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A Juggler on the Moon: How Sounds Think in Tom Stoppard's *Darkside*

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article porte sur la pièce radiophonique *Darkside* écrite par Tom Stoppard en 2013, laquelle intègre des éléments de l'album *TheDark Side of the Moon* (1973) du groupe rock Pink Floyd et met en scène une série d'expériences de pensée. Mon but est de montrer comment la réunion de ces différents éléments nous force à réfléchir sur le travail et l'usage du son dans le théâtre radiophonique, et en particulier à la façon dont il articule ici le thème central des changements climatiques. Poussant cette réflexion plus avant, on trouvera ici en creux une hypothèse plus générale selon laquelle l'idée même du "son de la pensée", telle qu'elle se manifeste dans *Darkside*, conduirait à développer une nouvelle approche du médium radiophonique, et dont le point de départ ne serait pas de s'interroger sur ce que signifient les sons, mais sur comment ils "pensent".

A Juggler on the Moon : How Sounds Think in Tom Stoppard's *Darkside*

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> […] *The history of the ear is always a history of madness too.* - Friedrich Kittler, "The God of Ears" (2015 [1982] : 9)

I. Lunatics

A heartbeat, a clock's tick, a cash register, a helicopter, voices of argument and of madness, laughter, oscillations slithering across layered tracks, all intensifying until they coalesce into a cry about to burst into a watery chord, but then give way to an unfamiliar scream as a speeding train rattles the soundscape, signaling catastrophe. Tom Stoppard's radio play *Darkside* begins with this passage of *musique concrète* drawn from "Speak to Me", the overture of Pink Floyd's 1973 album *The Dark Side of the Moon*, which sold more than 45 million copies worldwide over the 741 weeks it spent on the charts from the golden age of the LP to that of the CD (see Harris 2005; Reising 2005). Conceived as an artistic challenge for the venerated author (and as a gimmick to mark the 40th anniversary of the record) *Darkside* was a special commission by the BBC and aired with much hype on August 26th, 2013 on Radio 2, produced by James Robinson. Shortly thereafter it was issued in a CD with versions of the text in 9 languages, accompanied by artwork from Aardman Animation, which also created a short film based on the piece (Stoppard 2013).[1] All this made it among the most high-profile U.K. radio plays in a generation, and one that despite its many opaque references felt contemporary thanks to its thematic exploration of humanist sensibilities in the Anthropocene-era. Its focus, for example, on climate change provides a new way to hear the prog rock album, which has long been

lost in a fog of its own attending myths, from its allusions to enigmatic songwriter Syd Barrett to the old chestnut about the album as an alternative soundtrack to *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming 1939). To many listeners, it may have seemed as if the play exhibited little more than the *passé* LP, the obsolete radio play reliving their glory days together on the island of misfit media, among other senescent and abandoned sound arts. But to a careful listener *Darkside* represents a surprising revival of the relevance of the radio play as an artistic form, a rebirth that harkens back both to the medium's longstanding preoccupations and to its possible future.

Darkside is the story of a young woman and the voices in her head. Emily McCoy (Amaka Okafor) travels a landscape of riddles prompted by a part-time university course in ethics. To solve them, McCoy takes a peripatetic adventure with a resurrected Boy (Iwan Rheon), who is the casualty of a thought experiment gone wrong. During her odyssey to come to terms with the problem of the good in an age of evil, McCoy is also followed by her buffoonish instructor Mr. Baggott (Rufus Sewell), who occasionally slips into his alter ego Ethics Man as he parses the conundrums in which Emily finds herself, and who yearns to find a niche among philosophical schools of thought. Emily drops hints that all this is really a fantasy stemming from her ongoing treatment for mental illness by Dr. Antrobus (Bill Nighy) whose voice we hear in the corners of the drama and inside the voices of others. At times it seems like the play is an extended acouasm from Emily's hospital bed. At other times, she seems in tune with another plane of the drama, claiming to "hear voices that no one else can hear" at the precise moment we hear those same elements in the songs of *Dark Side*. Yet despite its solipsism, the play still has the feeling of a journey, depicting a mountain trip to find the secret of life from The Wise One (Peter Marinker), a visit to a movie-quoting Fat Man (Adrian Scarborough) on a blighted grazing common, an imagined speech to change the world, and an absurd witch trial. The narrative comes to rest like a leaf on the grass in the mind of McCoy as she recovers after Antrobus's laser brain surgery and expresses her fears of the future in the climate change era. And through it all, the Floyd record bubbles in the background with its moods of paranoia and dread.

Stoppard has joked that the extent of his musical training lay in dinging the triangle in a school band during his childhood in India, yet he has also been fascinated by music, an interest that surfaced most recently in his 2006 stage play *Rock 'n' Roll*, which also references Barrett as well as Czech underground rock (Nadel 2002 : 33). You could say that Stoppard's entire radio output is a kind of concept album with its recurring themes of suicidal madness (*The Dog it Was that Died* and *Albert's Bridge*), time (*Artist Descending a Staircase*, *If You're Glad*, *I'll be Frank*, and *In the Native State*) and falling (*Artist* and *The Dog it Was That Died*). He even recycles lines – 19 years apart, both *Artist* and *Native State* make jokes about whether or not unicorns are real when

we imagine them (Stoppard 1994; Stoppard 2012). *Darkside* hosts the same preoccupations, but unlike the others it has an indexical relation to music whose characteristics may be unique in the history of Anglophone radio. In the 1950s the American anthology *Suspense* took popular songs and turned them into *noir* radio plays; a decade later in England Charles Parker, Peggy Seeger and Ewen MacColl invented the Radio Ballad, which blended folk songs with social documentary; and in 1967 Glenn Gould's "Idea of North" in Canada spread voices of northerners across a movement of Sibelius's *Symphony #5*. However, to my knowledge no playwright has nested a radio drama in an entire record, particularly one so heavily invested in the album as expressive form. In a 1977 *New Yorker* article, Kenneth Tynan called Stoppard's *Hamlet*-inspired play *Rosencrantz and Gildenstern are Dead* the first play to use another play as "décor" (Tynan 1977). That's also an apt way of capturing the relationship between *Darkside* and *Dark Side*. The album provides an ornamental system supporting the story, which could not exist without the music, just as the story reshapes the album, turning text into context and using *Dark Side* as its own dark side.

It is possible that the project is an outgrowth of a chain of associations that began with Stoppard's own "lunatic" obsession. In a *Theater Quarterly* interview from spring 1974, Stoppard was asked to account for why the word "moon" recurred so often in his titles, character names and elsewhere. The playwright recalled being struck by a moment in the Billy the Kid western *The Left-Handed Gun* (Arthur Penn 1958) in which Paul Newman shoots the reflection of the moon in a horse-trough. In the interview – captured not long after Stoppard himself may have first heard *The Dark Side of the Moon* – he had this to say :

> I thought, I *felt*, that the destruction of moon mythology and moon association in poetry and romance, superstition and everything, would be a sort of minute lobotomy performed on the human race, like a tiny laser making dead some small part of the psyche. And this perception or pseudo-perception was something that I would want somehow to write about. (Hudson, Itzin & Trussler 1994 : 72)

Forty years later, Stoppard would indeed destroy a *Moon*, removing it from the Pink Floyd title as cleanly as a neurosurgeon with a laser, for a play about a lobotomy.

II. What do Sounds Think

In this article, I propose that this encounter between the most sonorous of Stoppard's radio works and the most theatrical of rock albums creates unusual dynamics that ought to be situated within a history of how dramatists have considered thought itself to be an activity especially amenable to sonic exploration on radio. Thought – whether in a stream or as an aside, as an action or silence – is second only to darkness among touchstone tropes of the medium. Many know radio as a "Theater of the

Mind", a term meant to articulate how we experience the theater we are listening to within our own thoughts. The metaphor also has origins in philosophy. Centuries before radio, David Hume was among the first to depict sense-experience as an interiorized drama in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (Hume 1978 : 253); R.L. Stephenson may have ushered the concept into modernity in his 1888 essay "A Chapter on Dreams", using the phrase "theater of the brain" to describe a point just before sleeping in which "Brownies" put on plays in the mind, a model of the radio play *avant la lettre* (Stephenson 1888 : 122). The concept "theater of the mind" was first linked to radio during the 1930s (there are several claimants to the coinage, which is true of "concept album" as well), but it would grow in usage only in the 1950s, when the rise of television retrospectively imposed upon radio a sense of imaginative license.

In my work, I have tried to unpack the idea of the theater of the mind, first by arguing that it impedes the critical ear (claiming a play "is all in our minds" undermines our study of the delicate art of putting it there), and second by showing how the medium developed into a laboratory for cultural notions of interiority over the middle decades of the century (Verma 2012). If we believe that radio asks us to imagine, then it must embody shared assumptions about what imagination is and how it works, assumptions that evolve in complex relation to media, politics and sensibility, and it is not surprising that even the most rudimentary radio drama cannot help but explore mental breakdowns. You can hear the theater of the mind in the trembling voice of Mrs. Stevenson in Lucille Fletcher's "Sorry, Wrong Number" (1943), in the smoothness of time in Dylan Thomas's "Under Milk Wood" (1954), in the whistle of a disembodied brain in Orson Welles's "Donovan's Brain" (1944), but you also have to get through the obfuscation of the same concept in order to notice those granular sonic details. In short, my position has been that the idea of a "theater of the mind" is very bad for radio criticism, but rather good for radio history.

This essay takes a new approach, one prompted by a reemergence of the issue of how to depict thought through sound. In marquee radio works of the current generation, a fascination with making thought sonic has returned. In the U.S., the inaugural episode of *Radiolab* in 2002 and that of *Invisibilia* in 2015 both consider the theory of thoughts in depth (strikingly, *Radiolab* even dramatizes Stephenson's "Dreamer" essay, unaware of its connection to the nickname of the medium); while recent works in Europe and Canada by artists such as Pejk Malinovski (*Everything, Nothing, Harvey Keitel* 2013), Tim Hinman (*In One Ear and Out the Other* 2015), and Anna Friz and Emmanuel Madan (*The Joy Channel* 2015) depict consciousness during meditation, sense processing and empathic communication, often in ways that are absented from the bodies that are doing it. What these works share is a nagging idea that sounds don't merely communicate knowledge from being to being, but that they can also ponder, cognize and know on their own, perhaps

even get along without us. "Words and sounds and thoughts are each other in different tuning", as Stoppard's *Darkside* characters insist with surprising earnestness.

So what role might the notion of a "theater of the mind" have in helping to guide critical habits today? *Darkside* represents a useful *argumentum ad absurdum* for the theater of the mind idiom, exhibiting the ways that radio fixes thought through sound and vice versa, suggesting that listening is itself a philosophical activity. Meeting the play on these terms could help move radio criticism beyond paradigms that ask what sound *means* or *is* in the context of fiction, and toward what it *does to* fiction. In other words, just as W.J.T. Mitchell challenged picture theory by taking seriously the question of "what pictures want", probing the perception that images afford a powerful capacity to desire, beguile and insist, I want to suggest that it is time to upset listening theory by asking something similar (see Mitchell 2005). This essay is after what thought "sounds like" in contemporary dramatic audio, but it also proposes a deeper question : when it comes to issues of representation and deliberation, of the present and future, *what do sounds think*? Like the problems facing Stoppard's characters, it's a question that cannot be answered exactly, only inhabited, in order to let it resonate more clearly.

III. Textual Pointing

Recycling "Speak to Me" and incorporating its elements into a play, Stoppard and Robinson signal that *Darkside* will complicate long-standing rules of thumb that radio drama is (1) fundamentally made up of words, sound effects and music (a paradigm flattening heterogeneities within each of these categories and shortchanging elements such as pacing, depth, layering and segue) and (2) words define depicted events the most, taking on a controlling role – "the supremacy of the spoken word in the hierarchy of radio drama remains unchallenged" as John Hand and Mary Traynor's recent book explains (Hand & Traynor 2011 : 41). When it comes to music and effects, John Drakakis sums up the prevailing philosophy : "Their function is usually, as all theoreticians agree, expressive, whether they are communicating information in some symbolic form or are used to evoke a particular mood" (1981 : 26). These "expressive" elements are, moreover, seen as inherently unstable dramatic properties, requiring supplemental confirmation in verbal form. In 1949, Milton Kaplan's *Radio and Poetry* borrowed a weaving metaphor : "Dialogue is undeniably the warp of the radio play. Sound effects supply the woof" (Kaplan 1949 : 93). Fifty years later, Andrew Crisell's *Understanding Radio* explained the same idea a little more clearly : "Sounds require textual pointing – support from the dialogue or narrative" as a way of managing polysemy, a model that Crisell likens to *ancrage* in Barthes' sense of the term (Crisell 1994 : 48). We hear what sounds like a train, but delay affixing that signifier until voices say "Look there! – There's a train coming through!", at which point the matter is settled.

    As it sets scenes and clarifies events, "textual pointing" can also take on special functions, something that Stoppard has long explored. *Artist Descending a Staircase* is saturated in private jokes on textual pointing, from the artist Beauchamp instructing an imaginary horse evoked by coconut halves to steady himself, to the sound of the fly that bookends the play, a pest that eludes textual pointing but succumbs to a thumping. For critic Elissa Guralnick, these and other features point toward a Stoppardian fascination with "*trompe l'oreille*" effects, which establish gaps between word and meaning that produce puns, misapprehensions and, above all, ironies that indicate the paradoxical nature of radio representation (Guralnick 1996 : 29-51). It is certainly true that textual pointing is used in stylized ways. In *In the Native State*, a scholar named Pike, external to the two main temporal sequences, often adds textual footnotes to the life of British writer Flora Crewe in 1930s India, although he is ignorant of facts we ourselves can hear, making his comments amusing. *Albert's Bridge* starts with a fascinating passage of textual pointing as a group of painters working along a suspension bridge call out to one another to establish distances vis-à-vis our audioposition. The sound of painting itself is narrated by Albert, whose brush we hear in extreme focus as he mutters : "Dip brush slap slip, tickle and wipe". In this way, the sound design firmly establishes the play's thematic preoccupation with scale long before its characters do. A more comic example comes in Stoppard's *On Dover Beach*, an imagined scene in which poet Matthew Arnold talks to himself about his famous lyric poem. The play suggests that Arnold's line about "clashing by night" points not at the waves below, but to his inexperienced Victorian-era bride, who we hear sobbing in the background. The text "points" impishly, in two directions at once. *Darkside*'s sequences of textual pointing often mock themselves with excess. In the witch trial sequence, for instance, the drama brings in a radio Commentator to clarify events, a sequence that strongly recalls Archibald MacLeish's 1937 classic "The Fall of the City". The Commentator witnesses the following : "A crowd of about a hundred people, some women and children among them, carrying suitcases and bundles, have appeared from nowhere – surging around the prisoners – this is unbelievable! It looks like a rescue attempt!" (Stoppard 2013). As textual pointing comes to the rescue of our minds struggling to visualize the scene, the very mechanism that assures that what we hear is "real" turns the scene surreal.

    The attraction of textual pointing as a theory of radio lies in its capacity to attend closely to a moment of ascription, a well-marked node in a narrative stream at which something is decided about the existence or nonexistence of some event, object or phenomenon, and thus chronicle a passage into intelligibility, even into dramatic being. Like Rick Altman's concept of the "sound hermeneutic", in which a film's sound asks "where?" and its image always answers "here", textual pointing sets up a systematic rhythm of "what?" followed by "this" (Altman 1986). Strict

adherence to that model does not characterize Stoppard, whose main theme in radio, as Kathleen Kelly has put it, is "the maddeningly relative nature of human perception and understanding" (Kelly 1989 : 451). In *Darkside*'s appropriation of "Speak to Me", for instance, words act as music, effects act like words and music, and so forth. This confusion casts into doubt the separation between the three elements that any hierarchy of them presupposes. It is hard to come to grips, for instance, with the status of janitor Gerry O'Driscoll's voice "… not frightened of dying, any time will do […]" under Clare Torry's spectacular vocals in "The Great Gig in the Sky" when both are used to underscore a Stoppard speech. Interjecting from soundtrack to drama, music transforms into a sort of sound effect. The opposite transposition also occurs, with a card from the deck of the drama slipping into that of the music. After the Wise One informs Emily that the secret of life is "This is not a drill", she expresses disappointment that "The secret of life is what your mother's been shouting up the stairs at you". Later, in the middle of a passage from the song "Time", we hear the voice of Emily's mother – "Wake up, Emily. Your life is going by!" – with enough reverb that it seems like it could be one of the actualities included in the original record from 1973. The line is text incorporated into music, now disguised as text incorporated into music from the past.

And even if it were possible to make hard and fast classifications of each sound, *Darkside* would still stymie us by putting effects and music into unusual anchoring roles to the structure. Several scenes are back-timed to a particular Floyd vocal with script notes that chart down to the second where and how music should be playing, treating it like an exiting and entering character in ways that do not appear in other Stoppard scripts. "Time" bridges four separate scenes; there are no fewer than 14 "stage directions" for the song "Money" alone. Small wonder that song lyrics explain verbal scenes more forcefully than vice versa. An interesting case occurs during the scene of the witch trial, as a corrupt Politician character expounds on his theory of justice. In his speech, the coin and register sound effects in the opening of "Money" sound in the background as he pompously explains that society requires "constraints, inclusiveness and accountancy". The Politician cannot hear the soundtrack, but it nevertheless seems to have distracted him into making this goofy slip of the tongue.

The use of depth also prioritizes music over words. Music not only occupies the greatest distance away from "where" we listen, deep in the background of audioposition, but it also comes closer to us than any other element, flush against our ears for a greater duration than conventional radio plays are willing to risk. By my count, musical passages occupy the entire foreground for at least 19:21 of the 54:29 minutes of the play, thus making up more than one third of airtime and conveying the sense that the play is an interruption of the primary experience of the album. That "interruptive aesthetic" is built in. Pink Floyd fans will

recall that the brief track "Speak to Me" merges seamlessly with the next track on the album, "Breathe"; many CD editions of the album combine the two into one. In a detailed analysis, Kevin Holm-Hudson has shown that the use of tonal segues such as this one are like lyrical correspondences between tracks, giving the album its rhetoric; these are what make *The Dark Side of the Moon* a concept album rather than a series of tracks (Holm-Hudson 2005). But in his script, Stoppard specifies that *Darkside*'s first dramatic scene ought to begin with the first 74 seconds of *Dark Side*. In this way, the action cleaves a space between two songs that had been elided, where sound effects have their affective force diverted into a dramatic scene, hopping off track from a scheduled itinerary. That is exactly the subject of the subsequent scene, making the editing an objective anticipation of what the dialogue and effects are about to depict.

IV. *Sono Ergo Sum*

The scene that follows can help show how Stoppard's aesthetic of dis*ancrage* fits into a broader sonic argument about the play, favoring indecision and diversion over conclusive reasoning. In the scene, we hear a scream in the foreground as dialogue is delivered "American comic-book style" in a series of voices that sound in short bursts :

Look there! – There's a train coming through!

The signal must have failed!

It's speeding toward where the bridge got washed away in the flood!

As these voices "look on" in horror, moral philosopher Ethics Man appears, stepping forward to switch the points and divert the train onto another track just in time. But as the onlookers discover, there is a young man on the other track, and we listen as he is struck and killed to save the passengers. "I did what had to be done", quips Ethics Man grimly. A young child turns to him, asking if the hero saw the boy who had to be sacrificed for the survival of those on the train. Ethics Man replies, "I saw him, son. Someday you'll understand", while the music takes over.

I see this as a dramatization of a thought experiment first proposed by Phillipa Foot (1978). The "Trolley Problem" asks about the moral situation of a driver who must choose one track that will lead him to hit five laborers and another that will lead him to hit just one. Among moral philosophers, the problem helps to differentiate utilitarian consequentialists – who opt for the best foreseeable outcome and save the greater number of those in danger – and deontologists, who balk at the use of killing even to save, and it is often subject to comparisons and refinements that draw ever-finer distinctions between theories of moral action in the tradition of analytical philosophy. Like most thought experiments, this one evolves. Philosopher Judith Jarvis Thomson introduced innovations to the scenario in the 1970s and 80s, some of which Stop-

pard also follows, including taking the dilemma out of the hands of the trolley driver and putting it into those of a bystander (Thomson 1985). There are many variants across the "trolleyology" literature, some of them quite byzantine, incorporating fat men pushed from footbridges onto tracks, looped tracks that put both groups in danger, Lazy Susan's, avalanches and moving platforms (see Bruers & Braeckman 2014). Stoppard appears to have chosen a train over a trolley to echo sounds from the album more clearly, and perhaps selected a washed-out track to hint at McCoy's fear of climate change.

The listener does not need to reach back into her memory for any dimly-recalled philosophy course to get all that, because the next scene puts us inside just such a classroom. Chairs shift and mouths cough. Mr. Baggott asks his class to raise their hands if they believe that Ethics Man did the right thing, then he asks them to raise their hands if not. It's a canny joke in radio, which cannot give us the results of the poll, one that is later repeated in the same setting when Mr. Baggott tries to spell the name "Nietzsche" but misplaces the z on an invisible chalk-board, prompting undergraduate sniggering. After the poll, Baggott calls out Emily for failing to raise her hand for either choice, as she debates with him the question of whether or not it matters who the boy was, an issue the professor bats away with annoyance, more concerned with classifying the decision according to systems explored on the syllabus. As a utilitarian, Ethics Man must increase the sum of human happiness. "We define happiness", he explains "as a state of well-being, starting off with being alive instead of dead", punctuated with Roger Waters' brief vocal passage from "Breathe".

What follows is a scene in which McCoy meets up with the dead Boy from the thought experiment, as they begin walking and discussing the ramifications of the events leading up to his death, puzzling over whether or not it would matter if the people in the train could have been geography teachers, villains or jerk boyfriends, or if the Boy on the track might know the secret to stop the glaciers from melting. Over the eight-note synth of "On the Run", the Boy speaks – philosophically, how else? – of his own death, and clarifies a Kantian objection that to divert the train and kill the one for the benefit of the many would disrespect humanness, which is something that cannot be subjected to quantitative measures. The result is to "diss the transcendental", at which point Emily asks what the transcendental means :

BOY

It's the juggler on the radio

EMILY

The juggler on the radio?

BOY

There's a juggler on the radio, he sounds exactly the same as if there's no juggler. There's lots of people listening to the radio and some are saying "I believe in the juggler," and some are saying "There is no juggler!" and there's a few philosopher type people who are saying "How is a juggler you can't see, hear, smell or touch, different from no juggler?" But there's nothing any of these people can tell each other about the existence or the non-existence of the juggler.

EMILY

So how do you know there's a juggler?

BOY

I heard him on the radio.

The word "juggler" shares its root with Norman *jongleur*, an itinerant musician or minstrel undomesticated by lordly power, a vagabond whose connection to music Jacques Attali has vividly written (1985 : 14-15). The juggler is a buffoon, one who amuses others with story, trick and song. Naturally the inaudible juggler in *Darkside* is a joke on radio itself. After all, when it comes to making things "real" by correlating words, music and effects in mutual support of one another – keep those balls in the air! – Stoppard's juggler is auditory dark matter, pointed at but not there, present in silence and silent in presence, an unmoved mover. In radio *sono ergo sum* is the dictum, as anything that "is" in the play is attached to some kind of sonic event. But the juggler scrambles this notion. To hear the juggler on the radio is to also hear no juggler on the radio.

So if the purpose of thought experiments is similar to the purpose of textual pointing in that both aim to achieve a settled state from out of indeterminacy, to *decide* like Ethics man ("I did what needed to be done") and all the invisible students putting up their hands for one position or the other in a shabby classroom, then we might take a lesson from Emily's silent response. The right answer to the trolley problem is neither to pull the lever nor fail to pull the lever, but to arrest the question in midair, to refuse it. Time and again in *Darkside*, Emily solves a problem by finding the appropriate basis on which to reject its premises, much to the pleasure of the Boy who often says "You've cracked it, Emily" – "cracked" rather than "solved". This seems to fit with Stoppard's sense of his own craft. "There is often no single clear statement in my plays", he has remarked. "What there is, is a series of conflicting statements made by conflicting characters and they tend to play a sort of infinite leap-frog" (Hudson, Itzin & Trussler 1994 : 58). Perhaps indecision may be the most moral answer for many of the questions the play has set before us – is Emily mad? is there a juggler? is Stoppard serious? – and if that is right, then listening philosophically is less like following along while a professor points to the blackboard and more like watching a juggler doing his act in the low gravity of the moon.

V. Shorter of Breath

In a recent article, Christopher Innis has noted that the overwhelming majority of Tom Stoppard's work has to do with the past, both as a setting and a problem. In plays such as *Travesties* and *The Coast of Utopia* trilogy, "History is not just informing the present, it merges with it" (Innis 2006 : 234). *Darkside* follows that tendency. By now it should be obvious that the nesting of drama inside a concept album is only one half of the play's motivating conceit. The other is nesting thought experiments – the "philosopher's instrument of choice" as one writer has it – inside the play, and in curating all three "formats" (play, album, thought experiment) together as three histories in resonant contact with one another (Sorensen 1992 : 7).

All three genres have murky histories that look clearer when considered together, and it is striking that they enter their golden ages one after another, forming an unbroken line of conjectural narrative and mental visualization that spans the 20th century. We believe that Anglophone radio plays were invented in the US at WGY Schenectady and at the BBC between the summer of 1922 and the winter of 1923, with earliest offerings little more than readings of staged plays by Shakespeare and other canonical authors, until a year or so later when the BBC aired "A Comedy of Danger" by Richard Hughes, the first "born radio" play in Britain (Crook 1999 : 4-6; Hand 2011 : 14-16). While concept albums are sometimes associated with folk records like Woody Guthrie's 1940 *Dust Bowl Ballads* and mood music albums of the 1950s, the term "concept album" really took off after 1966 with albums like The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (an album at one point conceived to incorporate a radio play) and The Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*, exploiting the album as a form and creating what Keir Keightley calls albums "conceived as an organic whole" (Keightley : 614). The form enjoyed great popularity in the 1970s and a revival in the 1990's. In the literature, writers speak of how concept albums tell stories, weave together themes or create self-contained worlds, just as Hughes' "Comedy of Danger" signaled the first "true" radio play by conjuring a sense of scenic place that made it more than reading a script aloud; the concept albums of the 1960s and 70s told stories – sonically and narratively – in ways that set them apart from their precursors. These ideas guide the theory of thought experiments, too. Consult the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and you will find that the latter are understood as taking narrative form and demanding experimental visualization in the imagination, one of the things that sets them apart from counterfactuals (Brown & Fehige 2014). Just as radio plays have the reputation of drawing on the listener's storehouse of experienced imagery, moreover, it is often argued that thought experiments draw on inner experience too, from Ernst Mach's view that they tap into unarticulated knowledge to Thomas Kuhn's argument that thought experiments release suppressed discrepancies in evidence, like a *déjà vu* (Mach 1897; Kuhn 1977). Of the

three genres, thought experiments are both the oldest and the newest, tracing their lineage to the pre-Socratics, but coming to the center of analytical philosophy, economics, science and other fields in the 1980s.

For *Darkside*, Stoppard selects experiments that are recent in vintage and that span a number of disciplines, such as the Tragedy of the Commons (popularized by ecologist Garrett Hardin in the 1960s) and the Prisoner's Dilemma (concocted at the RAND corporation in the 1950s). While the events in these vignettes mock each experiment – the dilemma of two prisoners selling one another out to receive an easier sentence is defeated with each prisoner taking false responsibility in a feat of "competitive altruism" – Emily also evinces frustration with these devices.

> In proper life people aren't just out for themselves and there's always a million things you don't know, but your stick-figures think they can work out the answers like doing sudoku. And what I'm thinking is, you can't work out what is the Good, you just know what is the Good. That's what's good about it.

The statement evokes derision from Baggott, who quips that should such intuitionism spread, it would lead to widespread unemployment among moral philosophers.

McCoy's leeriness about the value of thought experiments is clear; *Darkside* expresses skepticism that this type of thinking can teach us about the world. But that is not the whole story, as a second anxiety creeps in at the sonic level. The Trolley scene began with a rapid series of voices each equally closely-miked. The microphone is mobile, everywhere and yet nowhere in the space of the fiction, and volume and reverberation contain no specific information that we can translate into pictorial details. In my work on classic radio drama I term this mode of representation *kaleidosonic*, conveying the sense of simultaneity and of a world in which there exist a series of apertures between which we alternate without moving (Verma 2012 : 57-72). By contrast, the sonic texture of the second scene in the classroom is quite different. Mr. Baggott's voice comes to us from farther off, and intervening coughs and shifted seating suggest that the classroom is depicted from a singular and immobile audioposition, that of Emily McCoy whose place in the world of the fiction we occupy intimately, hearing as she hears and from where she hears in what is conveyed to us as a small seminar room. The third scene of the play (this one broken into three subsections) follows Emily and the Boy talking philosophy as they head up a mountain to find the Wise One, encountering Baggott again along the way and hearing vague and ominous crashes around them.

These three sequences contrast with one another. The first has a mobile microphone moving swiftly across a series of shallow locations in an abstract two-dimensional world, the next has stationary mike in a familiar and much more three-dimensional location, and the third has a mike traveling along with two well-defined speakers across a sonically realistic geography of mountain air, stones and plane crashes.

Remarkably, however, all three scenes end in the same way. In each case as the scene progresses, the sequence of events seems to shrink, to slow down, and the broader space to fall in on itself. Then a male voice (Ethics Man, Baggott, Wise Man) delivers a short patronizing phrase ("Someday you'll understand"; "Alive instead of dead"; "This is not a drill") that is stylized in various ways (use of reverb; punctuation with song; the first lines of "Time"). The pattern recurs in the remainder of the broadcast. The "Tragedy of the Commons" sequence takes place on a wide exterior of grazing lands where a stream has failed. The soundscape features deep focus, with dogs and crows feasting on carcasses in the blighted land, and the Fat Man approaching from a distance to explain how self-interested farming ruined the land. Soon the commons vanishes sonically as well, and the scene ends with one of the Fat Man's signature film *clichés*, "you're going out a youngster but you've got to come back a star" in tight focus. Emily's monologue in the next scene – her attempt to persuade the people that kindness can save the common – is similar, with a bubbling background establishing the presence of a large audience and a microphone and PA system warming up. Then both vanish, and instead we are given close focus on her voice, without any attendant resonance, as if we were inside her microphone rather than inside the hall of listeners. The final sequence of the play, bridging "Us and Them", "Any Colour You Like" and "Brain Damage", draws out the pattern. In the early parts of the sequence, we hear a clear external world of the mental hospital, its grounds, doors and a world beyond, while Mr. Baggott visits Emily during her convalescence, but when she retreats into the quiet of her own head in search of the Boy (one voice that the surgery did not remove), we go with her.

In scene after scene, the play returns from the musical interlude full of windy airspace and exhales to the end. *Darkside* doesn't exactly blend its genres of radio play, concept album and thought experiment, it *breathes* them. Indeed, thinking about respiration helps explain the aesthetic of the project as a whole, capturing how the play emerges from and retreats back into the album in smooth regular currents. Critic John Harris has argued that the first lines of *The Dark Side of the Moon*, "Breathe, breath in the air / don't be afraid to care", stand as its "compact manifesto" (Harris 2006 : 81). Significant sounds of breathing also occur at the textual level. The Boy coaches Emily to speak using a metaphor of respiration, advising her, "Hold the thought like holding our breath till you can't hold it any more, then hold it more till you think you're going to die, and let it go, a thought wave, sound waves of pure thought!" Baggott's disguises as "Ethics Man" all occur toward the end of his expiration of air. Emily's audible intake of breath in the classroom is her first dramatic act in the play. In her last meeting with Baggott, there is a similar moment as McCoy speaks of her breakdown :

> For weeks before they brought me here, I couldn't get out of bed for crying and thinking, 'What is the Good? *What is the Good*? 'till I'm going 'What is the

good of asking what is the Good?' when the bad is doing just great without anyone asking what is it? Injustice and unfairness are running free like they own the earth, and the way it's looking the earth won't be worth owning.

The dialogue in the scene pauses as we hear the two breathe together in wordless sympathy.

All this is to say that Stoppard may be thinking about philosophy in *Darkside*, but at the sonic level *Darkside* is thinking about the air inside us and around us, as glaciers melt. Like all sonic media, radio is not only "on the air" but it is always *in* the air, a vibration in the atmosphere of a living room, car, or the tiny airspace of earbuds. In this sense radio drama is a branch of the atmospheric sciences, a form of ecological thinking. In a recent book, Jacob Smith has proposed radio as a narrative medium especially adept at exploring the idea of "dark ecology", eschewing the cliché beautiful depictions of nature in favor of depictions that suggest an ugly, ironic and uncanny relationship to the ecological world, reflecting the realization that the end of the world may have already come about (Smith 2015 : 111-12). It's a realization that is surely latent in *Darkside*'s life of quiet respiration.

VI. It's All Dark

Emily delivers two monologues in *Darkside*, both of which have to do with natural resources. The first comes at the end of the first side of the record, and it proposes an ethic of sharing to prevent the tragedy of the commons on a grand scale. "The other is us and we are the other", she says. "We are of a kind and we are natural born to kindness, which means to act as to our kind, as kin to kin, as kindred, which is to act kindly". Reminiscing a pun in *Hamlet*, the dialogue could have been delivered as a stuttered sermon, but Amaka Okafor plays the scene straight, fitting the transporting tones of "The Great Gig in the Sky". Over the course of events, her words achieve a pyrrhic victory; although green shoots soon do reappear on the blighted common, an auction to sell off resources begins immediately. The second monologue comes at the end of "Brain Damage", perhaps the track whose lyrics most closely describe what is happening in the play. It is appropriately pessimistic. McCoy seems to address us directly, warning of environmental degradation and anthropogenic warming :

> We consume everything. We're dying of consumption. Hardwoods are toppling for dashboards. The last rhino has given up its horn for a cancer cure that doesn't work. The last swordfish is gasping beneath a floating island of plastic as big as France. The weather forecast is a state secret.

In this ultimate global trolley problem, we are both the driver of the trolley and the boy on the tracks. There are no bystanders.

The passage comes across as heavy-handed, lacking the ironic Stop-

pard touch – one critic cited "slushy environmental pieties" as one reason for dismissing *Darkside* altogether (Reynolds 2013). But perhaps the time for irony is over, even for Stoppard. Thinking about climate change is unlike thinking other kinds of thoughts, even in the "theater of the mind". In his recent work on the issue, Dipesh Chakrabarty has noted that the climate crisis is hard to cognize because it exists in larger time scales than we can imagine – carbon cycles in the millions of years – even as it requires us to manage risk by thinking in terms of the years or decades it takes to develop and implement a policy initiative. As a consequence, we are forced to ponder the problem on two incompatible scales of time at once, producing what Chakrabarty calls "rifts" that we "keep crossing or straddling when we think of climate change" (Chakrabarty 2014 : 3). The conclusion of *Darkside* is a metaphor for that. From her hospital bed, McCoy speaks about the history of the entire universe leading up to the present, while Baggott speaks of whether or not she's coming back to the course. In the background, the lyrical scope of the song "Eclipse" reaches for a celestial "all that is now, all that is gone, all that's to come", but returns to the creaturely scale of the heartbeat. In the end, Emily yearns for a solution in the fantasy of the juggler on the radio, for that "something beyond perception" that can bridge cognitive rifts. This seems to resonate with what Chakrabarty is after, a theory that can make anthropogenic climate degradation thinkable by "waking up to the shock of the planet's otherness" in an age where human systems are caught up in planetary systems (Chakrabarty 2014 : 23). What drives both thought and sound to madness today isn't the dark side of the moon, after all, but the dark side of the earth.

Notes

1. Readers should be aware that there are discrepancies among recorded versions of the play. For instance, the use of the mother's voice with reverb noted in this essay appears in the inaugural broadcast (available online at https://vimeo.com/77882285, accessed Sept. 3, 2017) and the line is also printed in the published 2013 script, but it is not in the mix of the accompanying CD in that edition.

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Abstract

This essay explores Tom Stoppard's 2013 radio play *Darkside*, which incorporates elements of Pink Floyd's 1973 album *The Dark Side of the Moon*, and dramatizes a series of thought experiments. I show how the combination of these three forms necessitates a rethinking of how sounds operate in radio drama, chart the play's habits of diversion and evasion, and discuss how these tendencies are brought to bear on the central theme of climate change. At the heart of this essay is a proposal that the idea of the "sound of thought" embodied in *Darkside* may prompt a new approach to the theory of radio, one that begins not with what sounds mean, but with how sounds "think".

Keywords : Tom Stoppard; Thought Experiments; Concept Albums; Radio Drama; Climate Change.

Résumé

Cet article porte sur la pièce radiophonique *Darkside* écrite par Tom Stoppard en 2013, laquelle intègre des éléments de l'album *The Dark Side of the Moon* (1973) du groupe rock Pink Floyd et met en scène une série d'expériences de pensée. Mon but est de montrer comment la réunion de ces différents éléments nous force à réfléchir sur le travail et l'usage du son dans le théâtre radiophonique, et en particulier à la façon dont il articule ici le thème central des changements climatiques. Poussant cette réflexion plus avant, on trouvera ici en creux une hypothèse plus générale selon laquelle l'idée même du "son de la pensée", telle qu'elle se manifeste dans *Darkside*, conduirait à développer une nouvelle approche du médium radiophonique, et dont le point de départ ne serait pas de s'interroger sur ce que signifient les sons, mais sur comment ils "pensent".

Mos-clés : Tom Stoppard; expérience de pensée; albums-concept; théâtre radiophonique; changements climatiques.

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