



# TRANSPARENT CITIES

MAY 1, 2012 8:30 PM

presented by

REDCAT

Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater

California Institute of the Arts

**CaLARTS**

# TRANSPARENT CITIES

May 1, 2012, 8:30pm

## PROGRAM

### *Five Lines*

Madison Brookshire

Digital video and live musical performance, color, sound, 16 minutes, 2012

Ezra Buchla, synthesizer; April Guthrie, cello; Julia Holter, keyboard; Michael Pisaro, electric guitar; Cassia Streb, viola; Christine Tivolacci, flute; Tashi Wada, reed organ

*A spot of sunlight moves over five hand-drawn lines,  
transforming the screen into a musical score. (MB)*

### *Intermission*

### *Transparent Cities*

Brookshire, Guthrie, Pisaro, Streb

Digital video and live musical performance, color, sound, 68 minutes, 2008–2012

Madison Brookshire, video

April Guthrie, cello (recorded and live)

Michael Pisaro, field recording, sine tones, mixing

Cassia Streb, viola (recorded and live)

## PROGRAM NOTE

### *The Creation of Transparent Cities*

*Transparent Cities* concerns layers of sound and image within fixed parameters. It had a lengthy and layered process of creation that is embedded in the result. We hope that this fairly detailed description of that process helps viewers and listeners to get a sense of the scenic, sonic and temporal constraints that shaped the work.

It all began in 2008 when the duo of April Guthrie and Cassia Streb were offered a residency at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. Guthrie, a cellist, and Streb, a violist, asked filmmaker Madison Brookshire and composer Michael Pisaro to collaborate with them, to create a work to be performed in the Billy Wilder Theater (where the work was premiered on April 23, 2009). Guthrie/Streb wanted us to work together on something from the ground up, without any assumptions about how a work of video and music *should* be made. This meant that although it was clear that

the duo would play their instruments, Brookshire would shoot video and Pisaro would record sound, ideas about the content of the live sound and the recordings could come from anyone, and decisions in the project would be agreed on by everyone.

The question that fascinated us the most was how to tie sound and image together in an essential, but novel way. Ideas to either film the musicians directly or create sound for an independently shot video were quickly rejected. The quartet shared an interest in time and duration. Here the work of photographer Michael Wesely with long exposures (including his monumental documentation of the building of the new Museum of Modern Art in New York) was influential. We ultimately decided to hinge everything on the coordinates of location and time of day.

First we selected two locations: Cassia Streb chose her Highland Park apartment, and April Guthrie the hill on which the California Institute of the Arts is situated, facing east (overlooking the Santa Clarita Valley). We decided to record both the sounds the musicians made and the locations (sound and video) at the same time (i.e., in sync), over the course of two separate days.

The structure and timing of the recordings became the fundamental material of the piece. The two charts below show the layout of the recording on the two days we chose. In both cases, the endpoints were selected around the sunrise and sunset times of the days (since we were dealing with the available light, and changes in the light over time).

In Highland Park (March 16, 2008), we divided the day up into 11 units, spaced out at ca. 73-minute intervals. Each recording lasted 7 minutes. In this location, Cassia played (from a series of tunings she had selected) in her studio. Madison chose a shooting location on the porch of the building, looking down Avenue 54 towards Figueroa. Michael had one microphone in Cassia’s studio and one out the door towards the street (recording both simultaneously).

<b>cassia</b>	<b>March 16, 2008</b>	<b>(recording)</b>								
sunrise	7:01	begin	6:55							
sunset	7:00	end	7:15							
		minutes	740							
		factored	ca. 67 min							
recordings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<b>6:55</b>	<b>8:08</b>	<b>9:21</b>	<b>10:34</b>	<b>11:49</b>	<b>1:02</b>	<b>2:15</b>	<b>3:28</b>	<b>4:41</b>	<b>5:54</b>

In Santa Clarita (June 13, 2008), we divided the day into 7 units, spaced out at intervals of about 144 minutes. Here each recording lasted 11 minutes. April set up on a deck outside of the graduate student apartments and played mostly soft sounds that drew attention to features of the environment. Madison shot from close by, looking out over the valley and towards the San Gabriel Mountains. Michael had one microphone

towards the cello and the other pointing out over the valley. (A technical mishap forced us to actually begin recording at 5:55 a.m. instead of the planned 5:35 a.m.)

Recording at CalArts w/April

June 13, 2008 (Friday)

sunrise	5:41	sunset	8:06	duration	14h24m	864 minutes			6 units (7 reps)	ca. 144'
start times		1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
end times		5:35 (5:46)	8:00 (8:11)	10:24 (10:35)	12:48 (12:59)	3:12 (3:23)	5:36 (5:47)	8:00 (8:11)		

We determined that we wanted to use the individual recordings as layers. The stability of the location could thus reveal the transience of instants (or what physicist Julian Barbour calls "time capsules"). But these instants also acquire a kind of permanence through the process of recording.

The layering scheme treated the two locations differently. We had pre-determined the duration of the piece to be "about an hour," and using the recording length as a multiplier, came to a division between locations of 35 minutes for Highland Park (or 5 sections of 7 minutes each) and 33 minutes for Santa Clarita (or 3 sections of 11 minutes each). Together this creates 8 sections with a total duration of 68 minutes. We created a scheme of alternation between the locations that also, within the synced layers, follows the time of day.

Sound and video were somewhat different in their treatment of the layers. As the chart below indicates, the number of sound layers varies between 1 and 8. Recordings from the Highland Park location ("Cassia") were allowed to be repeated, but those from Santa Clarita ("April") were not.

Transparent Cities, layers of sound									
section	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
musician	april	cassia	cassia	april	cassia	april	cassia	cassia	
	11 min. fade in, 1'	7 min.	7 min.	11 min.	7 min.	11 min.	7 min.	7 min. fade out, 1'	(68 min.)
1	<b>5:55a.m.</b>	6:55am	<b>10:34am</b>	10:24am	11:49am	<b>5:36p.m.</b>	9:21am	3:28pm	
2	8:00a.m.	<b>8:08am</b>		<b>12:48pm</b>	1:02pm	8:00pm	10:34am	4:41pm	
3		9:21am		3:12pm	<b>2:15pm</b>		11:49am	5:54pm	
4		10:34am			3:28pm		1:02pm	<b>7:08pm</b>	
5							2:15pm		
6							3:28pm		
7							4:41pm		
8							<b>5:54pm</b>		
no. of layers	2	4	1	3	4	2	8	4	

bold: agreed sync w/video

Sound and video would have to sync a minimum of one layer (indicated in bold in the chart above). In most cases, more than one layer is synced. Video would use the following scheme in terms of the numbers of (temporally adjacent) layers:

<b>Section:</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
Layers:	2	2	2	3	4	3	3	3

The result in both sound and video is both complex (in that the potential density of events can be fairly high, and a variety of visual and acoustic phenomena can result from the layering) and transparent, in that both video and sound are porous and allow events from any layer to penetrate the surface.

Within the sound world are the multilayered sounds of cello and of viola. Initially the performers created sound as a reflection of the environment (so they are unique to the specific situation of each recording). Individual sections that were played as solos acquire an added harmonic context with each additional layer.

Finally, in terms of the sound, a kind of audible “key” is given to the recorded time and number of layers. Pisaro created two series of sine tones, one for each instrument. For the viola layers the series starts on the lowest tone of the instrument (130.8 hz) and ascends in 11 stages (one for each layers) by an interval of 11/8 (halfway between a perfect fourth and a tritone). For the cello, the series also starts on its lowest tone (65.4 hz), but ascends in 7 stages by an interval of 39/20 (just smaller than an octave). Within each section at an assigned time, alternating pulses (of 11 and 7 seconds respectively) point to the layers that are present in the sound. (The highest tone in each series is assigned to the earliest layer, so the overall movement over the course of the pieces is from high to low.)

11" x 11		7" x 11	
cello / tones	(39/20)	viola / tones	(11/8)
1	65.4	1	130.8
2	127.53	2	179.85
3	248.68	3	247.294
4	484.93	4	340.029
5	945.62	5	467.54
6	1843.96	6	642.867
7	3595.72	7	883.942
		8	1215.42
		9	1671.2
		10	2297.9
		11	3159.62

Guthrie and Streb have a created a live score to go with the layered recorded sound and the video projected. Components of the score include: “Pillars”—occurring every

six minutes, played by the duo together and consisting of tones from the C harmonic series, "Arcs" of solo tones (rising and falling over the course of the whole duration) and "Memories" of sounds heard while on location and from the recordings. The mixture between the live sounds and the recordings is variable: sometimes (as in the Pillars) the live sound comes to the front; at other times it is barely distinguishable from the sounds emanating from the speakers.

—Michael Pisaro

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**Madison Brookshire** is a Los Angeles-based artist and filmmaker. He has screened his work at the Toronto International Film Festival, the New York Film Festival, International Film Festival Rotterdam, Migrating Forms, Los Angeles Filmforum and REDCAT. He has also had solo exhibitions at Parker Jones in Culver City and Presents Gallery in Brooklyn as well as performances at the wulf., The Lab, Betalevel and Artists' Television Access.

**Ezra Buchla** lives in Los Angeles, working with viola, voice, sounds, computers, and related concerns.

**April Guthrie**, a Kansas City native and now Los Angeles-based cellist, vocalist, and composer, is dedicated to performance and collaboration with artists of all genres. Her focus on contemporary music has brought her to work directly with Louis Andriessen, Muhal Richard Abrams, Vinny Golia, Joan LaBarbara, Mario Lavista, David Rosenboom, James Tenney, Wadada Leo Smith, Christian Wolff, and John Zorn. Guthrie's work with folk and rock bands includes recordings and tours with Miroslav Tadic and Rade Serbedzija; Moira Smiley & voco; Seawolf; Spiritualized; and Guster. Most recently she collaborated with voco and Greer Honeywill, a visual artist in Hobart, Tasmania, to create a sound installation for Honeywill's works *Veiled* and *IN-Grained*.

**Julia Holter's** homemade recordings and scores consist of instrumental and/or animal sounds, and sung text. She collaborates frequently with other musicians, writers, visual artists, and puppeteers in the Los Angeles area and beyond.

**Michael Pisaro** is a composer and guitarist. Recent festival appearances include Maerzmusik (Berlin), INSTAL (Glasgow), Amplify (New York), Cut & Splice (London), Sonic Acts (Amsterdam) and Sonorités (Montpellier). Recordings of his music (over twenty of them to date) have been released on erstwhile, Gravity Wave, another timbre, Cathnor,

winds measure, Presqu'île and Edition Wandelweiser. He holds the Roy E. Disney Family Chair in Music Composition at the California Institute of the Arts.

**Cassia Streb** is a violist, improviser and composer based in Los Angeles. She performs primarily in the fields of contemporary and experimental music and art. Cassia collaborates with many artists from other disciplines, such as visual art, dance and sound art, to create site-specific works. She has been commissioning works and performing with her contemporary viola and cello duo, Guthrie & Streb, since 2006.

**Christine Tivolacci** is a flutist who is devoted to the performance of contemporary and experimental music. She currently lives and performs in Los Angeles while simultaneously pursuing her doctorate in contemporary flute performance at the University of California, San Diego.

**Tashi Wada** is a composer and performer based in California. His recent compositions use apparently simple structures to generate rich and unanticipated perceptual effects. Wada performs regularly in the United States and Europe, often in collaboration with other artists.

## UPCOMING PERFORMANCES AT REDCAT

**May 16 – 20**

Arcane Collective: *Cold Dream Colour*

**June 14**

Partch

**June 24 – 25**

Studio: Summer 2012

**April 28 – 29**

Ntare Guma Mbaho Mwine: *A Missionary Position*

For more information visit [redcat.org](http://redcat.org)

## WE WANT TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR REDCAT EXPERIENCE!

Post a comment on our wall @ [facebook.com/calartsredcat](https://www.facebook.com/calartsredcat)

... or send a tweet to us @ [twitter.com/calartsredcat](https://twitter.com/calartsredcat)

... or send an old-fashioned email to [info.redcat@calarts.edu](mailto:info.redcat@calarts.edu)