

Example 1: A scan of the handwritten original score (Pia Palme 2014).

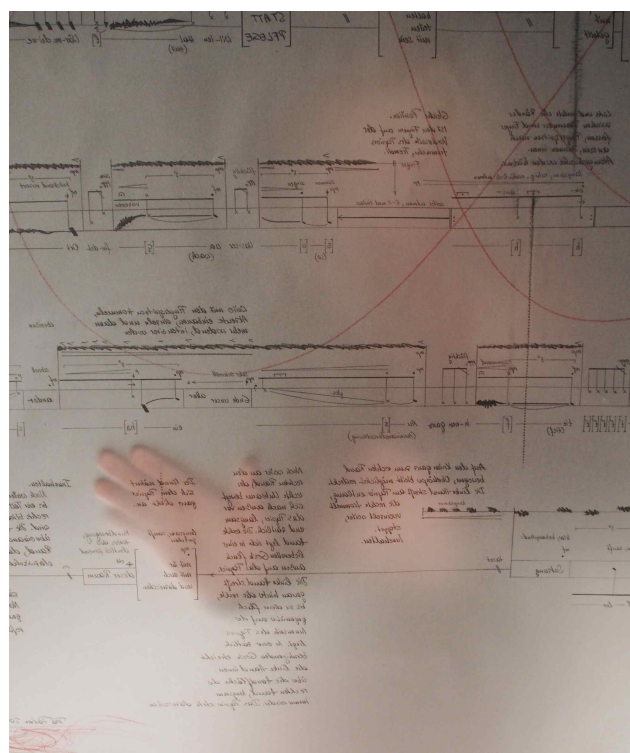
[illegible]

SETZUNG 1.1 (2014) is a work for actress/vocalist, in which I explored a conception of the membranes as intermediary. This work extends my interest in the use of objects, e.g. wooden boxes, feathers, cardboard and paper constructions not only for their musical or scenic potential, but as externalisations of compositional thinking. The work and its performance are framed as an installation: a huge translucent print of the score is used as a graphic membrane on stage, separating the vocalist and the audience. The translucent score is a statement about my compositional process, a potential space between a state of mind and sonic outcome. For the conception of the membrane, I draw on the observations of D. W. Winnicott about a third intermediary between the 'inner' and the 'outer' domains of a personality, where communication and creative exchange are located. Key issues of composition, text, notation and performance are tied to a highly personal and artistic reflection about a historical figure, the Baroque writer and nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (Mexico, 1648 - 1695).

A translucent score as a membrane domain

The original 'membrane' score for the composition SETZUNG 1.1 is handwritten: using black and red pencils and a single, large sheet of white paper (210 x 110 cm), working from a number of sketches and preliminary versions, I merged drawing and handwriting into one extended process of notation (see example 1 for a scan of the original score). For the performance, a 1:1 print is hung as a banner of translucent paper; the performer takes her position behind it. The score-membrane enables an effect of visual highlighting: touching the translucent score, parts of the performer's body temporarily come into clear focus, creating a kind of 'zoom' effect (see example 2).

Example 2: The performer's hands touching the membrane; this position corresponds to the beginning of the fourth system of the score (photo by Pia Palme).



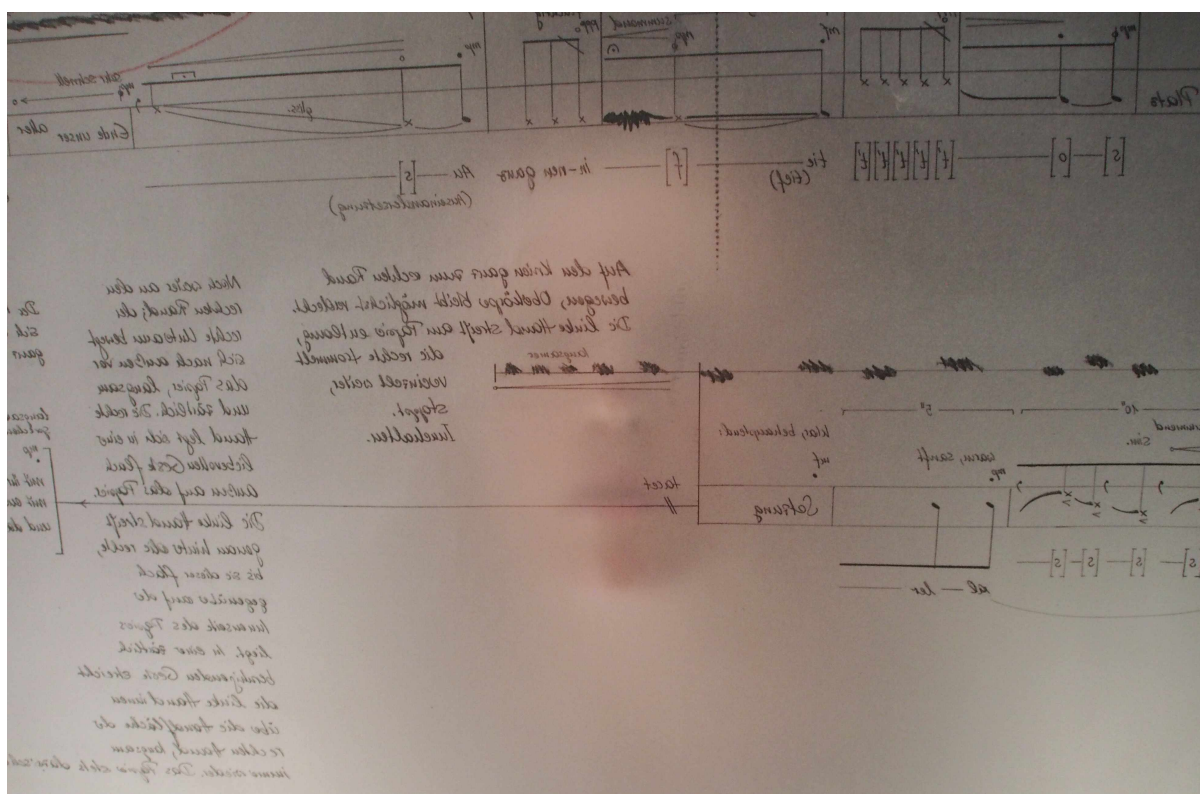
The performer's movements, the resulting noises and the fragmented visibility of her body are integral aspects of the composition. I direct and choreograph vocality, in order to block, deconstruct and distort the conventional visual element of female voice performance (see examples 3 and 7). Instead, the score is visible throughout the piece, dominating the scene¹. Conventionally, sheet music on music stands is hidden from the audience's view, while the performer's visibility is granted; this placement creates a certain mystique around notation as a code for insiders. In my installation I turn the setting around, to deconstruct the performer's habitual role, and to gain space for more playfulness in score design. In the face of an increasing mechanisation and uniformity of notation, in music software design and the music (publishing) business, crafting a huge score by handwriting is a personal act of defiance against commercially set standards.

Notation as an intermediary zone

Looking into a conception of the intermediary, I carried out research into Donald W. Winnicott's theories about a transitional zone as a location for 'playing and doing'. The pioneering British psychologist, following his observations of babies in relation to their mothers, postulated a 'potential space', the area of play, as a third area between baby and mother/parent (or: child and family, individual and society). This intermediate ground, which from an individual's point of view is neither 'inside' one's personality nor 'outside', but accessible from both sides, provides space for individual experiences. From here, play expands into creative living and cultural activity (Winnicott, 2005).

The concept of a third area as a place and time for the activity of inquisitive exchange and creativity clarifies certain aspects of my compositional process, most of all the role of notation. My music is generated from an inner urge, and not geared towards production or the dramatic. In composing, I work with structures and geometries of perception; this includes my own thinking activity, and requires a fine-tuned personal awareness of inner states. Imagination and first thoughts leading to the conceptual ground of a composition originate from a central space deep within the/my 'inner' world. Winnicott claims that the core of a personality rests in silence and is fundamentally isolate. The innermost reality may be characterised by the wish not to be found (Winnicott, 1972, pp. 179-192). From this hidden origin, the process of notating a composition is long and intense for me; it activates creativity and is accompanied by considerable struggle at the same time. I do not experience it as a translation process, i.e. a transfer of content from one system to another similar system; it seems to bring about a radical shift in paradigms. For me, notation is a key phase which extends the inner, compositional process into performance.

¹ Because of the translucent print the score appears in an inverted view to the audience.



Example 3: The translucent score veiling the performer's face (photo by Pia Palme).

I experience this phase as a domain of its own, located neither 'inside' nor 'outside'. Drawing on Winnicott, I would define it as an intermediate zone - together with its manifest objects, i.e. the first sketches of notation, up to the score for performance as its final product. This area and its phenomena simultaneously contrast with and join the immediate, personal reality of my 'inside world' and the common property of the 'outside reality'. While the latter is more objectively perceived, and open to others, the inner core remains isolate and hidden. In my highly personal approach to composition, notation is the intense working process of constructing a bridge from the true isolate to common ground. Winnicott's explanations help to understand the complexity of this work, and also clarify my ongoing discontent with standard forms of notation. In my creative process, notation is an intermediary which requires openness and a space of its own; mechanised and standard forms of score writing can barely serve as tools here.

The function of objects in my recent pieces is to invite playfulness into the domain of notation. Haptic textures increase physical awareness; they invite the outer reality. In my work, objects are neither dramatic enhancements, nor added for scenic effect. I select objects from conceptional principles only. During the experimental phase, there is a process of feedback from both sides, the inner and the outer reality. The role of feedback is highly important: substantial exchange is a necessary ingredient, in fact the mingling of outer and inner keeps the

creative process going. This may also include communication with performers. Only if experiments with an object are satisfactory, and everything fits into the final compositional structure, do I integrate an object into a piece. I immediately chose paper as a material for SETZUNG 1.1, and started to work on a performance concept which would synchronise vocal production and movements on paper.

Sor Juana and the permeable walls of a cell

The conception and text of SETZUNG 1.1 connect to the poet-nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, whose life story and work continue to inspire me. Born as Juana Ramírez de Asbaje² near present-day Mexico City as an illegitimate child of a nobleman, she started to write poetry at an early age, and was celebrated as a young artist in the viceregal court. She had the strong wish to devote her life to studying and to art, planned at some time to dress up as a boy to enter school and university, refused to marry as a young woman, and in 1669 chose to be ordained as a nun instead. For the rest of her life, she never left the boundaries of her convent, the order of San Jerónimo, where she lived in a spacious cell, with a substantial library and an extensive collection of scientific and musical instruments. She wrote poetry, essays, plays for theatres, numerous letters and songs. She received guests and visitors in the convent, and maintained a substantial correspondence, an intellectual exchange and debate with the outside world. Most of her works were commissioned, internationally published and spread all over the world - including Europe and as far as Hong Kong. She is renowned for a spirited text, the 'Reply to Sor Philotea' from 1691, in which she openly advocates the rights of women to study, to teach and to write (Paz, 1994, p. 599). Today, many of her works are destroyed and lost; what remains, is enough to make her an outstanding Latin American poet (Paz, 1994, p.693). She probably also composed music, of which nothing is left today. Throughout her life as a nun, she had to cope with restrictions and increasing criticism from her (male) superiors in the church hierarchy. This conflict culminated in 1694: Sor Juana was forced to sign documents of abjuration, one in blood, renounce writing and artistic activities, and give up her library and possessions. Nursing her sister nuns, she died during a devastating epidemic in 1695 (Paz, 1994).

Reflecting on the life and work of the poet-nun, I find the balance of retreat and outreach interesting, in the context of my own creative process. Sor Juana chose to withdraw from the world into a cell, to be able to pursue artistic research. Her writings expanded outside again. I observe a similar process in my work: I need to retreat into the inner core to be able compose, which is like a walled-in cell, too. From there, a piece evolves, until it radiates to the outside reality, meeting an audience. Following Winnicott, there is a process from the lonely isolate to common ground. The installative setting of the score-membrane and performance was inspired by the image of walls of a cell, a kind of social cell-membrane, which Sor Juana constantly penetrates with her writing.

² There is some dispute about the exact year of her birth, most likely 1648 or 1651 (Paz, 1994, p.107).

In composition and text, I refer to poem XXI,³ where Sor Juana writes about a longing to communicate with a distant, beloved person (Cruz, 1966, pp.75-81). She postulates writing as a means of exchange, and acknowledges its limitations, brought about by her inability to intellectually comprehend certain emotional realms; she can only write about what she is able to conceptualise. I found her precise and detailed observations quite similar to what I perceive in my own writing process. Sor Juana uses the analogy of a feather for writing. Portraits of Sor Juana show her with a feather in her right hand, a traditional way of picturing an author, writer or scholar (Paz, 1994, pp. 384-385). This prompted me to use feathers as objects for sonic and visual outcomes.

A further aspect of Sor Juana's corpus of writings, which is of interest to me as a composer, is feminism. In my text for SETZUNG 1.1 there are explicitly feminist passages, referring to Sor Juana's fate.

A compositional exploration of the intermediary

I started the working process with writing the text for the piece. It is a multi-layered reflection about the above themes: a personal observation of the creative process spanning over three areas (inner, outer, intermediary), a personal re-enactment of Sor Juana's thinking, and feminist statements as an explicit extension towards the outer reality of today's society. The text follows a post-dramatic dramaturgy. I start from monitoring personal processes, and several times return to that theme, interrupting other layers of the text. I move into the personality of Sor Juana as she writes, and into an artistic exploration of some phases of her life. There is a culmination point, a three-word slogan: 'MACHT STATT PFLEGE' - printed in capital letters. The following passage evokes thoughts of ending, death and settling; the text closes with a translated quote from Sor Juana.

After the text, I sketched the composition, and then formed the choreography as a counterpoint to text and vocality. Using a big sheet of paper and working through the composition sketch sound by sound, I explored possible connections of gestures, positions, body movements and object handling with vocal productions. I chose additional objects, a single goose feather and feathers mounted on rotating milk whisks⁴. The feathers are a reference to Sor Juana and the process of (hand)writing. Using milk whisks for rotation adds interesting flurries of sound and an oscillating visual element (see example 4). All these movements produce a selection of noises and percussive articulations integrated into the piece; in the final score, choreography is fused with vocal production.

³ Sor Juana's poems do not have titles originally; titles were added by her first publisher (Cruz, 1996, p. 16).

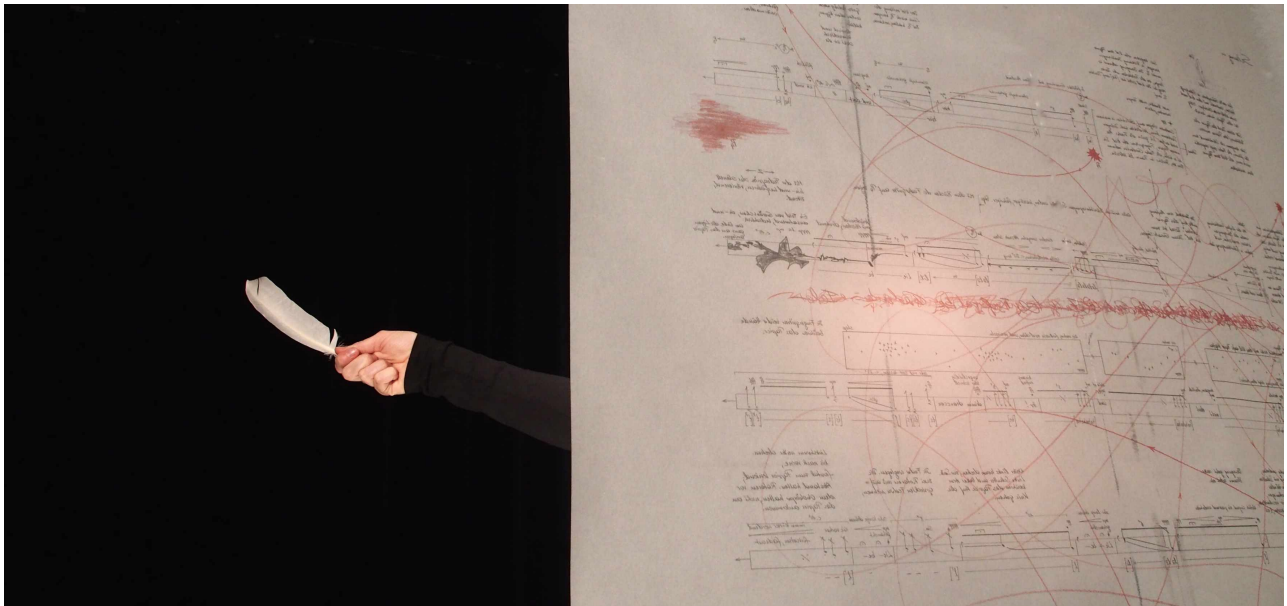
⁴ I discovered this technique during work on my piece GIB SIE WIEDER, collaborating with harpist Rhodri Davies, see under http://piapalme.at/works/gib_sie_wieder-palme-2014/ [Accessed 16 September 2014]



Example 4: Milk whisks and feathers (photo by Pia Palme).

Notation of movements happens in two ways: over the stave for the voice, there is a row of verbal choreographic directions; for this, I used black pencil. The notation of positions and gestures for movements made directly onto the score membrane are defined with red pencil. Red lines run over and across instructions in black pencil, layered as a second score across the black handwriting. Here, I imitate design principles as in patterns for sewing: line systems of different texture can be shared on a single sheet of paper. There is an intentional reference to female handcrafting, which I have been practising for a long time.

The composition features a fragmented sonic personality, following the text. The fragmented text-layers are further deconstructed in the compositional working cycle; here I apply the technique of condensing layers through implied polyphony, a Baroque compositional structure. Introspective parts have to be recited with a closed mouth. The piece builds from a subtle passage with mostly unvoiced, whispered textures and barely audible spoken words to a middle part with sung vocality (see example 5). Here the word 'Liebe' (German for 'love') is sung. Only four words are sung in the entire piece; I chose this word because of its content and its sonic qualities, both of which are connected with human interaction and exchange. The 'L' at the beginning requires a partially closed mouth, which illustrates the transition from inside to outside. At the same time, the performer's movements develop from a first connection with the tip of a feather to the paper, to subtle explorations of the terrain, to big movements, then smaller 'writing' gestures with a feather, to touching the score with hands, upper body and mouth. The vocal development from unvoiced to sung is accompanied by an intensification of physical contact with the score.



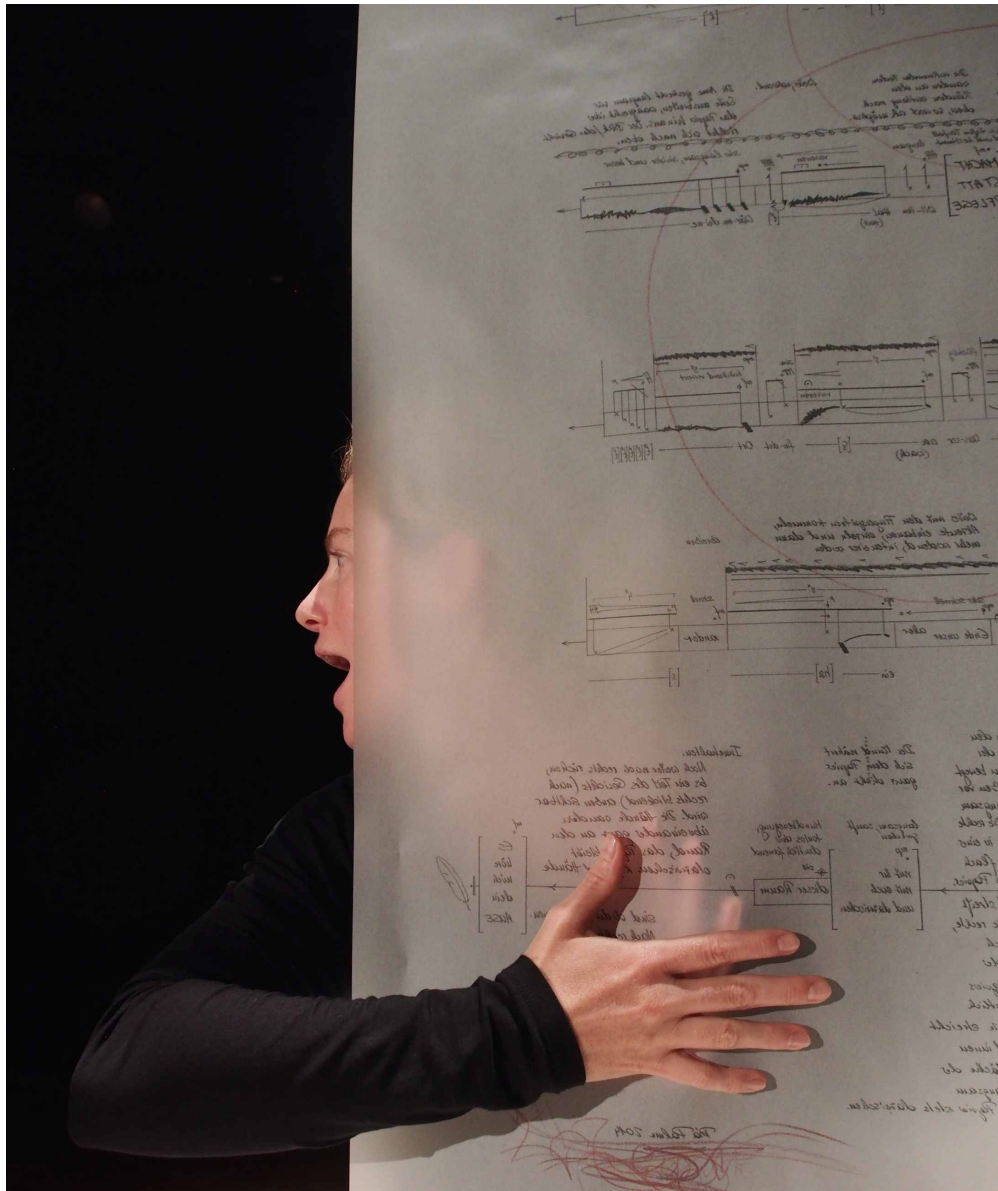
Example 5: Gesture in the first part of the piece; the corresponding position in the score is towards the end of the first system, precisely at the word 'dort' ('there').

The performer stands at the beginning; in the middle part, repeating the sung word 'Love', she is asked to go down on her knees, and keeps this kneeling position to the end. This is for practical reasons - the musical notation needs to be spaced out vertically on the paper - but also for content: at the final stage of her life, Sor Juana had to bend to the authorities. A dynamic point of culmination is expressed in this kneeling position, with arms outstretched far to the sides, as if crucified, extended by rotating feathers. Here, the performer is instructed to boldly recite the slogan 'MACHT STATT PFLEGE'. The passage translates as 'power instead of care/nurturing/nursing'. The word 'Pflege' in German sums up a number of meanings connected with nursing, supporting and helping, traditionally women's activities in many societies. I wrote this passage as a peak statement of text, gesture and sound, about feminist aspects of Sor Juana's life and work. Apart from the historic reference, it is also a furious contemporary statement about what I wish for women to change, worldwide. At this point I still perceive women pushed into helping roles, lacking in social power, and concerned with care and nursing, instead of decision making - or composing and writing.

Towards the end, vocality dominates over movement. Three bell-like sung words are fragmented by more noisy expressions, and herald the end: 'Ende unser aller' (in English approximately 'the end of all of us') - like bells of a church ringing, as a sonic reference to Sor Juana's life. The performer is instructed to move one arm in front of the membrane, and her palms gently caress each other, with the score in between. For the end of the piece, I turn to a German translation of a line from Sor Juana's poem XXI: 'Óyeme con los ojos'⁵. One's field

⁵ A possible English translation is 'Hear me with eyes alone' (Cruz, 1988, p. 71). The German translation I use is 'Es höre mich dein Auge' (Cruz, 1966, p.75);

of vision may cover a greater physical distance than the range of one's voice and hearing, or at times it may not possible to communicate verbally with someone within vision. I draw on Sor Juana's paradox to illustrate the dispute about the influence of the visual on the aural, and vice versa, in musical performance. Only at this moment is part of the performer's face visible, near the lower lefthand corner of the score. The actress is directed to turn sideways, on her knees, while she tenderly and softly whispers the words, as if addressing a lover (see example 6).



Example 6: Position at the end of the piece (photo by Pia Palme).

For the title, I looked at the German word 'Besetzung'. This term has various different meanings:⁶ from 'occupation', 'allocation', 'cast' to 'instrumentation'. Sigmund Freud (Freud, 1972), in developing a vocabulary for psychoanalysis around 1900, introduced the word 'Besetzung' to denote an investment of emotional or mental content, by a person, into an object or an idea. There is the sense of occupation of an otherwise existing object, an extension of one's personality. I chose the main part 'Setzung' of this word, without its prefix 'be'. 'Setzung' roughly translates as 'setting', 'settling' or 'placement' and is mostly used as a term in technical language.⁷ The title refers to the setting/placement of the membrane score in front of the vocalist, and also to the fact that I allocate layers of compositional content to a huge piece of paper. There are hidden layers, too, which are of personal relevance: the inner emotional work tied to the composition; my connection to Sor Juana, or simply the extended physical workflow of concentrated handwriting and drawing on the big surface.

Conclusion

During the composition of SETZUNG 1.1 and a contextual exploration into the subject of the intermediary, I came to understand relevant aspects of the creative process. I found that in my current work as a composer, the phase of notation is one of personal importance as a third area between inner and outer reality; objects enhance the intermediary in a playful way. The composition and my observations expand into further work in reference to Sor Juana; I want to develop the format of a membrane score installation into a larger scenic setting, and explore the potential of an extended vocal solo.

SETZUNG 1.1 was premiered in Vienna in September 24th 2014 by the actress Michaela Schausberger. I wish to thank her for the readiness to test sketched versions and to experiment, and her brilliant performance. All photographs were taken by myself, at rehearsals for the performance, with her permission.

References:

⁶ In Grimm, J. and Grimm, J. (1854) *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jakob und Josef Grimm*. Leipzig: 1854. [Online] Available at: <http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemma=besetzung> [Accessed 23 September 2014] and further [Online] Available at: <http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemma=besetzen> [Accessed 23 September 2014]

⁷ In English, there is a difference between 'settling' and 'setting'; for the German term see [Online] Available at: <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Setzung> [Accessed 16 September 2014]

de la Cruz, S. J. I. (1988) A Sor Juana Anthology. Translated by A. S. Trueblood. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

de la Cruz, J. I. (1996) Es höre mich dein Auge : Lyrik, Theater, Prosa. Translated by E. Dorre et al. Published by A. P. A. Adam. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik. (Original work published in 1692).

Freud, S. (1972) Zur Psychologie der Traumvorgänge. In S. Fischer Verlag (Eds). Die Traumdeutung. Studienausgabe Band II. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag. First published 1900. [Online] Available at: <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/die-traumdeutung-907/7> [Accessed 11 September 2014]

Paz, O. (1994) Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz oder Die Fallstricke des Glaubens. Translated by M. Bramberg. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag. (Original work published in 1982).

Winnicott, D. W. (1972) The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment. Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development. London: The Hogarth Press.

Winnicott, D. W. (2005) Playing and Reality. London: Routledge Classics.

Sources of examples:

Score and all photographs by Pia Palme.

Text for SETZUNG 1.1 (Pia Palme 2014)

~~Gedanken steigen auf. Entstehen in meinem Denkraum. Verdichten sich. Drängen nach außen. Ich spüre die Feder. An meinen Finger, Fingerspitzen: der Kiel. Sie ist so leicht, die Feder. Gedanken nehmen Form an, Struktur im Raum. Ich schreibe.~~

hier
und

dort

ich und

HA

~~Ich spüre den weichen Flaum an den Fingern. Haut und Haare in köstlicher Berührung. Will nicht aufhören.~~

Liebe

ich denke also bist du hier
bin ich gedacht

nicht dort
ich und

IHR

drinnen draußen
zwischen

ein Fühlen in mir
in dem
was begrenzt ist als

INNEN

halten
da

Liebe
sehnt sich nach

kann Leben losgelassen sein
verspielt
barfuss
auf einer Wiese im Tau

~~Sie dreht sich in einem fort. Immer weiter. Luft. Feder. Luft. Feder.~~

und fröhlich
mit
geteilt

Verantwortung
haben halten teilen
mit sein

MACHT STATT PFLEGE

Willen

HALT

Wärme
deine

ist Staub ist Erde ist Asche am Ende
Sie denkt: ist Asche am Ende
ihre Schönheit
ist Wort

und ist dabei
innen ganz tief

so wach
so klar

WASSER

findet immer
Ort tief unten

hat ihren Platz
hier

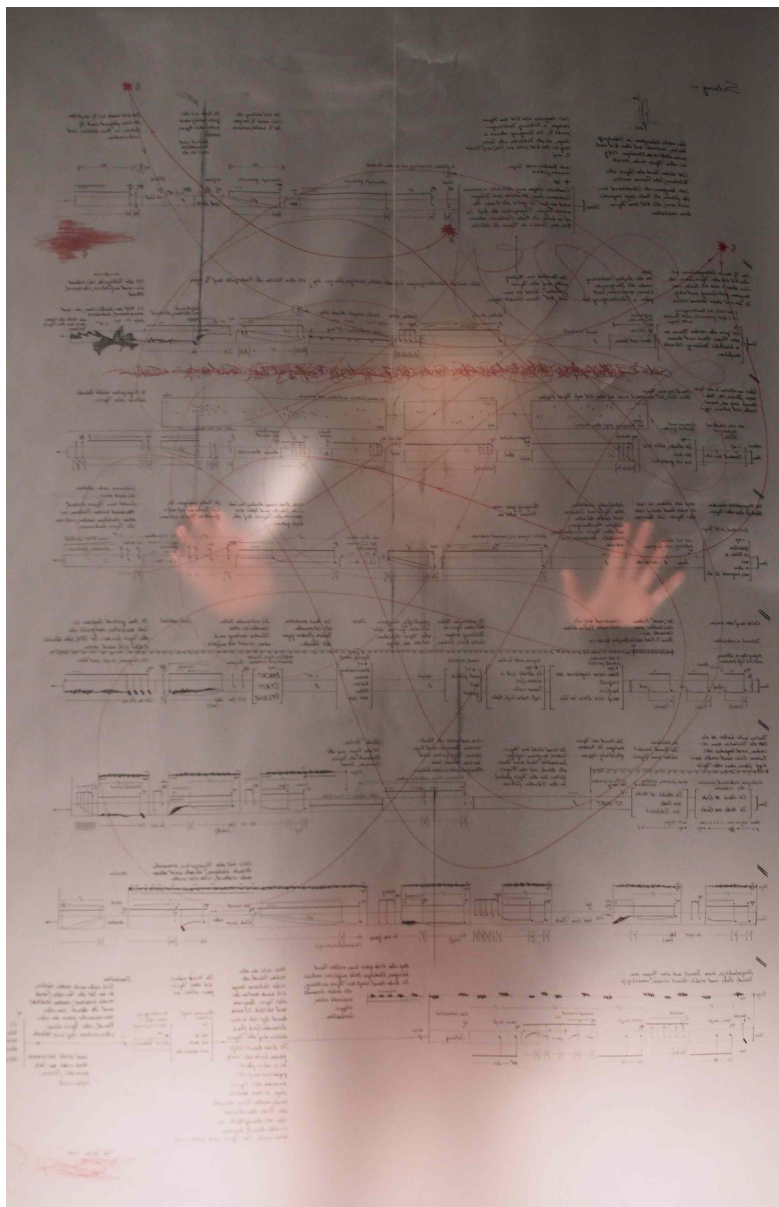
aus-

einander Setzung

Ende
unser aller

mit ihr
mit euch
und dazwischen
dieser Raum

'es höre mich dein AUGE



Example 7: Total view of membrane score and the performer behind, with a white feather
(photo by Pia Palme).