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FROZEN DREAMS: LUMINOUS VOICES IN THE NIGHT

SONHOS GELADOS: VOZES LUZENTES NA NOITE

Abstract

Frozen Dreams, Luminous Voices in the Night is the first chapter of a work-in-progress, ambience-specific, audio-visual installation. In a dark and silent space, voices, diffused by portable loudspeakers anchored to colourful flashing balloons, narrate their dreams: inner memories reactivated when heard. The project is inspired by *Les Paroles Gelées* (The Frozen Words), a section of the fourth book (1552) of François Rabelais's *Gargantua et Pantagruel*, which narrates that at the edge of the frozen sea, in winter, there was a great and bloody battle. The shouts, the cries, the slashing, the clashing, the neighing and all the other frightful noises became frozen in the air. When the rigours of winter have passed, the serenity and temper of the good old days come to the fore, and so they melt and are heard. *Thawing Dreams* is the second chapter within which the voices counterpoint the sounds of water and thawing ice.

Keywords: Fragility. Art. Resonance. Aura. Reactivation.

Resumo

Frozen Dreams, Luminous Voices in the Night é o primeiro capítulo de uma instalação audio-visual (ambience-specific) de work-in-progress. Num espaço escuro e silencioso, várias vozes, difundidas por altifalantes portáteis que ancoram balões luminosos coloridos, narram os seus sonhos. Sonhos estes de memórias interiores reativadas pela escuta. O projeto é inspirado por *Les Paroles Gelées* (As Palavras Congeladas), uma secção do quarto livro (1552) de *Gargantua et Pantagruel*, de François Rabelais, que narra que à beira do mar gelado, no inverno, houve uma grande e sangrenta batalha. Os gritos, os berros, os golpes, os choques, os relinchos e todos os outros ruídos assustadores ficaram congelados no ar. Quando o rigor do inverno passa, a serenidade e o temperamento dos “bons velhos tempos” vêm ao de cima, derretendo-se e fazendo-se ouvir. *Thawing Dreams* é o segundo capítulo em que as vozes fazem contraponto com os sons da água e do gelo descongelado.

Palavras chave: Fragilidade. Arte. Ressonância. Aura. Reativação

1 FRAGILITY

... of the fragility of voices narrating their dreams, hanging from fragile, coloured balloons in fragile environments and contexts.



Figure 1. Set up of the installation of *Frozen Dreams: Luminous Voices in the Night*.

Frozen Dreams is a work-in-progress, ambiance-specific, audio-visual, artistic installation. In a dark and silent space, several voices, diffused by portable loudspeakers anchored to colourful flashing balloons, narrate their dreams: inner memories reactivated when heard.

During my music studies, I discovered an episode known as *Les Paroles Gelées* (The Frozen Words), a part of François Rabelais's fourth book of *Gargantua et Pantagruel* (1552), a five-book romance that narrates the fantastical adventures of the giants Gargantua and Pantagruel, following the "heroic deeds and sayings of the noble Pantagruel" as he travelled the world in search of the oracle of the "Dive Bouteille". The composer Azio Corghi, who was my teacher at the time, was working on his opera *Gargantua* that was staged from May 1984, in several opera theatres around the world. This is narrated in *Les Paroles Gelées* as they sail in the Arctic Circle, near the North Pole:

Icy est le confin de la mer glaciale, sus laquelle feut au commencement de l'hyver dernier passé grosse & felonne bataille, entre les Arismapiens, & les Nephelibates. Lors gelerent en l'air les parolles & crys des homes & femmes, les chaplis des masses, les hurtys des harnoy, des bardes, les hannissemens des chevaux, et tout aultre effroy de combat. A ceste heure la rigueur de l'hyver passée, advenente la serenité et temperie du bon temps, elles fondent et sont ouyes.

This is the edge of the frozen sea, and at the beginning of last winter there was a great and bloody battle here between the Arimaspians and the Cloud Riders. The shouts of the men, the cries of the women, the slashing of the battle-axes, the

clashing of the armour and harnesses, the neighing of the horses and all the other frightful noises of battle became frozen on the air. At this hour, when the rigours of winter have passed, the serenity and temper of the good old days come to the fore, they melt and are heard.

Les quelles ensemblement fondues ouysmes, hin, hin, hin, hin, his, ticque torche, lorgne, brededin, brededac, frr, frrr, frrr, bou, bou, bou, bou, bou, bou, bou, bou, tracc, trac, trr, trr, trr, trrr, trrrrr, on, on, on, on, ououououon [...]

When they had all melted together, we heard, “Hin, hin, hin, hin, his, tick, tock, crack, brededin, brededac, frr, frrr, frrrr, bou, bou, bou, bou, bou, bou, bou, bou, tracc, tracc, trr, trrr, trrrr, trrrrr, trrrrr, on, on, on, on, on, ououououon [...]

Upon reading this episode, I inferred that the frozen words had been the first audio recorder in history. The memory remained dormant for many years, but the frozen words were etched deeply in my mind.



Figure 2. *Frozen Dreams: Luminous Voices in the Night*. Outdoor installation.

2 ART

In the summer of 2021, I received an invitation to create a participatory musical installation for the symposium, *L'enchantement qui revient* (The Enchantment that Returns) to be held in the ancient and charming castle of Cerisy in Normandy. The installation, named *Dream Clouds*, consisted of a dozen small loudspeakers hanging from clusters of luminous balloons, which were scattered around the castle's beautiful park. The installation created an alluring spread of voices into the night, as the frozen words awoke. But what could these voices say? Certainly not accounts of battle. “Make dreams, not war!”, I thought, and I launched an appeal and collected about 80 dreams told in different languages.

In the Spring 2023, attracted by the call for artist's residencies at the Spitsbergen Kunstnersenter, the most northern Artist in Residence centre in the world, the connection with Rabelais's frozen words was immediate, and equally immediate was the request for a double residency, including both the winter and summer solstices. However, beneath the dormant project, which had not yet come to the surface, there was a spontaneous and immediate suggestion of dyads: night/day, winter/summer, black/white, dreaming/waking. Suggestions proposing possible links with: the long night and the long day, the white of snow and ice and the black of local coal mines that were for more than a century the essence and life of this place, now largely closed and destined to cease all operations within two years in respect of the environment of these islands. A carbon footprint that marks not only these territories, among the most fragile on the planet, but also the wider world.

The response was positive, the double residency period was envisaged and I went to the Arctic with a primary question in mind: how could I execute this ephemeral art installation in such a fragile and challenging environment? In collaboration with a photographer and videographer friend who shared the residency with me, we decided to treat the winter residency as an exploratory phase: the frozen dreams – we thought – would take shape in the documentation of the difficulty of the project being realised. Although fragmented in reality, not perceivable in the world they would be reactivated in, they would be given meaning through narrative when shaped through the documentary. We recorded sounds, photos and videos to continue the initial project of a documentary on the design and realisation of the project.

In January 2024, in the Spitsbergen Art Gallery, we presented our installation, *Frozen Dreams: Luminous Voices in the Night*.



Figure 3. *Frozen Dreams: Luminous Voices in the Night*. Winter 2023-2024, Gallery Exhibition.

3 RESONANCE

Is there a connection between sounds and dreams? I spontaneously answer: yes. The connection lies within the phonetics of the words that describe these concepts, particularly in Latin-based languages (som/sonho, suono/sogno, son/songe, sonido/sueño). There is a depth in both topics: that of deep listening, related to practices like soundwalk, soundscape, and acoustic ecology, and that of the sleep where our dreams reside. Music has the power to make us dream, just as dreams have the power to bridge the gap between sleep and reality.

Has not dream interpretation always been an attempt to reconcile the world of sleep, night, darkness, and the moon with wakefulness, day, light, and the sun?

And what about the great day of the Earth with its four phases: dawn/spring, day/summer, dusk/autumn, night/winter? That, at the planet's opposite poles, there is a unique year/day, where winter/night and summer/day are the two grand seasons?

In these reflections, John Cage with his *Silence* (1961) re-emerges: an artist who has made the liberation of sounds and listening (“allowing the sounds to be themselves”) his own poetic and artistic style. One of the most revealing books of our time in which knowledge, otherwise fragmented into isolated branches, is interwoven into a new polyphony and a new humanism harvested in porous pockets. As I was leafing through the book, I read:

But then a few days later, while rambling in the woods, I got to thinking. I recalled the Indian concept of the relation of life and the seasons. Spring is Creation. Summer is Preservation. Fall is Destruction. Winter is Quiescence. Mushrooms grow most vigorously in the fall, the period of destruction, and the function of many of them is to bring about the final decay of rotting material.

This raises a question: perhaps dreams, like mushrooms and like music, but perhaps like all art, have ecological filtering, a purification function?

4 AURA

The shortest path from one point to another is not the straight line, it's the dream.

Malian proverb

Ecology has become a mesmerising word, which has lost its meaning in the trivialisation of advertising. Everything has been switched into a 'green' product to be sold, from insurance policies to snacks. There is nothing more polluting than an incitement to indiscriminate consumption.

The ecological vision that underpins our project resonates deeply with us. We believe that ecology is fundamentally about "taking care" – what else should it be? This begins with becoming aware of the immense beauty and richness of the world that still surrounds us, as well as the sensory and aesthetic perceptions that our bodies have had since the beginning of life, and our minds' ability to understand ourselves, others, and the world. Nothing more is needed than to be present in the moment, simply because we exist. Dreams, art, and music allow us to communicate and create new worlds. By empathising with others and with the world, immersing ourselves in their emotional narratives, we expand our experiences and sense of connection.

A place where we live, whether settled or nomadic, with our work, but above all with the ability to perceive it, becomes landscape and soundscape. And through imagination, memory and dream, it becomes an emotional landscape.

You do not need anything other than to take care of what we have and what we are: to walk, dream, imagine, we do not need anything, and we only generate the entropy necessary for life, we use and take care of everything that is the environment inside and outside of us. We didn't know, and still don't know, how paying attention to sounds can impact our dreams. We understand that dreams condense our experiences - affective, sensory and real - into narratives that we experience with the same emotional intensity as when we are awake. We know that the dreams are coalescent by the representation of the world in which we live. We understand that dreams have always been considered to be the keepers of knowledge that transcends rationality. When we give attention to their emotional content, they reveal to us the knowledge of unexplored inner landscapes.



Figure 4. Set up of the installation of *Thawing Dreams*.

5 REACTIVATION

At this hour, when the rigours of winter have passed, the serenity and temper of the good old days come to the fore, they melt and are heard.

I wrote at the beginning of this text: “*Frozen Dreams* is a work-in-progress, ambiance-specific, audio-visual, artistic installation. In a dark and silent space, several voices, diffused by portable loudspeakers anchored to colourful flashing balloons, narrate their dreams: inner memories reactivated when heard.”

After the long night of the winter solstice, the second chapter of the Arctic adventure took place, as planned, on the long day of the summer solstice. How to give body and meaning to our idea in such a radically different ambience? The fascination of the first installation was in the dark space of a 'luminous' art gallery with large windows open to the night. To recreate now an artificial night by darkening them would have been, literally, unnatural.

Summer is here, and the icy landscape melts into sonorous rivulets of water dripping from the mountains and glaciers in a multitude of trickling, fragile streams, burrowing twisted canyons in the ice; flowing between coal-black, iron-red and multi coloured boulders immersed in the innumerable shades of green and brown of the musks dotted with the bright colours of minute flowers; roaring in the constant flush of the muddy Longyearlva, which rises from the ice of the Longyearbreen to flow into the Adventfjorden and Adventdalen at Longyerbyen, the northernmost city in the world.

Water, sun, and wind have spent millions of years shaping these mountains that collapse into counterforts of boulders, stones, and pebbles.

At this hour, when the rigours of winter have passed, the serenity and temper of the good old days come to the fore. Dreams thaw and are heard like voices rising from shallow piles of stones resting on the floor of a different room in the same art gallery that had hosted the frozen voices falling from the roof, just one night ago.



Figure 5. *Thawing Dreams*. Summer 2024, Gallery Exhibition.

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