned sex at birth. Then, using Dohoney's analysis of *Dolmen Music,* we can observe that Monk's treatment of gender in the piece differs from her treatment of gender in later works. In *Dolmen Music* Monk assumes that the audience will project the performers' gender onto their individual vocal timbres and then will read their visual gender presentations as confirmation of the projection. Because the piece is designed according to these assumptions, *Dolmen Music* represents the beginning of Monk's evolution in terms of her work interacting with multiple gender presentations. Because the piece was her first to include the vocal instruments of men, Monk seems to play with the timbral and visual differences of two

[101] Ibid., 84.

(and only two) genders while still maintaining wide tessituras typical of her compositional style.

In the video recording of the piece, featured in Peter Greenaway's documentary on Monk, *Dolmen Music* does begin, as Dohoney observes, with three male-presenting people and three female presenting people seated in chairs and grouped according to gender presentation.[102] All performers are dressed in the same uniform: a white collared shirt and black pants. The piece begins with one of the female performers, and in the recorded performance it is Monk herself, singing an ascending perfect fourth from A3 to D4. She repeats the figure several times, and after a few repetitions, the other female performers seem to complete Monk's rising melody and adds G4 and A4 in even succession. The melodic figure almost forms an arpeggiated D major chord in its second inversion, but the G4, rather than an F♯, pushes the pitch collection a semitone above the expected triad. The melody begins in an octave quite low in the tessitura for a female singer; we might read this as the women creating a musical community in which many octaves can be heard, even those associated with male voices. The women turn to each other as if in conversation, seemingly closing off the men from their sung space.

The men then sing, in unison, a melody using D, D♯, A♯, and G♯, pitches just a semitone above the women's melody, before breaking into spoken, but non-languaged, conversation. Each group's melodies are then layered.[103] Out of the layer comes a new texture: one of the women sustains the G♯ of her melody on rapid, non-languaged syllables like the ones in the men's melodic figure, almost angrily. As she sings with

[102] Peter Greenaway, *Meredith Monk*, 1983.
[103] In the performance footage in Greenaway's documentary, the women modulate their melody up a semitone to meet the men's melody. It is unclear if this is intentional or just a product of an intonation issue.

more intensity and with faster syllables, as if shouting over a loud group, the other singers fall silent. The exchange of quickly phonated non-languaged syllables from the men's music to the women's music parallels Cavarero's idea of separate community spaces for men and women but also highlights how this idea was built in response to the initial lack of an area for women to hold space through voice. The piece continues in a similar way but with new musical material; with each new melodic idea, each gendered sonic space asserts its wholeness and autonomy, and then layers onto the other. *Dolmen Music* ends with all performers singing the same short melody in unison, but in stratified octaves, continuing to show gender difference.

Recognition and the Heterosexual Matrix

In her philosophies of gender, Judith Butler discusses the notion of social viability through recognition.[104] That is, the legitimacy of oneself as a socially intelligible individual is contingent on a process of understanding norms. To Butler, the act of identification is contingent on recognition, which she defines in accordance with the Hegelian tradition as a communicative process of understanding between one (the object) and the Other, and that in recognition, we "see the Other as separate, but as structured psychically in ways that are shared."[105] To be a legitimized individual, by which I believe Butler means a person who can find themselves situated within societal norms, one must be able to be recognized according to those norms. The process of recognition, then, is one that allows the individual to observe traits in itself and understand similarities to and differences from those traits in the Other. Once traits are found and understood in the

[104] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 2.
[105] Ibid., 131-132.

Other, the object can recognize similar or different traits in itself and find legitimate identity. To understand how gender fits into the concept of recognition in *Undoing Gender*, we must refer to Butler's previous work on ideas of normalization via the "Heterosexual Matrix" that she introduces in *Gender Trouble* as framework.

Butler offers a system to help explain how norms of gender contribute to the realization of identity for people who fit into the norms. She calls it the "Heterosexual Matrix," defined as "the grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized."[106] On the Matrix are situated cultural and societal norms that attempt to stabilize characteristics of gender and sex as ontological and essential. However, the grid allows a space for the circular reasoning of these norms to be accepted as stable. As norms are plotted on the grid, they become efficacious and then used to define themselves in practice. Butler suggests that on the Heterosexual Matrix, masculinity is an expression of "male" and femininity is an expression of "female."[107] The Heterosexual Matrix represents the rules by which to govern norms of gender expression; conversely, without the need to establish and govern gender, the discursive rules are unnecessary. The reasoning of the grid is circular: on the Heterosexual Matrix, the norms around gender define the characteristics of identity by which identity is defined. For example, a person can be identified as female according to how well she fits into the femininity that is defined by expressing the qualities of a female person.

The Heterosexual Matrix, then, stabilizes and makes "known" what norms of gender are and how identities are defined using those norms. Butler is critical of the Heterosexual Matrix and works to deconstruct the idea with her theory of gender

[106] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 194.
[107] Ibid., 23.

performativity proposed in both *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*. To Butler, expression of gender is neither stable nor given, but is rather an act to be performed by each individual, whether in accordance with cultural norms or not. But before the process of recognition can facilitate formation of gender identity, the recognition must reference cultural and social norms. Recognition is thus based on norms situated on the Heterosexual Matrix. In her criticism, Butler writes:

> What this means for gender, then, is that it is important not only to understand how the terms of gender are instituted, naturalized, and established as presuppositional but to trace the moments where the binary system of gender is disputed and challenged, where the coherence of the categories are put into question, and where the very social life of gender turns out to be malleable and transformable.[108]

Because Butler argues for the instability of the societal and cultural norms that define gender identity, recognition of gendered characteristics is achieved on an individual level rather than a regulatory one. Therefore, the "rules" of gender are breakable because the Heterosexual Matrix cannot govern all expressions of gender, but only serves as a benchmark from which to measure some identities. We can find examples of the ways that Monk has measured gender identity on the Heterosexual Matrix, but as her work has evolved, we can also find examples of the departure from the Matrix in her work.

Listening to Timbre and "Knowing" Sound

Though Nina Sun Eidsheim does not discuss the concept of recognition established by Butler in *Undoing Gender*, I find that Butler's concept correlates to Eidsheim's theory of listening to timbre. In Butler's argument, the process of recognition as it relates to gender is rooted in realizing and converting information into identifying

[108] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 216.

factors. Similarly, Eidsheim posits that the assessment of vocal timbre comprises identifiers, but those that are assigned to the sound by the listener during the hearing process. In other words, the listener engages in the process of recognition when they hear qualities in a sound about which they then draw conclusions about identity based on vocal timbre. In her doctoral dissertation, Eidsheim briefly discusses Butler's first book, *Gender Trouble*, in which Butler provides a theory for the socially perpetuated performance of, rather than the essentialization of, binary gender.[109] Eidsheim suggests that frameworks like the one developed by Butler, wherein socially encoded identifying markers are used as part of the performance of gender, can support her theory that timbre is understood using social signifiers by the listener rather than the producer of sound.[110] To Eidsheim, the signifiers themselves are less important than the fact that socially constructed norms inform social perception, whether it be of gender or race. While in much of her work, Eidsheim focuses her arguments on the complexities of hearing race in vocal timbre, she does note that hearing other socially constructed identifiers is possible.[111]

From the perspective of recognizing qualities ascribed to race through auditory processing, Eidsheim posits that even though vocal timbre itself has no inherent meaning, values or beliefs about the identity of the vocalizer are deposited onto the sound. Two events occur that allow this recognition: the first is the assumption that we can "know" sound and the second is that the meaning we infer from that knowledge is a fundamental

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[109] Nina Sun Eidsheim, "Voice as a Technology of Selfhood: Towards an Analysis of Racialized Timbre and Vocal Performance" (PhD. diss., University of California, San Diego, 2008), 195-196.
[110] Ibid., 197.
[111] Nina Sun Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre and Vocality in African American Music* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 12.

truth.[112] The idea of "knowing" sound is complex, and the process of knowing sound is itself one of recognition. We, as listeners of sounds, can receive, process, and understand information embedded into the sound. We can then recognize sounds that are similar to and different from one another based on previously understood sonic information.[113] Eidsheim suggests that listeners of sound process ontological information about sound, like timbre, as knowledge of the sound. If we assume we know the sound, listeners then assume that meaning can be transported via that sound. Those assumptions are unchallenged, as they are processed as part of the ontological framework of the sound. Then, the listener loads meaning with identifying qualities onto the sound based on the sound's location in its societal context. The listener binds assumed knowledge about sound with assumed knowledge about identity. In other words, a listener assumes that identity they hear in timbre is the identity of the sound and draws conclusions about the identity of the source of the timbre based on qualities heard in the sound.

Eidsheim questions the accuracy of the assumption that we can both know sound and the encoded information about the sound. Instead, she suggests, that neither "knowing" sound nor knowing identifying information carried via sound are static, but are rather processed upon hearing by the listener, and that therefore, sound cannot be fully knowable as infallible information about the identity of its producer.[114] Eidsheim focuses much of her theory about timbre through the lens of African American music and performers, like Marian Anderson, Billie Holiday, and Jimmy Scott. To Eidsheim, timbre

[112] Nina Sun Eidsheim, "The Micropolitics of Listening to Vocal Timbre," *Postmodern Culture* 24, no. 3 (May 2014, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), http://doi.org/10.1353/pmc.2014.0014.
[113] Eidsheim names knowable sound the "Figure of Sound" or FoS.
[114] Eidsheim, "Micropolitics."

is racialized and understood as sonic qualities of race by the sound's listener, but the notion of gender as part of a socially understood identity can also be linked to recognition of timbral qualities that then serve to define gender itself.

Eidsheim discusses how gender and race interact with her theory. Still using race as a framework for discussion, Eidsheim discusses listening for gender in timbre, while using Jimmy Scott as a case study. To frame the discussion, she cites different sonic aspects of timbre that are coded in hearing as relating to the gender of the person making the sound. Those aural aspects are range of pitch, word choice, pitch and intonation contours, alteration in fundamental vocal pitch level, variables in dynamics, articulation, and either more or less breathiness.[115] Like the signaling during the process of recognition described by Butler, degrees of these aural qualities signal to the listener either more or less masculinity or femininity heard in vocal timbre. Eidsheim notes that listener observations about gender, like those about race, are based on perceived similarities and dissimilarities among sounds.[116] In hearing gender, the listener places vocal timbre on a spectrum measuring the similarities and differences in sounds associated with female people or male people by understanding aural qualities and cues. For example, a listener might hear a voice, recognize high pitch level, breathiness, and low dynamics, and perceive the source of the sound to be a woman because the listener heard gendered vocal qualities "known" about sound to be attributed to female voices. In understanding timbral cues associated with gender, the listener engages in the process of recognition, and applies the assessments about gender based on that recognition to

[115] Nina Sun Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound,* 106.
[116] Eidsheim, "Micropolitics."

assumptions made about the gender of the person making the sound. Therefore, the listener engenders each vocal timbre they recognize individually, on a micro-level.

However, the assumed identity of the sound (the sound as belonging to a gender or a person identifying with that gender) and the gender identity of the person making the sound with their voice might not always agree. If the person listening to a particular vocal timbre recognizes qualities in the timbre and then interprets those qualities according to beliefs that are ascribed to a certain gender (or race, or class), the listener genders the timbre, rather than the voice making the sound. But, timbral manipulation by a speaker or singer to present as one gender or another could add a layer to the process of gender recognition. A person might intentionally affect timbral qualities of their voice to perform a gender different from what is recognized, either visually or aurally, by those who receive that information. For example, to achieve a sound that would be perceived as closer to male, one might attempt to lower vocal pitch, round the vowels, and incorporate vocal fry into their voice. While the listener still perceives and ascribes a gender identity to the sound, by altering timbral qualities of voice to intentionally present as a different gender, the source of the sound, then, works to gender their own voice, assuming that the listener will recognize and infer the voice's gendered vocal qualities. Because the voice has the capacity to evoke as wide a spectrum of timbres as there are genders, the mediated timbre can then upset the recognition of gender through timbre.

Eidsheim posits that singer and recording artist Jimmy Scott's vocal timbre challenges listeners' recognition and understanding of aural gender and the timbral source's gender identity. According to Eidsheim, Scott's contemporaries (she cites singing styles of James Brown, Marvin Gaye, Smokey Robinson, Stevie Wonder, and

others) sung using a combination of unmediated singing and falsetto, in order to signal a marked timbral shift while still maintaining a sense of masculinity.[117] That is, while the falsetto singing technique in male-presenting voices shifts pitch-level into a much higher register, because the voices are known by the listener to possess timbral qualities attributed to male people, the vocal sounds are still heard as coming from a male person. Eidsheim terms the shift "timbral scare quotes."[118] Eidsheim suggests that, by contrast, because Scott's contralto singing voice is at an unmediated register higher (thus not requiring falsetto) than his contemporaries, his vocal timbre upset listeners' assumptions about his gender presentation.[119] Listeners to Jimmy Scott's voice recognized qualities in his timbre that placed it in a gendered sonic area, and then made assumptions based on that recognition about his gender presentation (and, according to Eidsheim, his sexuality as well).[120] Listeners effectively misgendered Scott because of the assumption that timbre is knowable, and information carried on the sound is stable.

Representation of Gender Identity in *Atlas*

Both Butler and Eidsheim focus on binary gender in their theories discussing the process of recognizing gender through cultural cues, but they problematize that binary within their theoretical frameworks.[121] However, I suggest that we can use Butler's and

[117] Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*, 107.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid., 110-111. We might also consider Tracy Chapman's timbre as another example of upsetting the heard gender.
[120] Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*, 112.
[121] Recent musicological scholarship discussing trans and non-binary gender identities continues to emerge. See Aiden Feltkamp, "Does Opera Need Gendered Voice Types?," *New Music Box*, January 7, 2019, https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/does-opera-need-gendered-voice-types/; Katherine Meizel, *Multivocality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

Eidsheim's frameworks to allow space for other genders via a reading of specific and multi-sensory examples in Meredith Monk's *Atlas*. Using these frameworks, I find that the cultural cues Monk uses to represent several characters' genders are a departure from the strictly binary representation in *Dolmen Music*. Broadly, gender representations also change as the opera progresses, beginning with visual and aural cues that adhere to gender norms and widening the scope of gender presentation and recognition throughout the narrative. The following analyses show a deliberate unfolding of space for nonbinary genders to exist in the world of *Atlas*.

In the opera, Monk's use of extended techniques, movement, and voice, along with other sonic and visual aspects challenge gender recognition and knowable sound. Recalling the close reading of "Part 1: Personal Climate: Future Quest" in Chapter Two as a reference, I find Eidsheim's and Butler's theories of gender recognition to be relevant and revealing frameworks for the aural and visual cues in the home scene between Alexandra and her parents. The Spirit Guides' appearance and first duet can also be read as the representation of characters who might not conform to a binary gender. Out of the Spirit Guides' music, the arrival of Alexandra's first timbrally extended technique in "Choosing Companions" can be understood to signify her realization of gender identities that exist outside the Heterosexual Matrix. Another example of binary gender nonconformity occurs in the scene "Lonely Spirit," during which Alexandra meets and connects with a "spirit from another realm."[122] In addition, Alexandra's vocal tessitura throughout the opera can serve to examine the relationship between voice and gender as well; as observed in the scenes "Explorers' Procession" and "Explorers' Junction."

[122] Monk, *Atlas*, "Scenario, Part II, 12 'Lonely Spirit.'"

In *Atlas*, Monk establishes two contrasting spaces of gender expression: one in which gender expression can be seen as fitting into Butler's Heterosexual Matrix, and one in which norms of gender expression do not adhere to social, cultural norms. Monk begins the opera in "Part 1: Personal Climate: Future Quest" by creating a gendered space similar to the one Dohoney reads in *Dolmen Music.* As discussed in Chapter Two, the scene portrays the discussion between Alexandra, her mother, and her father. Gender presentations of each member of the family are aurally and visually positioned on a binary scale; that is, Alexandra and her mother are read as female and her father is read as male. Casting and costuming contribute to this reading: young Alexandra, her mother, and her father each wear costumes that confirm the gender presentations of a young girl, a woman, and a man, respectively. It also seems that in both productions, gender identities of the performers confirm this reading as well. Additionally, the timbres of the performers' voices are meant to confirm our hearing of the binary gender presentations. For example, both the Mother and Father sing in ranges that do not necessitate timbral mediation, nor do their voice parts feature altered timbre using extended techniques. Likewise, Alexandra begins the opera at her parents' home, using limited timbral manipulation via extended techniques.

Also in "Part 1: Personal Climate: Future Quest," we are introduced to Alexandra's Spirit Guides. Throughout *Atlas*, the Guides exist outside of the gender binary that is established in the beginning of the scene through visual, aural, and dramatic presentations in several ways. We can read the Guides' costuming and styling, music and movement, and position in liminal dramatic space as designed to make the audience recognize that they operate outside the gender binary. In both the 1991 and 2019

productions of the opera, the Guides are styled in a way that does not cue a specific gender. Both productions dress the Guides mostly in black. In the 2019 production, their costumes are short-sleeved jumpsuits with wide legged pants, white *obi*-style belts, and black, flat shoes. Their hair is long, dark, and in a low ponytail. The costumes do not suggest a specific gender, but rather aspects of gender presentation that align with both femininity and masculinity are present.

Further, the bitonality of the Spirit Music observed in Chapter Two might signify gender ambiguity. Each tonality in the bitonal Spirit Music can be read as a representation of masculine and feminine. When Monk superimposes the two tonalities, she creates a new sonority that both encompasses previously understood tonality and can be heard outside of it. In this way, Monk challenges the listener by displacing sonic stability but also introduces the opportunity for new musical material to which the listener is unaccustomed. Because the Spirit Music is so connected to Alexandra in the beginning of the opera as discussed in Chapter Two, we might understand the two intertwined musical ideas to foreshadow Alexandra's separation from strictly binary gender.

When we first see the Guides, they are not making sounds themselves, but are signaled by the Spirit Guides music discussed in Chapter Two. Their synchronized and unison physical gestures do not imply a specific gender, like the contrasting movement of Alexandra's mother knitting and father reading the newspaper, and cannot be recognized as similar to or different from the gesture associated with masculinity nor femininity, suggesting that the gender of the Spirit Guides differs from both maleness and femaleness. In the first part of *Atlas*, the Spirit Guides vocalize in the ensemble during

the scene "Airport" as airline employees. Individual timbres of their voices contribute to the collective timbre of the ensemble but are not heard during the Airport scene. The first time we hear individual timbres from the Spirit Guides, they are not singing at all, but are rather dancing.

During the scene "Guides' Dance" in Part II, the Spirit Guides wear wooden *geta* sandals and engage in a tap-like dance during which accents of their foot patterns shift in and out of phase with each other. The score does not indicate specific tap dance steps to be used but does provide accented rhythmic figures for each Guide (Example 7). The Spirit Guides are meant to perform the rhythmic figures with their wooden-sandaled feet, creating percussive patterns on the floor. The first sounds we hear the Guides make, then, are non-vocal. Thus: the listener cannot associate the timbre of the sounds the Guides make with one or another gender. This removes encoding of gender to the Guides' timbres and, along with their non-gendered visual cues, eliminates the Spirit Guides from a recognizable, binary gender expression. However, because movement is an extension of music in Monk's work, the Guides still effectively retain voice.

Another example in *Atlas* that can be read as a challenge to recognition of gender is Part: II, Scene 12, "Lonely Spirit." The score indicates that the role should be filled by a "male soprano" who also doubles as an Ice Demon and other chorus roles, sung by Randall Wong in the 1991 production and Juecheng Chen in the 2019 production. Both versions of the Lonely Spirit are costumed in flowing robes and long hair that could trigger recognition of a feminine-presenting person. In the scene, Alexandra meets someone expressing their loneliness. The Lonely Spirit's vocal melody implies timbral

qualities associated with femininity, but the source of the sound might be recognized as a masculine-presenting person.

The Spirit sings a six-bar phrase in F minor with a pitch range of C5 to A♭4 that is repeated several times. Eidsheim provides a chart of typical female and male voice types (Figure 3). According to the chart, the first Lonely Spirit's range falls outside typical male vocal range but inside the female vocal range.[123] After several repeats, the Lonely Spirit's looped melodic figure shifts up an octave to the range of C6 to A♭5 (Example 8), surpassing what Eidsheim suggests as the typical range for a soprano. Neither Randall Wong nor Juecheng Chen used falsetto in their performances, both using an unmediated head voice, which, like Eidsheim's discussion of Jimmy Scott's timbre, challenges assumptions made about gender identity based on vocal timbre and its source.

As the opera progresses and Alexandra learns more, her timbral repertoire expands. The expansion can be read as her process of weakening adherence to a strict gender. The process begins with Alexandra leaving her parents' home in "Future Quest 2" and "Rite of Passage 1." Alexandra's childhood home can be read as a space where only binary gender exists, and as she leaves, we can understand that act as the possibility for genders other than those based on a binary to exist in Alexandra's new environment. The next time we see Alexandra, in "Choosing Companions," she has grown from a 13-year-old into an adult and plans to interview and select the travelers meant to accompany her on her journey. The scene begins with the Travel Music, a motif associated with Alexandra's journey that recurs throughout the opera, and while the single A minor

[123] Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*, 103.

sonority of the new theme is different from the tonalities of the Spirit Music, we can hear the Travel Music as an extension of the Spirit Music in the previous scene.

The F♮ and A♮ of the piano's left hand and string section and the A♮ and E♮ in the piano's right hand at the end of the Spirit Music provide harmonic material for the A Aeolian that begins the Travel Music. The rhythmic figure of the Travel Music also extends from the Spirit Music's similar rhythmic gesture (Example 9). The Travel Music almost completes the previous theme, but then continues to push forward as Alexandra begins singing the Hey Yo melody, another recurring theme in the opera. Because the Travel Music, which is so closely associated with Alexandra's spiritual journey that drives the opera's narrative, develops from the sonic representation of the gender-non-specific Spirit Guides, we can read the beginning of "Choosing Companions" as a step away from a world in which only binary gender can be found.

As she prepares to interview the first applicant from mm. 9-36, Alexandra introduces three melodic and gestural themes. In m. 43, the timbre of Alexandra's voice changes drastically as she sings her first extended technique very far outside the standards of traditional operatic singing.[124] On the syllable "Brih," Alexandra attacks the phonated consonant "B" below the written C6, rolls the "R" and performs a micro-glissando on the rolled "R" to the vowel, a forward "I" that gets tossed away. Then, Alexandra sings "ha haa," another new timbre with a forward and nasal vowel. In the score, Monk indicates that these pitches should incorporate an almost *Sprechstimme* timbral quality (Example 10). The phrase continues as Alexandra alternates rapidly between the two timbres and syllables on a rhythmic figure of eighth notes and rests

[124] I call the technique the High Chirp in the attached chart (Figure 1).

before beginning the next phrase. I read the introduction of the first timbrally extended technique in the opera positioned in close relationship with music marking change and progress as the beginning of Alexandra's journey and also the widening of potential gender identities.

Later in the opera, after the travelers have visited the agricultural community and an ice colony, they process to the next stop on their journey. The scene "Explorers' Procession" begins with the Travel Music. After one of the travelers sings a modified iteration of his "Hey Yo" theme, Alexandra sings a melody beginning in measure 7 that seems as though it was written for an instrument. The melody sounds like two different melodic ideas in two different vocal registers are superimposed onto each other, each part with its own syllables (Example 11). One part of the melody moves by step centering around C5 on the closed syllables "ee u hee" and alternates with the other part of the melody which leaps from D4 to G3, steps from D4 to C3, and leaps again from D4 to A3 on the warm and open syllables "aw haw." The result is an almost hocketed melodic figure but meant to be sung by one person. The registral shifts, contrasting melodic groupings, and syllabic inversion can signify an attempt to at once encompass aural cues from more than one gender simultaneously. During "Explorers' Procession," Alexandra only sings her self-hocket figure, which she repeats many times. At the end of the scene, Alexandra completes her melody and the self-hocket is immediately assumed by the Spirit Guides, but this time, the stratified melodic parts are broken up. One of the Guides sings the "ee u hee" gesture and the other sings the "aw haw" gesture, in a proper hocket (Example 12).

Meredith Monk has historically expressed interest in conceptualization of gender. In her first piece to include non-treble voices, *Dolmen Music*, Monk explored the differences between not only timbre and register but gendered voice in her separation of spaces for men's voices and women's voices. Throughout *Atlas*, we can see extended techniques that encompass a scope of timbre which can be read as a shift away from normative gender into a space constructed by Monk in which delineation of gender is intentionally blurred. Comparing this treatment of gender expression to the representation of binary gender we find in *Dolmen Music*; we can observe differences in Monk's approach to gender expression. This indicates that her ideas about representing gender in her works is evolving and that *Atlas* and *Dolmen Music* can mark phases in her conceptualization of gender in her music. If we view Monk's creation and use of extended techniques through the lens of the theories of gender and voice posited by Eidsheim and Butler, as well as Dohoney's distillation of Cavarero's philosophy, extended techniques remove the singing voices from timbral norms we might find situated on the Heterosexual Matrix.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored the music of Meredith Monk and how it interacts with the broader musical and social landscape of 20th and 21st century issues, supported by score analysis and close readings of some of her pieces. The analyses show not only that Monk achieves the goals she lists in her mission statement—including creating inclusive, multidimensional music and making art that crosses boundaries between disciplines—but also that her work lends itself to the exploration of expressions of gender previously unexplored in canonic opera. Because her work has been widely miscategorized as simple, a misconception that has both engendered and been perpetuated by the minimal analytical discussion of her work, the analyses in this thesis also show her work to be more complex and intricate than previously believed. Her 1991 opera *Atlas* has been the focus, but many of her other works engage with musical and social issues in similar ways.

Generally, scholars and music critics have associated Monk with minimalism and placed her music in the same orbit as that of Terry Riley and Philip Glass. Scholars cite repetition as a main stylistic justification for including her in the minimalist camp. While repetition is present in Monk's music, her approach to composition involves musical elements that do not align with the austere uses of musical material found in much music that is typically identified as minimalist. There are many facets to the musical material of

Monk's works, including the development and sophisticated use of extended vocal techniques, singing on non-languaged syllables, and physical gestures. Even so, her work is often characterized as simple. However, that categorization is a deceptive one that has been perpetuated in part because of her compositional style and practice includes limiting the creation, use, and availability of musical scores. Many of Monk's pieces must be transcribed before they can be analyzed, which often makes it difficult to determine a work's simplicity or complexity. Monk herself rejects the categorization of her music as minimalist.[125] Using the terms for defining minimalism with both formalistic and political aesthetic qualities, we find that even though her work reflects some formalistic and methodological approaches to minimalism, the variations in her music and compositional methods are salient enough to place her outside of the minimalist label.

A deeper look at Monk's music illuminates stylistic variation and the sophistication of her music. Monk's approach to style involves the layering and synthesis of music and movement that we can understand as her attempt to relax the boundaries between artistic disciplines, and this innovative approach has become a trademark of her style. Another trademark is her use of non-languaged syllables, rather than words belonging to a recognized language, as vocal material in her works. While the non-languaged syllables might at first sound like gibberish or glossolalia, in many of Monk's works, the syllables delineate narrative symbolism or character development. For example, in *Atlas*, the wider and more complex vocabularies of non-languaged syllables belong to characters who have undergone some spiritual transformation or maturation,

[125] As do other composers associated with minimalism, like Philip Glass and Steve Reich.

and while a more limited vocabulary of non-languaged syllables is associated with characters who have not.

Monk is credited as a pioneer of extended vocal techniques, and sometimes the techniques are discredited as "experimental" for the sake of experimentalism. However, like the non-languaged syllables, extended techniques in Monk's works serve dramatic action as well as character development. We can also find examples of the same extended technique used in different contexts and holding different symbolic meaning in more than one of Monk's works, like her use of the extended technique she calls the "goat trill." Its dramatic function in *Atlas* differs from its function in *The Education of the Girlchild*, or other works in which it might arise. In Monk's compositional language, physical gesture should be read as an extension of musical material. As well, the physical gestures behave similarly to non-languaged syllables and extended techniques in that each gesture might be unrecognizable to typical techniques or forms of dance, but it still serves to advance dramatic arc.

In the close reading of scenes in *Atlas* in Chapter Two, we can observe the intricacies of Monk's compositional language at work. The reading supports my claims that her work is miscategorized as minimalist and simple, as we can see the combination of physical gesture that drives narrative as well as sophisticated music associated with characters and their transformations as they progress throughout the opera. Monk uses a combination of some functional harmonic devices along with motivic recurrence and modal, bitonal, and atonal harmony that guide the listener through the drama. The close reading illuminates the richness in Monk's compositional language by analyzing her

musical material along with her development of non-languaged syllables and physical gesture in *Atlas*.

Through her work and interviews in which she discusses her work and compositional methods, Monk seems to exhibit a discomfort with dualistic ideas, including humanity vs. nature, voice vs. body, and aural vs. visual arts. Favoring a spectrum and integration between many of these facets, Monk prefers her works to encompass experiential fullness. In the same vein, I find a progressive approach to dualism in gender presentation and treatment in her works. Her works have been considered to follow a feminist philosophy, I find a connection between Monk's works and the feminist philosophies of Judith Butler, the critical musical-race theory of Nina Sun Eidsheim, and Adriana Cavarero's theories of gender and voice (as distilled by Ryan Dohoney). Using these theories, I find *Atlas* to be a representative of a different phase in Monk's treatment of gender.

If we compare Monk's presentations of gender in *Dolmen Music* with gender presentation in *Atlas*, we find contrasting ideas and a new phase in her work that shows an evolution from binary gender to a space that allows non-binary gender. Ryan Dohoney uses *Dolmen Music* as a representative work that, to him, exemplifies facets of Adriana Cavarero's philosophy of voice. In *Dolmen Music,* Dohoney finds spaces for men and women that are separate but function on equal levels, similar to spaces that Cavarero argues for in her work. Therefore, we can understand the performers' vocal timbres to be an essential part of how we experience the piece and part of that experience is that the listener genders the performers' vocal timbres and recognizes how they interact.

Judith Butler suggests a process of recognition based on gender presentation that we can apply to the understanding of gender in Monk's works. Butler names the framework for identifying gender norms the Heterosexual Matrix, and understands recognition as a process that uses the Heterosexual Matrix to both define and enforce how we recognize the norms. In *Dolmen Music*, then, Monk divides the performers according to the Heterosexual Matrix both in gender presentation and in timbre. However, in *Atlas*, we find a relaxation of the norms as defined by the Heterosexual Matrix in the gender presentation and timbres of the Spirit Guides and Alexandra.

In her theory, Nina Sun Eidsheim posits that the listener of vocal timbre, rather than the sound's producer, genders the voice that it hears. According to Eidsheim, listeners to vocal timbre use socially constructed aural cues to draw conclusions about gender based on sounds. I find a connection between Eidsheim's theory and Butler's theory of recognition, because both visual and timbral presentations of gender interact with the Heterosexual Matrix as a guiding framework. From visual and timbral cues, we can determine the similarities or deviations from the norms found in the Heterosexual Matrix. In *Atlas*, Monk challenges gender norms that are both aural and visual. The Spirit Guides challenge these norms with their visual presentation in costume and gesture and in their aural presentation through musical material. In the opera, Alexandra undergoes a spiritual transformation, but we can also observe a transformation in gender identity as the opera progresses. Alexandra's transformation is marked by the evolution of her extended techniques.

This project identifies and begins to fill long-standing gaps in the scholarship on Meredith Monk because it is the first of its kind to provide an extended and in-depth

analysis of any of Monk's works. Beyond that, this project contributes to the discussion of critical gender theory in musicology by examining how these theoretical concepts apply and manifest in Monk's work. Monk's treatment of gender is largely unexplored in the discussions of her work, and this project both examines her approach to gender in her works and historicizes her treatment of gender expression by showing that her approach has evolved across different phases of her compositional career.

There is more to be studied of Monk's work. For example, scholars might examine the sustainability of her work, given her idiosyncratic approaches to the creation and dissemination of scores, collaboration, and creating works that are specific to particular sites and performers. They also can explore how her work interacts with other art forms, including visual art, dance, and film. Additional studies could also look into her incorporation of elements from popular music or the traditional musics of "non-Western" cultures, and might compare how her treatments of non-Western music align her compositional contemporaries. In sum, the multifaceted nature of her works invites a breadth of study that can be continued long into the future.

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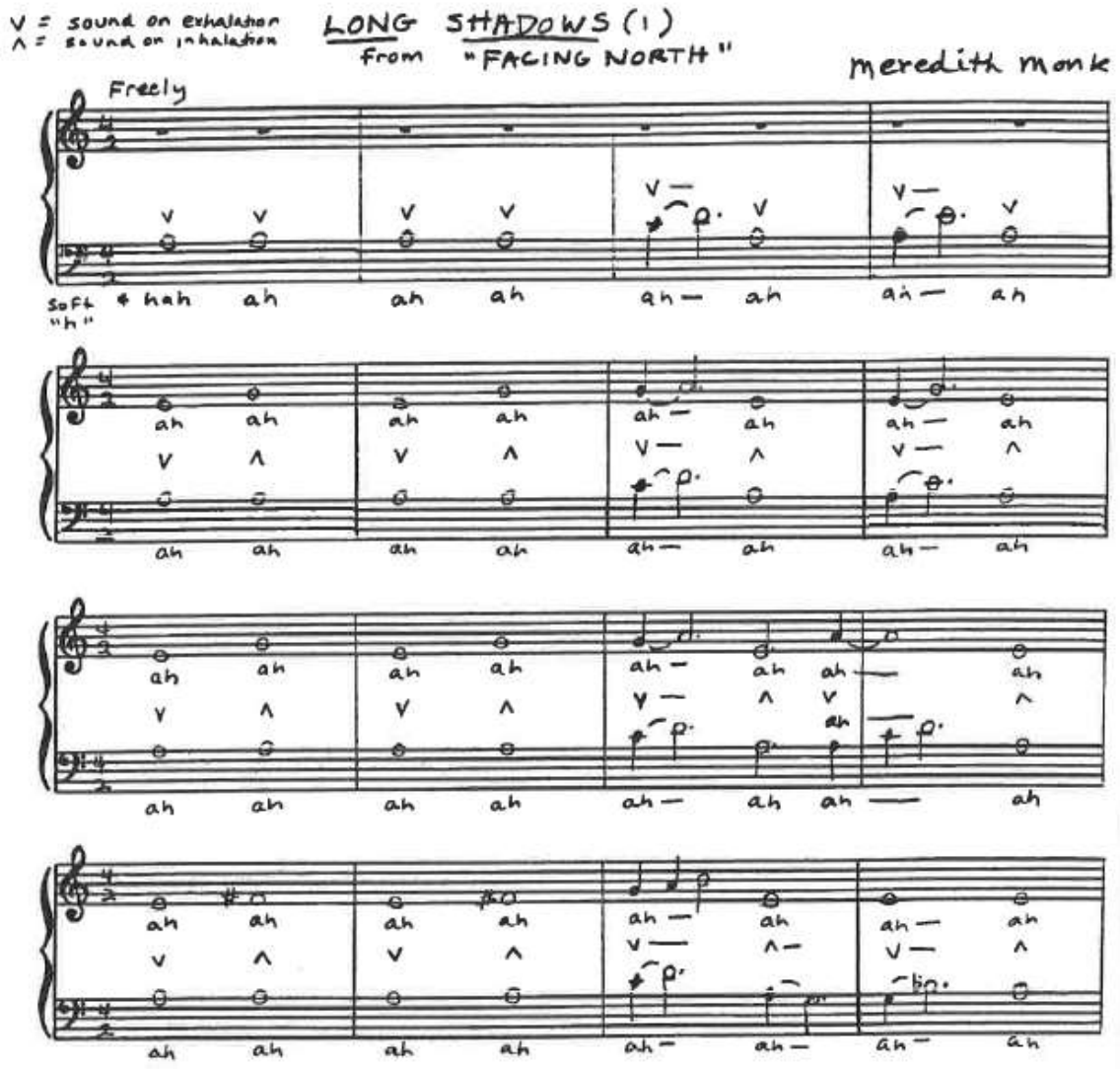
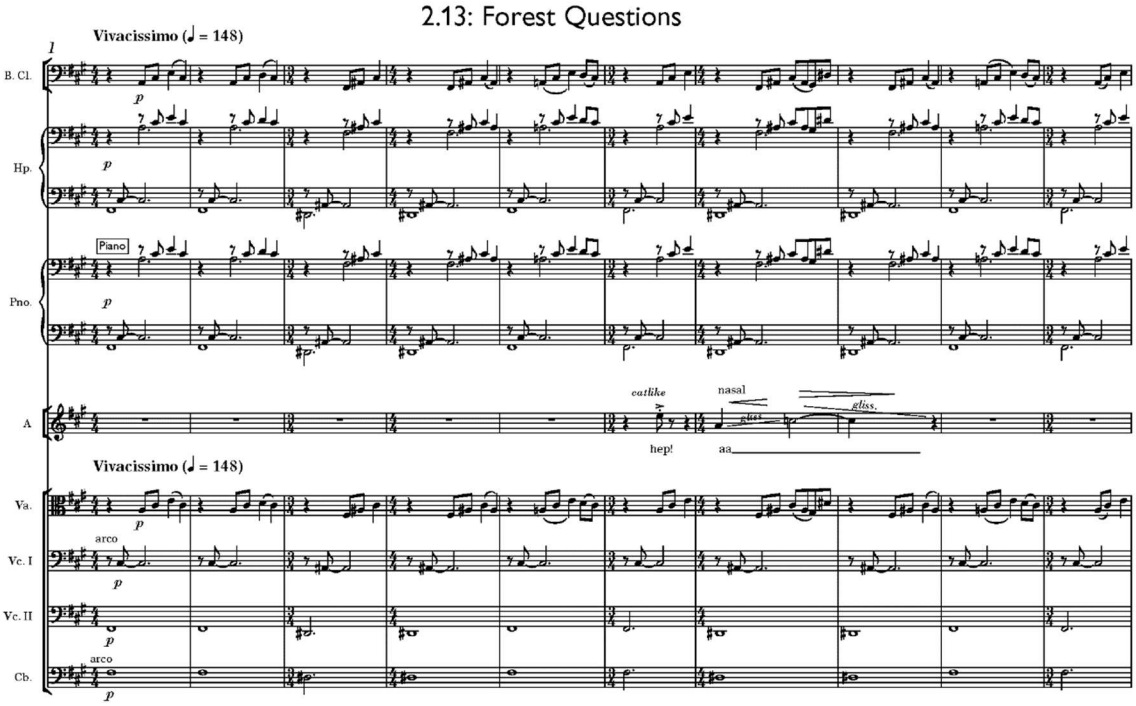
APPENDIX

MUSICAL EXAMPLES

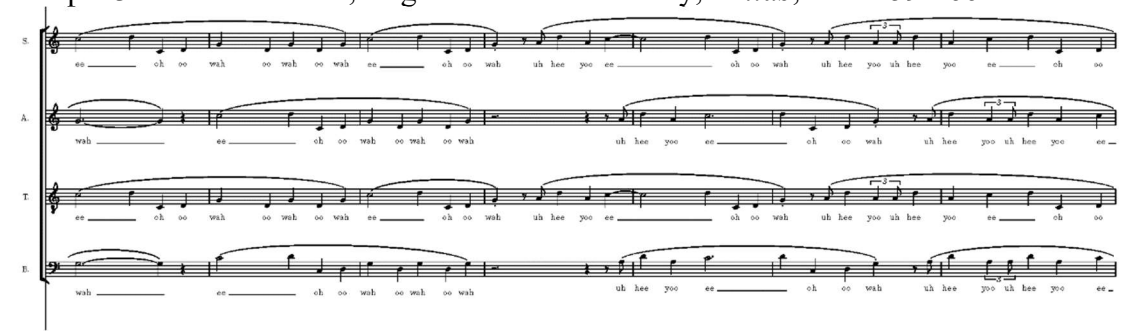
Example 1. Meredith Monk, “Long Shadows (1),” *Facing North*, 1990, mm. 1-16.



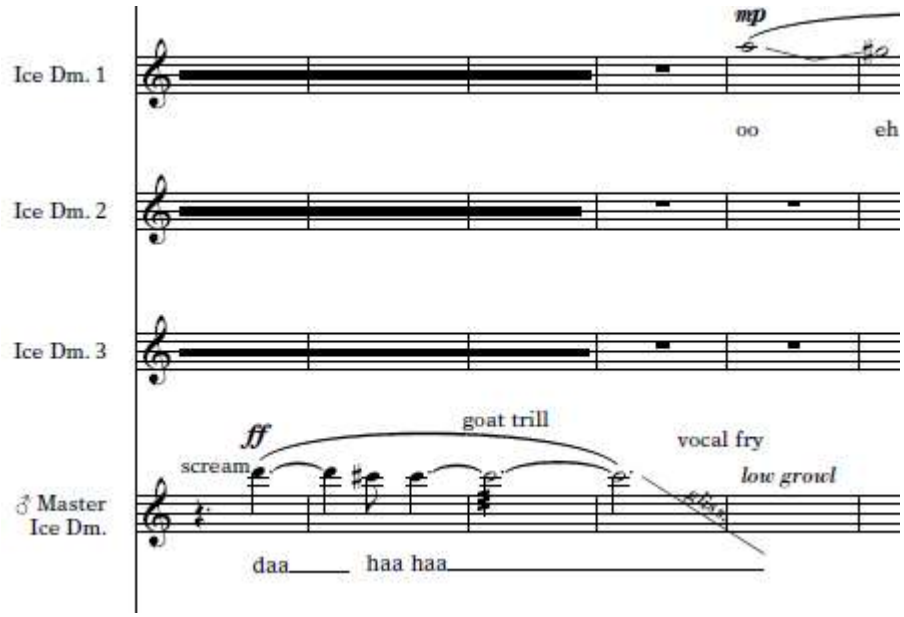
Example 2. Meredith Monk, “Forest Questions,” *Atlas*, (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 2019), mm. 1-10.



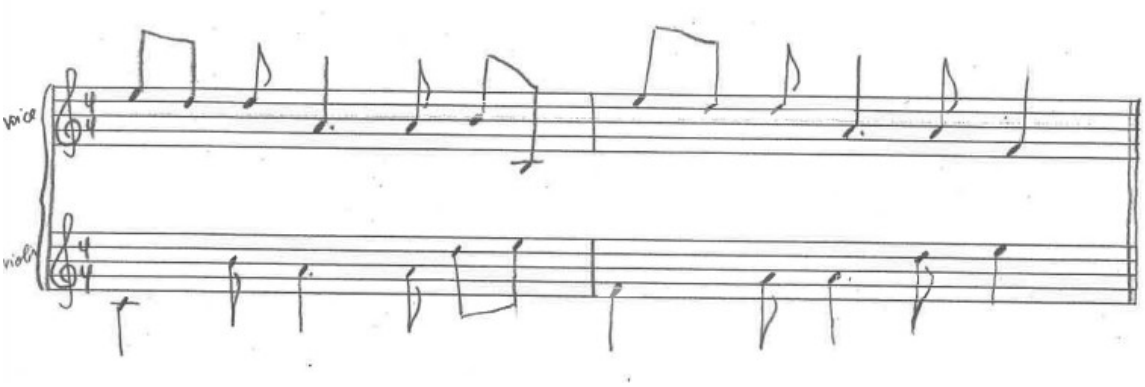
Example 3. Meredith Monk, “Agricultural Community,” *Atlas*, mm. 259-266.



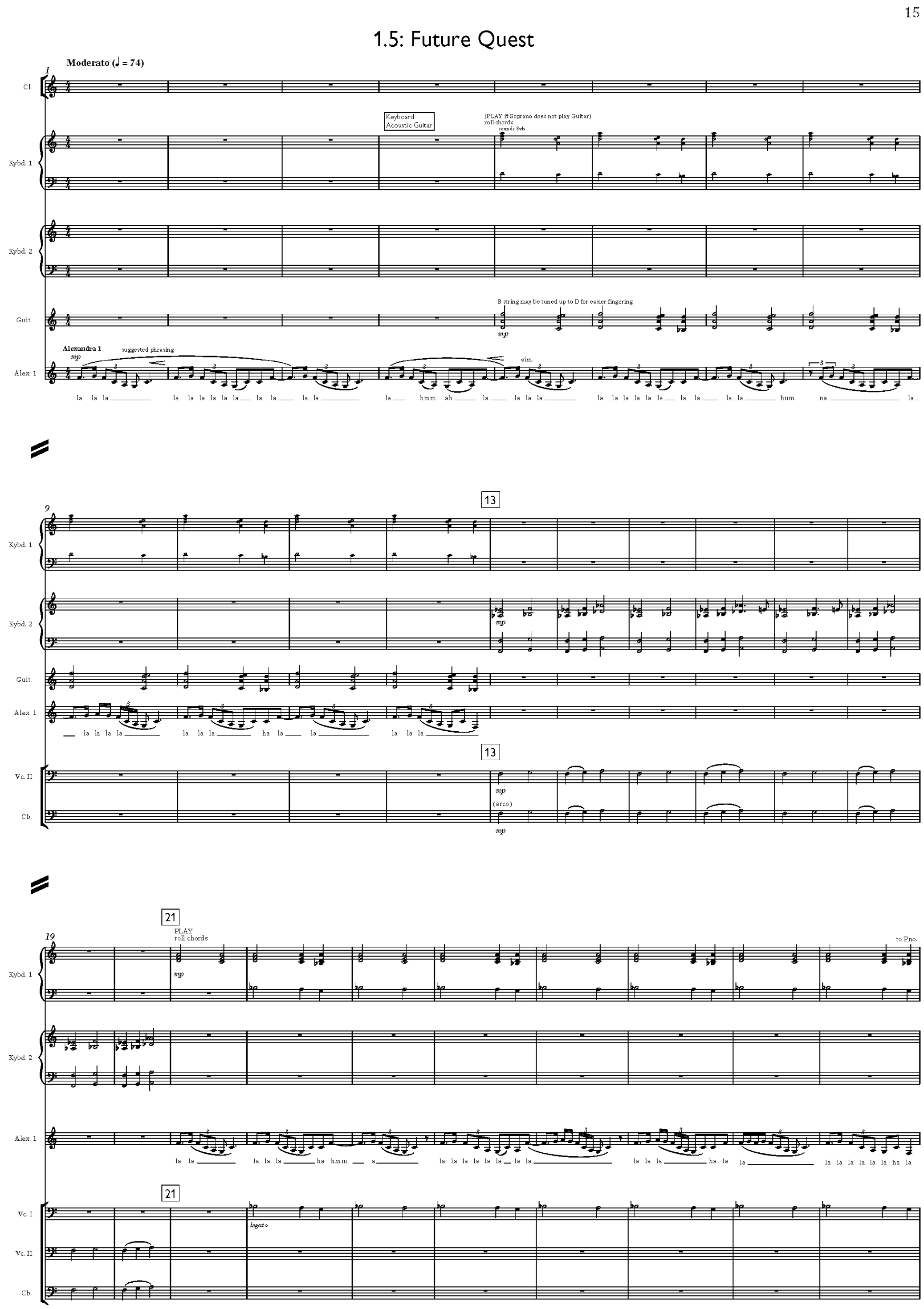
Example 4. Meredith Monk, “Ice Demons,” *Atlas*, mm. 103-107.



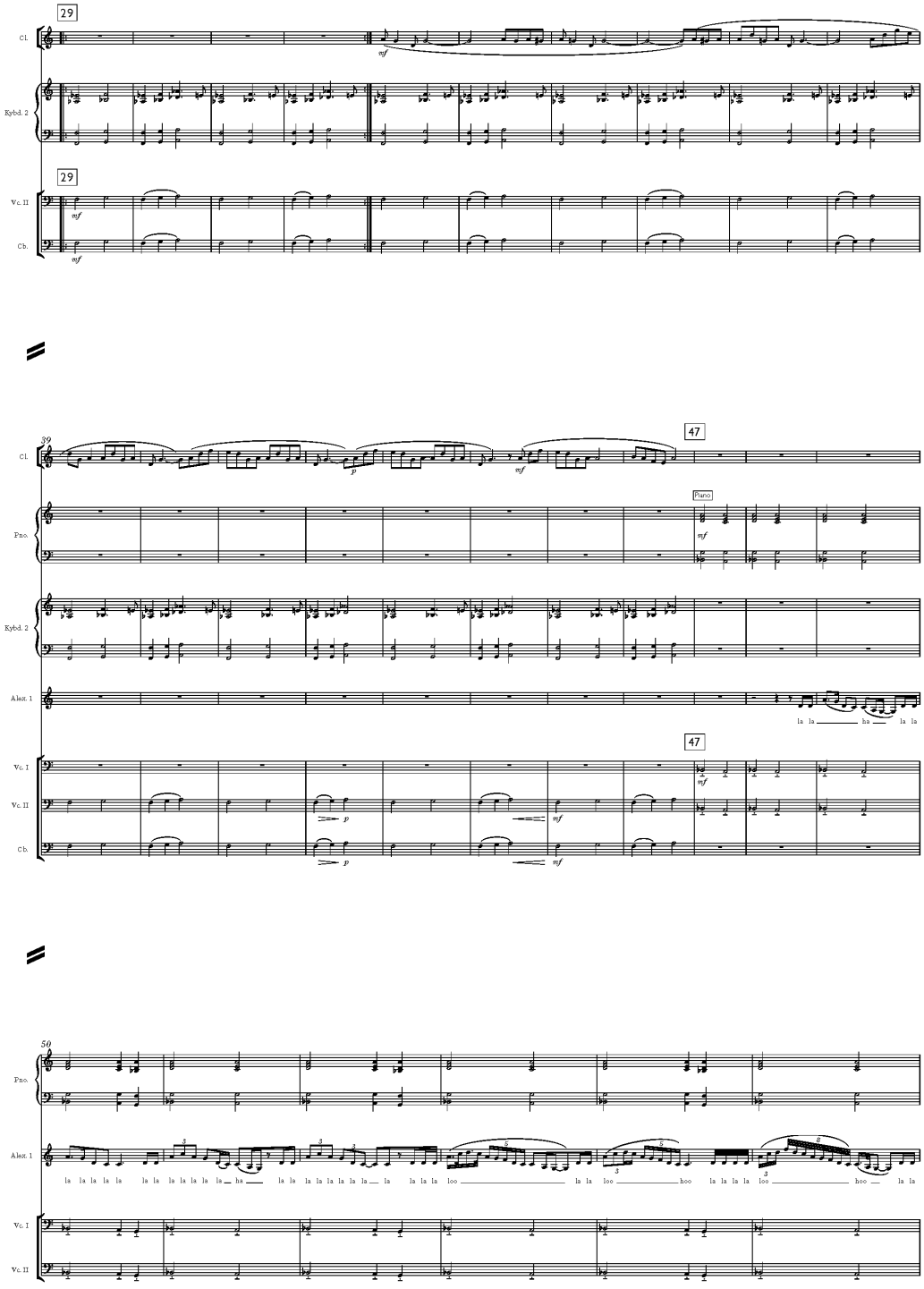
Example 5. Meredith Monk, “Happy Woman,” *Cellular Songs*, 2018, author’s transcription.

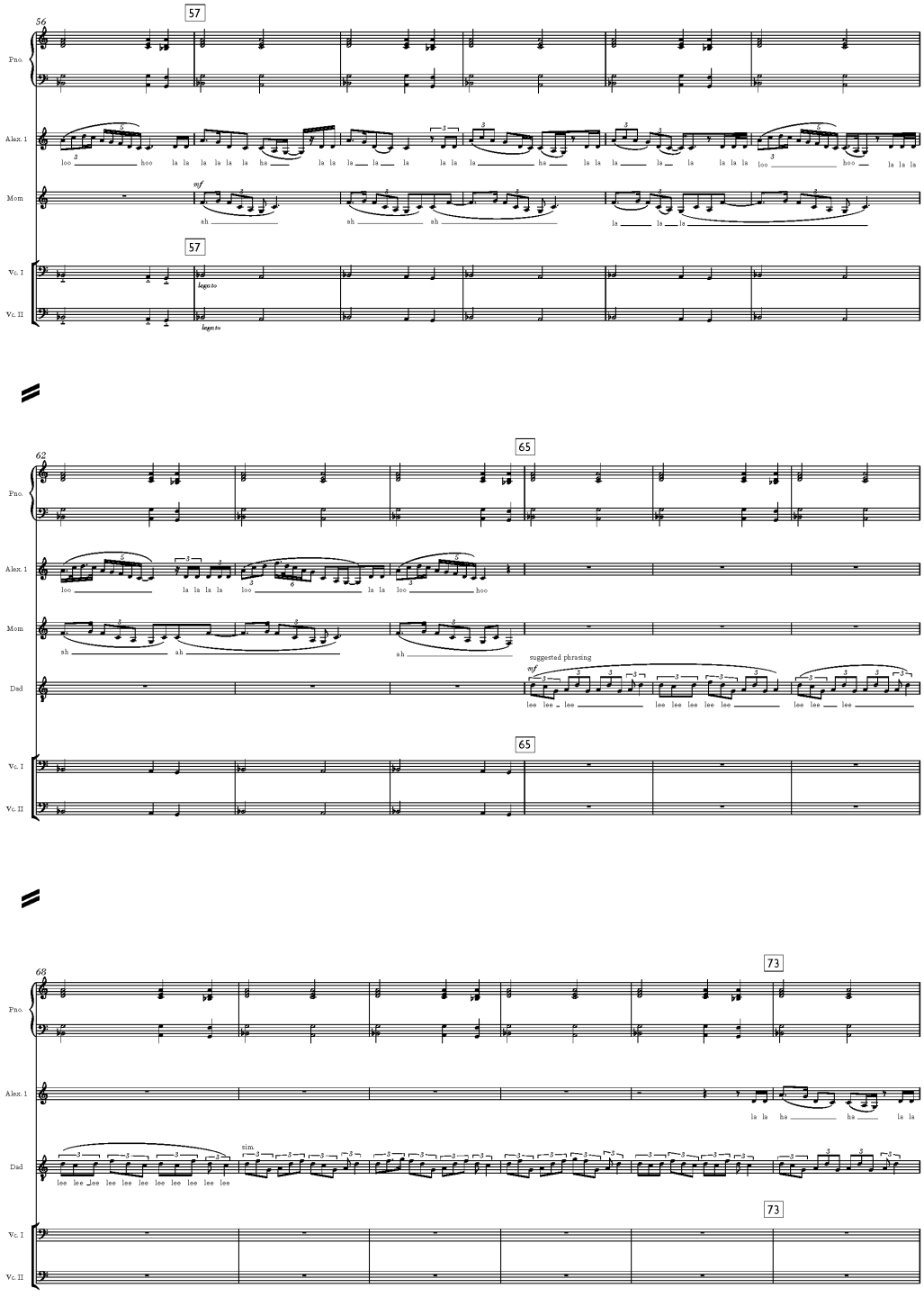


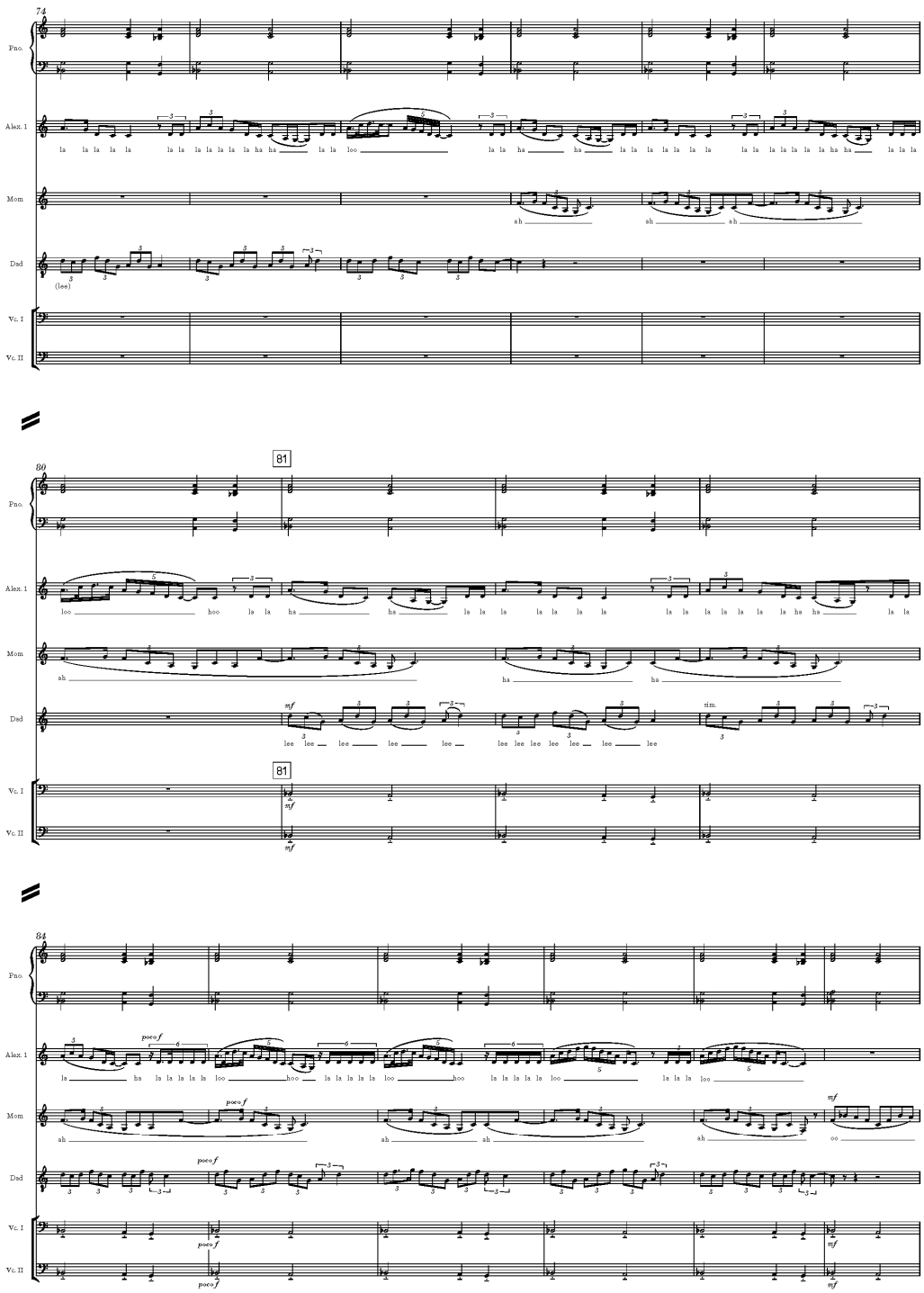
Example 6. Meredith Monk, "Future Quest," *Atlas*, mm. 1-125

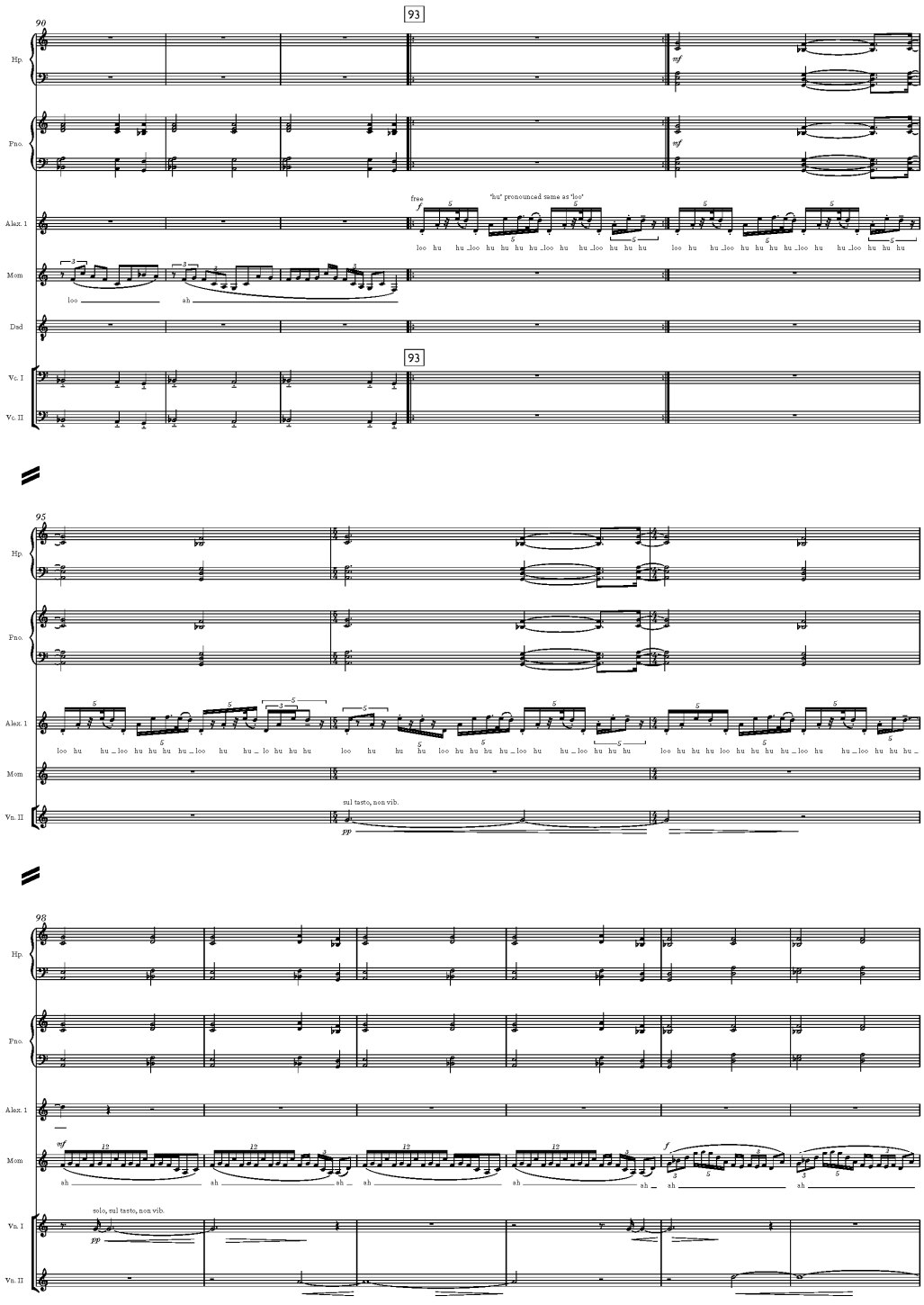


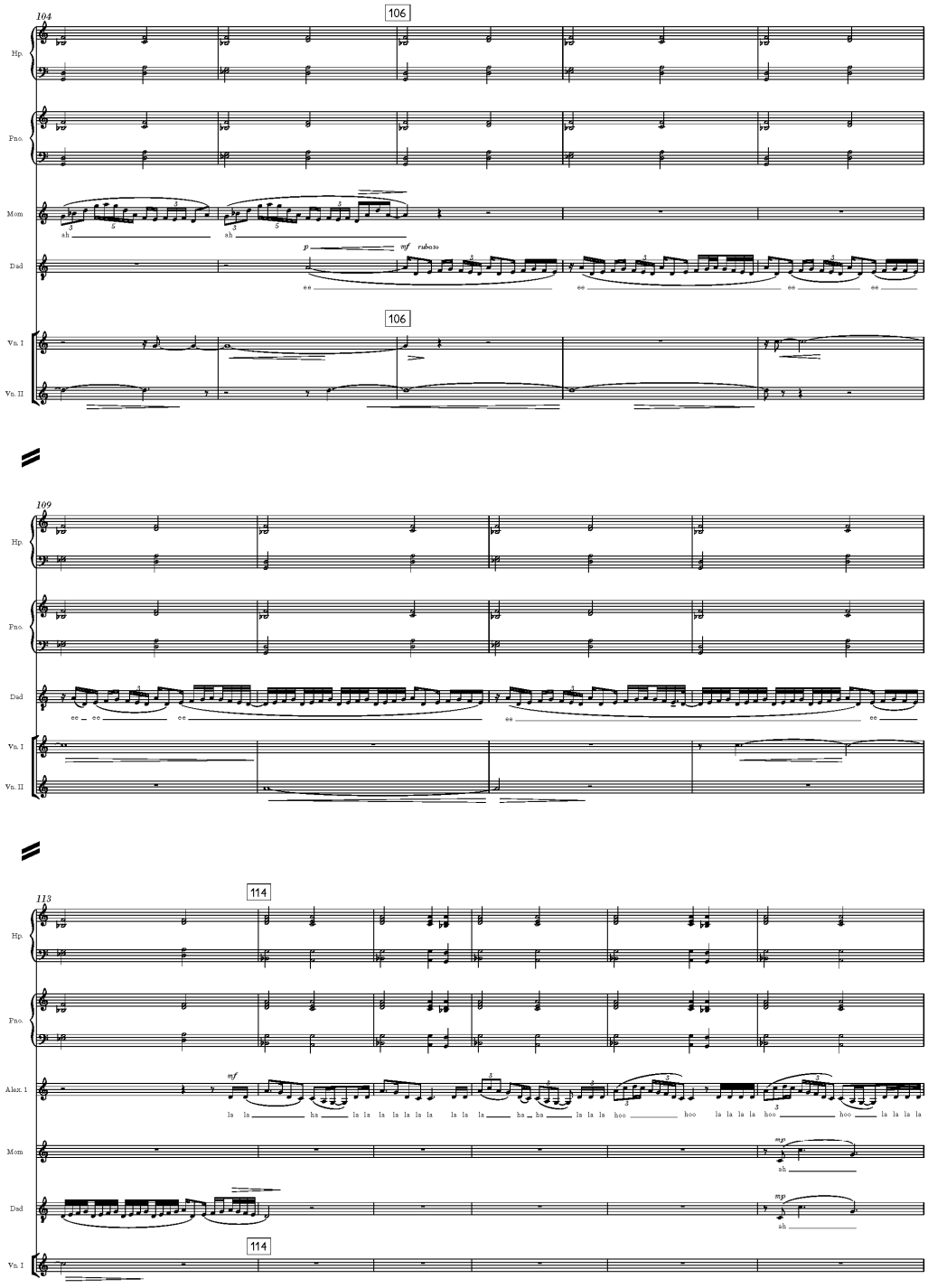
16

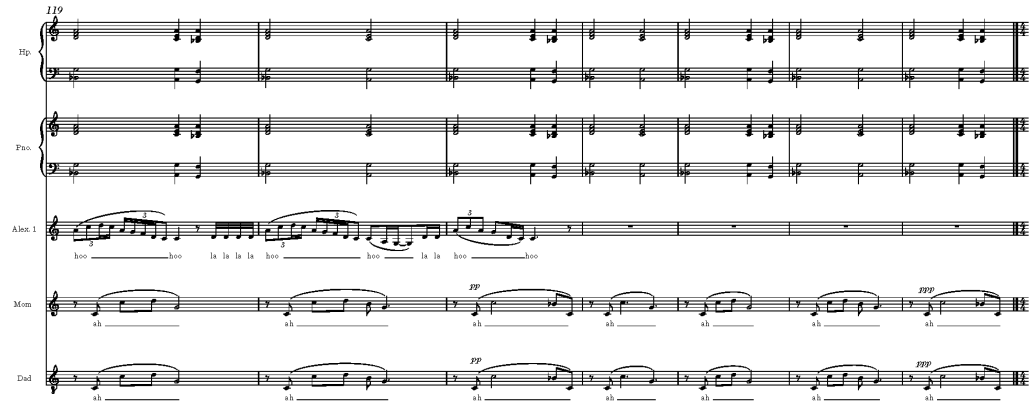

29
Cl.
mf
Kybd. 2
29
Vc. II
mf
Cb.
mf
39
Cl.
p
mf
47
Pno.
Puro
mf
Kybd. 2
Alex. 1
la la ha la la
47
Vc. I
mf
Vc. II
p
mf
Cb.
p
mf
50
Pno.
Alex. 1
la la la la la la la la la la ha la la la la la la la la la loo la la loo hoo la la la la loo hoo la la
Vc. I
Vc. II


56
57
Pno.
Alex. 1
loo hoo la la la la la ha la la la la la la la la ha la la la la la la loo hoo la la la
Mom
mf
sh sh sh la la la
57
Vc. I
Vc. II
legato
legato
62
65
Pno.
Alex. 1
loo la la la la loo la la loo hoo
Mom
sh sh sh
Dad
suggested phrasing
mf
lee lee lee lee lee lee lee lee lee lee lee lee
65
Vc. I
Vc. II
68
73
Pno.
Alex. 1
la la ha ha la la
Dad
sim.
lee lee lee lee lee lee lee lee lee lee lee
73
Vc. I
Vc. II

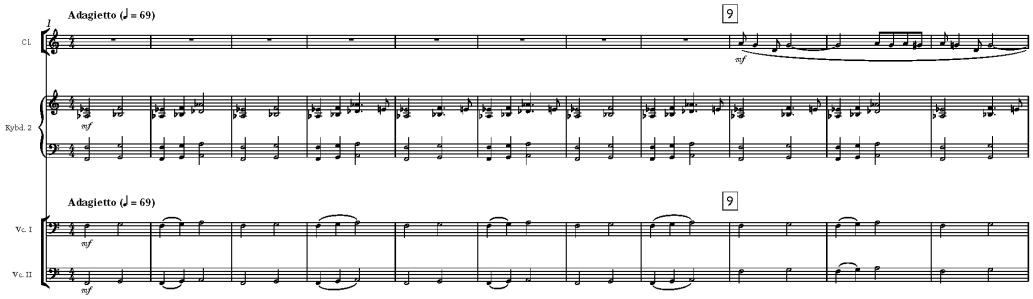

74
Pno.
Alex. 1
la la la la la la la la la la ha ha la la loo la la ha ha la la la la la la la la la la la la ha he la la la
Mom
sh sh sh
Dad
(lee)
Vc. I
Vc. II
80
81
Pno.
Alex. 1
loo hoo la la ha ha la la la la la la la la la la la la ha ha la la
Mom
ah ha ha
Dad
mf
lee lee lee lee lee lee lee lee lee lee lee lee lee lee
sim.
Vc. I
Vc. II
84
Pno.
Alex. 1
poco f
la ha la la la la loo hoo la la la la la loo loo la la la la la loo la la la loo
Mom
ah ah sh sh oo
Dad
Vc. I
Vc. II

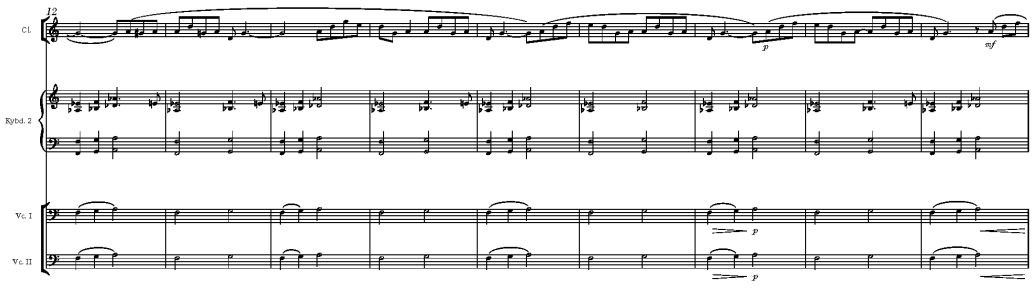

90
93
Hp.
Pno.
Alex. 1
Mom
Dad
Vc. I
Vc. II
mf
free
f
'hu' pronounced same as 'loo'
loo hu hu _loo hu hu hu hu _loo hu hu _loo hu hu hu
loo hu hu _loo hu hu hu hu _loo hu hu _loo hu hu hu
loo
ah
95
Vn. II
sul tasto, non vib.
pp
98
ah
Vn. I
solo, sul tasto, non vib.


104
106
Hp.
Pno.
Mom
Dad
Vn. I
Vn. II
ah
p
mf
ruboto
ee
106
109
Hp.
Pno.
Dad
Vn. I
Vn. II
ee
113
114
Hp.
Pno.
Alex. 1
Mom
Dad
Vn. I
mf
la la ha la la la la la la la la ha ha la la la hoo hoo hoo la la la la
mp
ah
114

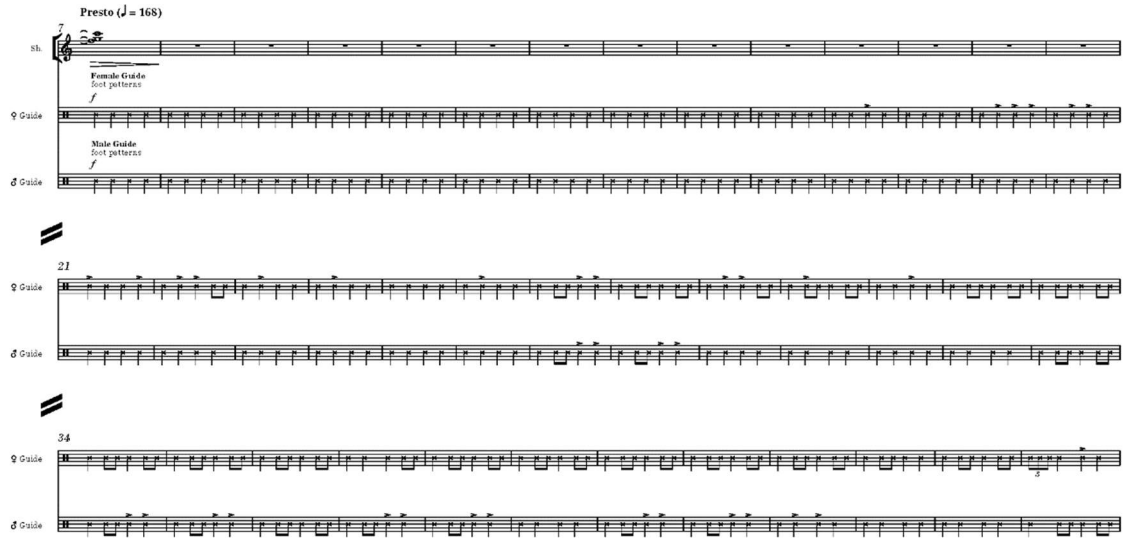


1.5a: Future Quest 2 (Film)

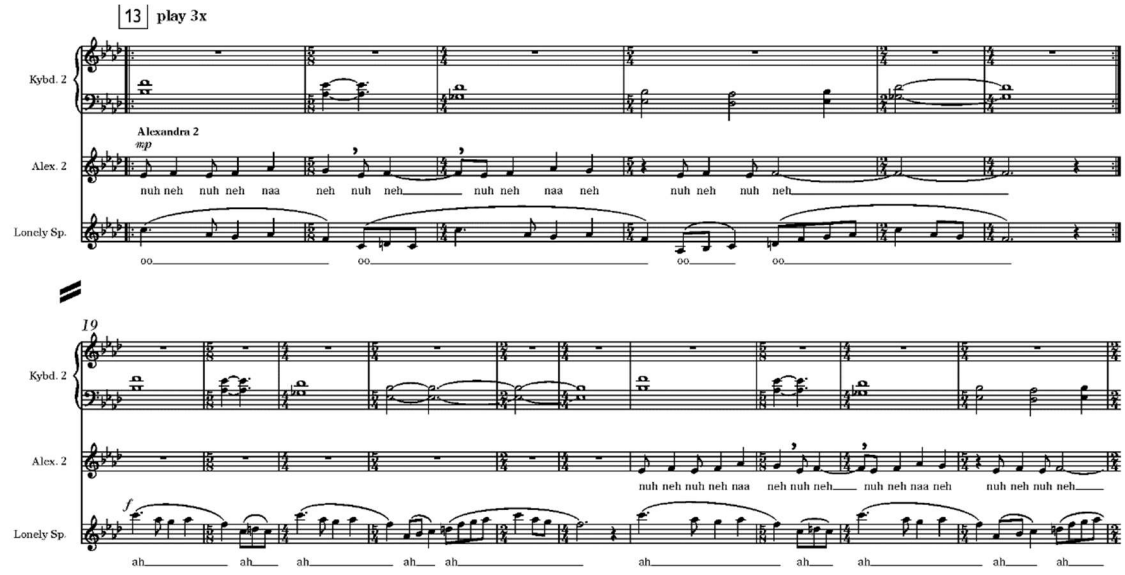




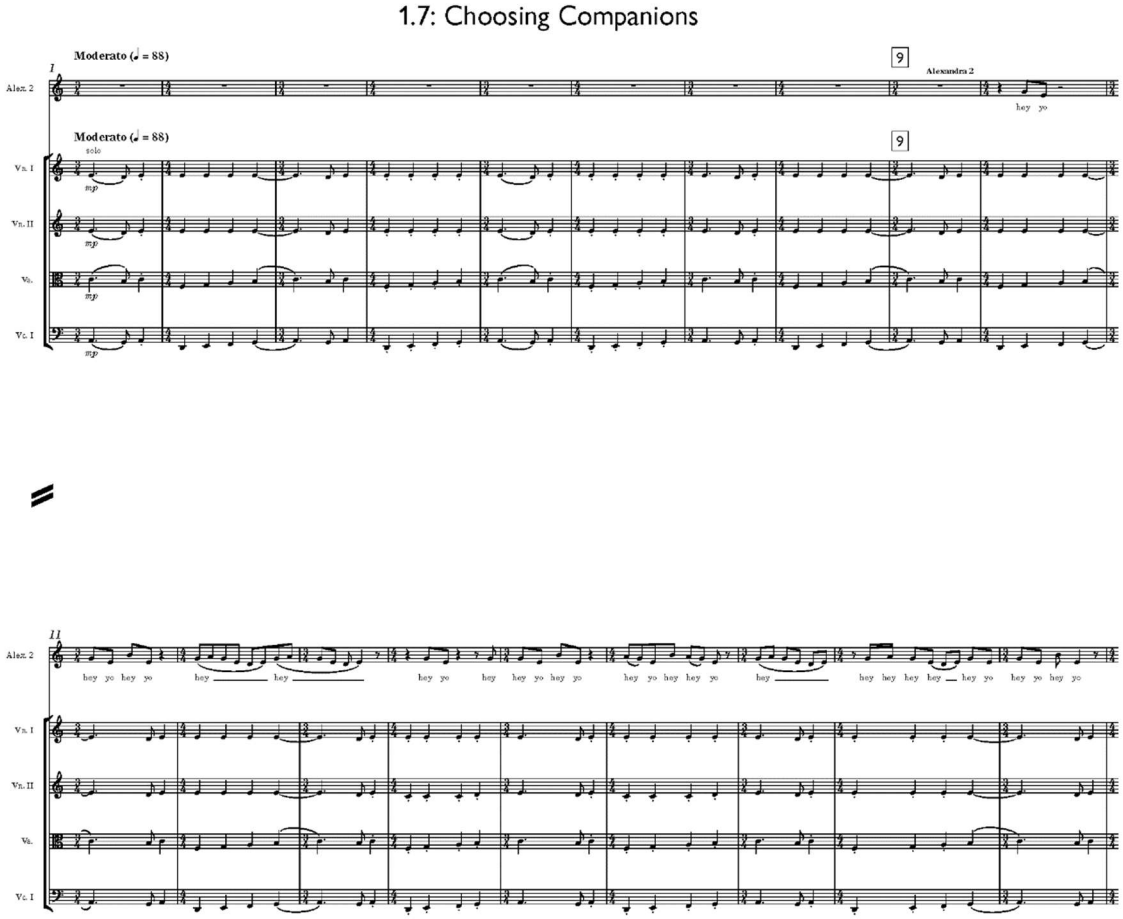
Example 7. Meredith Monk, “Guides’ Dance,” *Atlas* mm. 7-45.



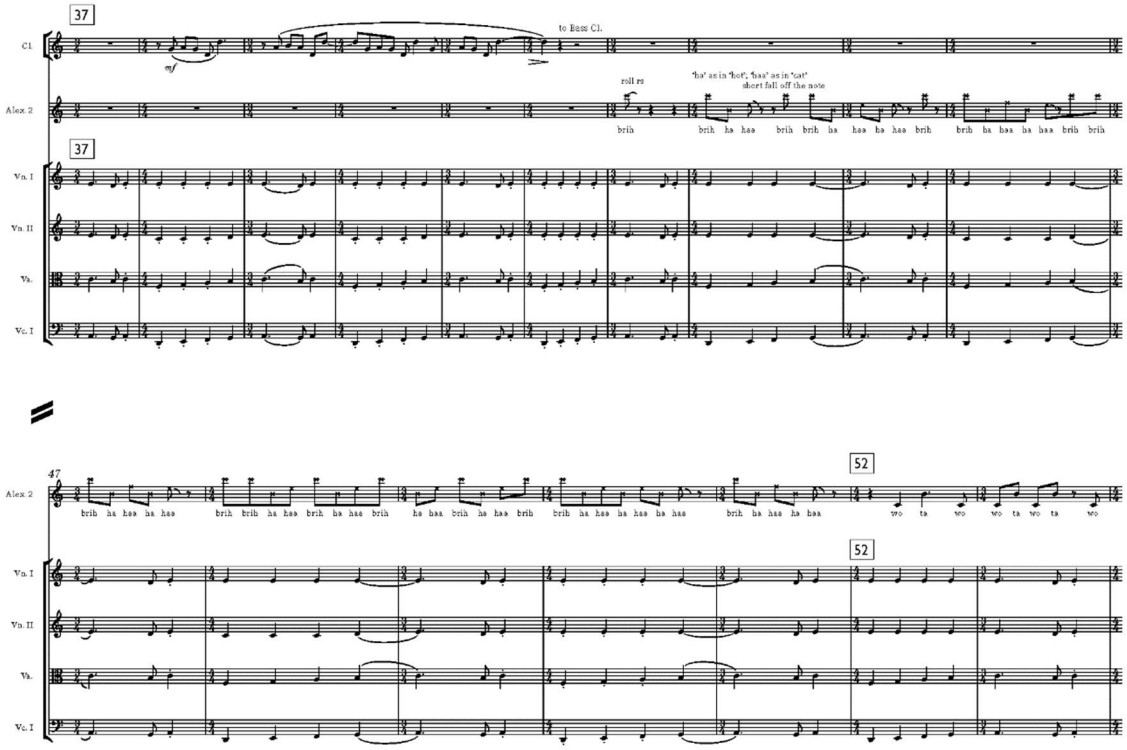
Example 8. Meredith Monk, “Lonely Spirit,” *Atlas*, mm. 13-28.



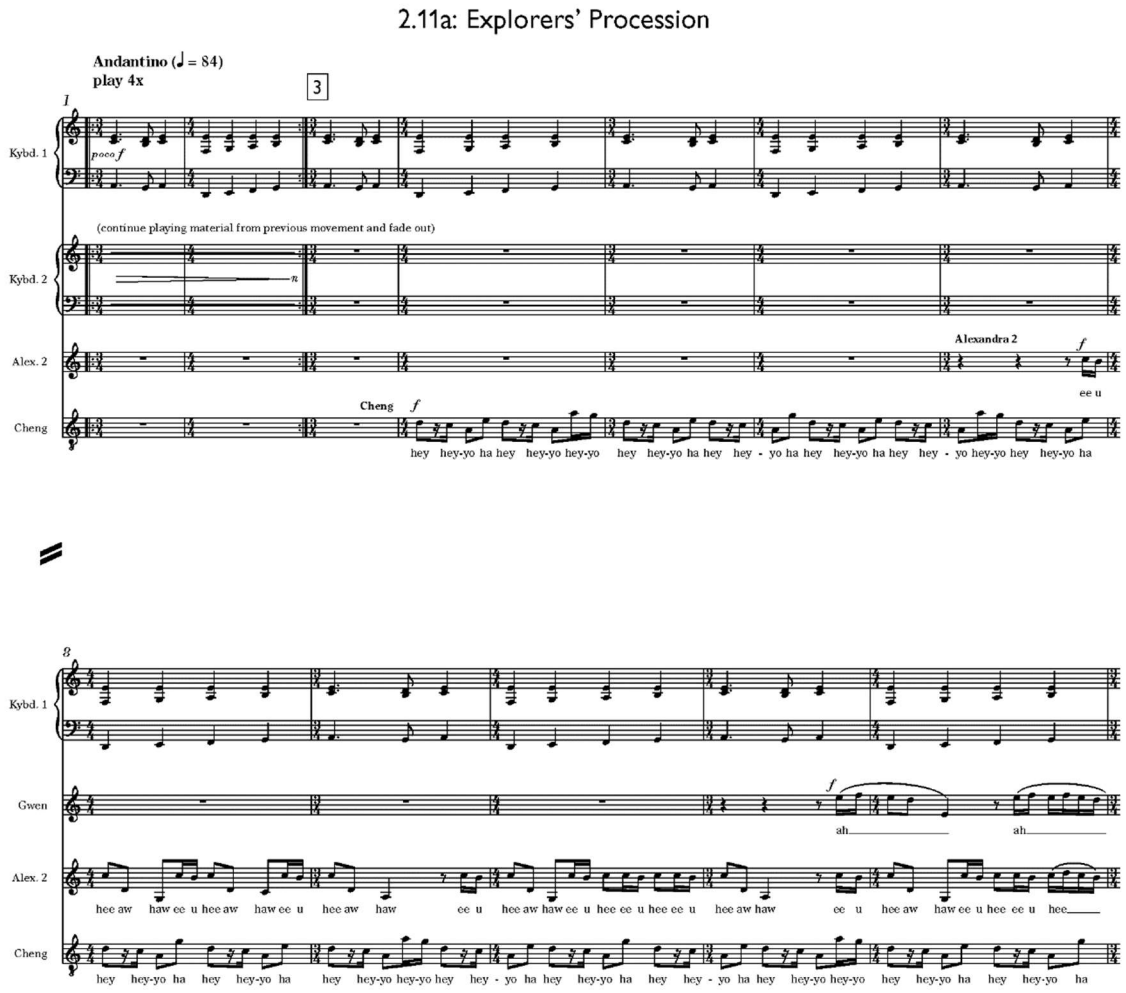
Example 9. Meredith Monk, “Choosing Companions,” *Atlas*, mm. 1-19.



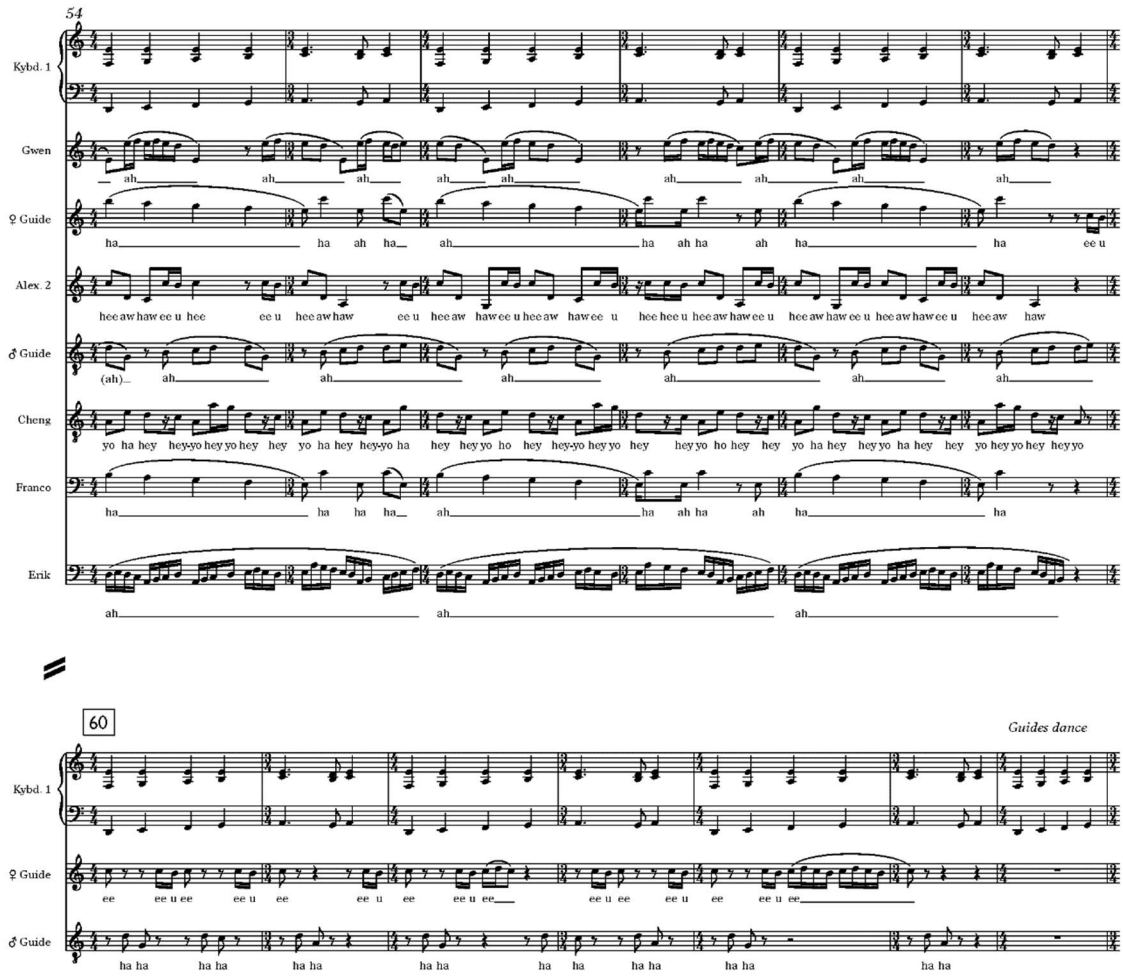
Example 10. Meredith Monk, “Choosing Companions,” *Atlas*, mm. 37-53.



Example 11. Meredith Monk, “Explorers’ Procession,” *Atlas*, mm. 1-12.



Example 12. Meredith Monk, “Explorers’ Procession,” *Atlas*, mm. 54-66.



FIGURES

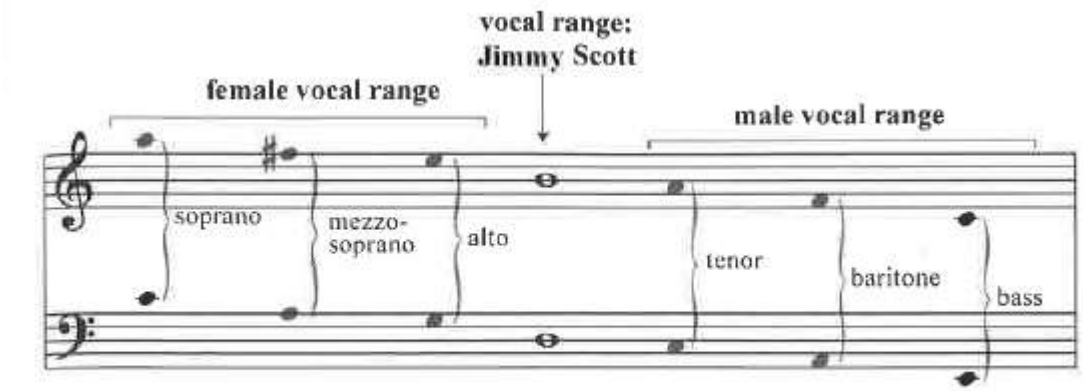
Figure 1. Extended techniques in *Atlas* and their locations.

Extended Technique	**Description**	**Found in *Atlas*: role, part/scene, mm.**
SONAR pulse	rapid, repetitive, voiced consonants	Alexandra, "Travel Dream Song," mm. 23-25, 31-33, 43-45, 51-52, etc. Hungry Ghost, "Hungry Ghost," figures C and D
Instrumental voice writing	Angular and/or rapid melodic gesture	Alexandra, Alexandra's Mother, "Future Quest," mm. 93-105
High chirp	Voiced consonant and rolled "r" beginning on low pitch then jumping into a high register on syllable "ih"	Alexandra, "Choosing Companions," mm. 43 - 51
Chirp conversation	High pitched, trilled, conversational pitch ad lib	Ice Demons, "Ice Demons," mm. 82-91
Expanded trill	Extended oscillation between sustained note and grace note	Alexandra, "Agricultural Community," mm. 39-40 Alexandra's Father, "Loss Song," m. 63, 65-67
Conversational pitch approximation	Approaching sprechstimme, pitches specified but yield to speaking pitches	Matriarch Farmer, "Agricultural Community," mm. 537-541
Microtonal waver		Ice Demons, "Ice Demons," mm. 107-122
Dolphin trill	Wide trill in extremely high register	Hungry Ghost, "Hungry Ghost," figure d
Crying waver	Wide waver to mimic crying	Alexandra's Father, "Loss Song," mm. 64-67
Extreme registral jumps		Cheng, "Hungry Ghost," figure 5b
Ice growl (named by Monk)	Tonal slide with growl	Ice Demons, "Ice Demons," mm. 87-105

Multi-hocket	Hocket between more than two characters	Gwen, Alexandra, Female Guide, Male Guide, Cheng, Franco, "Explorers' Junctures" mm. 1-24
Slow-motion waver (named by Monk)	Extremely slow and wide vibrato, sliding up and down a half-step or approximate	Gwen, Alexandra, Female Guide, Male Guide, Cheng, Franco, "Explorers' Junctures" m. 76-end
Limited or no vibrato		All characters, throughout
Goat trill (named by Monk)	Wide, forced trill	Hungry Ghost, "Hungry Ghost," figure aTenors, "Possibility of Destruction, " m. 36-74
Vocal fry (named by Monk)		Master Ice Demon, "Ice Demons," m. 107, 113
Glottal breaks		Alexandra, "Forest Questions," mm. 349-352
Glottal trill	Wider, pitched vocal fry trill	Hungry Ghost, "Hungry Ghost," figures c and d
Tremulant (named by Monk)	Large leap grace note jump within long glissando	Alexandra, "Forest Questions," mm. 354-355, 357-358
Open mouth nasal hum	Singing on a nasal hum (often in high register)	Sopranos, "Arctic Bar," throughout
Cat glissando	Head voice glissando on nasal "a" vowel	Altos, "Forest Questions," throughout
Tonal slide		Ice Demons, "Ice Demons," mm. 55-80 Erik Magnussen, "Treachery," figure E
Scream (named by Monk)	Screamed pitches	Master Ice Demon, "Ice Demons," m. 103, 110
Whisper/vocal percussion		Cheng, "Hungry Ghost," figures 1, 1a, 1b, 2, 2a-h Hungry Ghost, "Hungry Ghost," figure f Alexandra, "Lesson," third cell
Whistle tone		Hungry Ghost, "Hungry Ghost," throughout Ice Demons, "Ice Demons," throughout

Figure 2. Meredith Monk, director. Scene in 1991 production of *Atlas*.

Figure 3. Nina Sun Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound, Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 103.



CURRICULUM VITA

Tracy Monaghan
Musicologist, Musician

Louisville, Kentucky
tracymonaghan@gmail.com

EDUCATION

M.M, Music History and Literature — Expected completion May 2020
University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky

- Thesis: "Rethinking Meredith Monk"
    - Dr. Devin Burke, Advisor
    - Dr. Christopher Brody and Dr. Kirsten Carithers, Committee Members

B.M, Vocal Performance — 2016
California State University, Northridge, Northridge, California

B. M. Coursework — 2016
Tennessee State University, Nashville, Tennessee

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

"Canonic Variations: Feminist Ideologies in the Music of Meredith Monk"
American Musicological Society, South-Central Chapter Meeting — March 2019

"Meredith Monk's Compositional Hallmarks in *Atlas*"
American Musicological Society, Midwest Chapter Meeting — March 2020*
*Conference cancelled due to COVID-19 outbreak

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Graduate Teaching Assistant — 2018 - Present
University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky

- Served as Teaching Assistant for the following courses:

- Survey of American Jazz
- Music Literature I (1000-1750)
- Music Literature II (Classical/Early Romantic)
- Music Literature III (1860-Present)
- African American Music

Contributor 2017 – Present
I CARE IF YOU LISTEN, editor Amanda Cook
https://www.icareifyoulisten.com/author/tracy/

- (2020) Jenny Lin Partners with ICEBERG New Music on *The Etudes Project, Volume One*
- (2019) *in manus tuas*: Anne Leilehua Lanzilotti's Solo Album Debut
- (2019) Meredith Monk's Groundbreaking and Spectacular *Atlas* in Los Angeles
- (2019) 5 Questions to Rebecca Comerford (Founder, Ojai Youth Orchestra)
- (2019) 5 Questions to PubliQuartet About *Freedom and Faith*
- (2018) Big Ears Festival 2018: Experiential Trademarks
- (2018) Big Ears Festival 2018: Pushing the Boundaries
- (2018) Danielle Dahl's Debut Solo Album, *Loosening Orion's Belt* (abstract tits)
- (2018) "Dynamic Skill," Molly Gebrian and Danny Holt's Trios for Two (Innova)
- (2018) What's Old is New: Mackey/Treuting *Orpheus Unsung*

Contributor 2015 – 2018
Schmopera, editor Jenna Douglas
https://www.schmopera.com/authors/tracy-monaghan/

- (2018) *Susannah* Is Topical Relevance, Like It or Not
- (2018) Opera Meets Cult Film: *Hercules vs. Vampires*
- (2017) Rowley Wins the Night in Nashville Opera's *Tosca*
- (2017) In Review: *Carmen* at Nashville Opera
- (2017) In Review: *Three Way*
- (2016) In Review: *Glory Denied*
- (2016) In Review: *Don Giovanni* at Nashville Opera
- (2016) In Review: Nashville Symphony's Season Opener
- (2016) New Recordings: *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*

Office Administration, Human Resources Generalist, 2013 – 2018
Social Media Manager
Turnip Truck LLC, Nashville, Tennessee

College Guidance Associate, Registrar, 2008 – 2013
Student Program Coordinator
New Community Jewish High School, West Hills, California

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

University of Louisville School of Music Summer Travel Grant Review Committee	Present
Dean's Graduate Student Advisory Board, Founding Member	Present
Graduate Student Council Representative, School of Music	2018 – Present
School of Music Auditions Volunteer	2018 – Present
Food Pantry Volunteer, Cardinal Cupboard	2018 – Present
Soprano Section Leader, Northridge Singers	2006 – 2007
Alto Section Leader, Master Chorale	2006 – 2007
Soprano Section Leader, Women's Chorale	2004 – 2005

FELLOWSHIPS & GRANTS

University of Louisville School of Music Summer Travel Grant	June 2018
AMS Keitel/Palisca Professional Travel Grant (declined award)	November 2019
AMS Keitel/Palisca Professional Travel Grant (declined award)	November 2018
AMS Keitel/Palisca Professional Travel Grant	November 2017

HONORS & AWARDS

Pi Kappa Lambda Honor Society, Lambda Chapter	2020
CSUN Outstanding Vocalist	2007
CSUN Outstanding Member, Women's Chorale	2005

SELECT PERFORMANCE EXPERIENCE

Cipher, Kate Soper — 2019
- Soprano

Vermin (World Premiere), Rachael Smith — 2019
- Soprano

Dream World Blesses Me, Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate — 2020*
- Narrator

I watch you, beheading, Bekah Simms — 2020*
- Soprano

*Performance cancelled due to COVID-19 outbreak

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Clinic Escort, Planned Parenthood Middle Tennessee	2016 – 2018
Community Outreach, Planned Parenthood Middle Tennessee	2017 – 2018
Soprano II, Vox Grata Women's Choir	2016 – 2018

LGBTQIA+ Youth Shelter Volunteer, Nashville Launch Pad 2017 – 2018

LANGUAGES

German, intermediate French, beginning
American Sign Language, advanced

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

- American Musicological Society
- American Musicological Society, Midwest Chapter
- American Musicological Society, South-Central Chapter
- Composer Diversity Project, Advisory Board