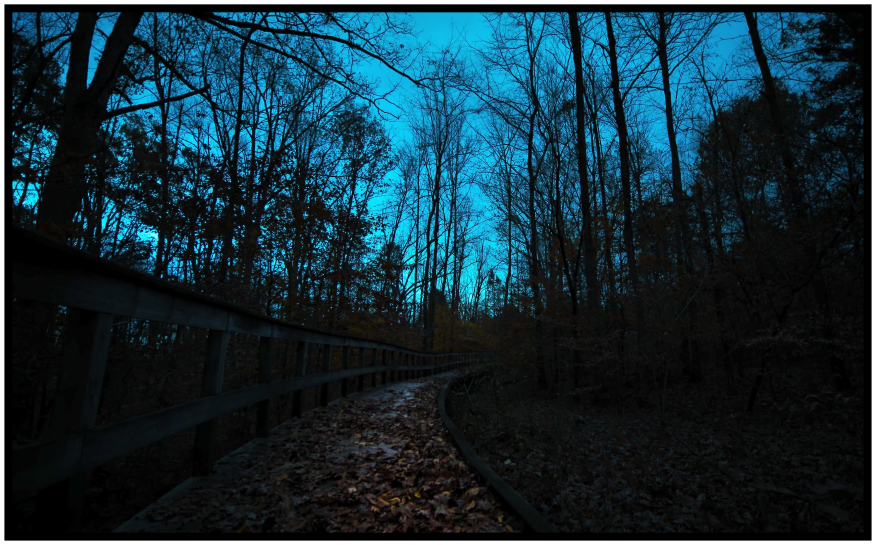
Phantom Remnants

Cello and Piano with Electronics

Written for the ACTIVATE Young Composer Program

Michael Selvaggi



Nov. 2020

9.5′

Phantom Remnants - 9.5’

The idea for this piece sprouted during the composition of one of my previous pieces, “An Inevitable Decay, Rot” for piano trio and electronics. The sound world that I was exploring in that piece—the textures, the techniques, and the aesthetics—were all concepts I felt I was not done investigating after finishing the trio in October. It was these notions that I felt as though I should continue developing in this piece. I wanted to take this sound world, one of decay and one that explores seasonal change, and alter it slightly to reflect the sort of eerie, forest-like atmosphere I was experiencing in late October.

My search began with finding field recordings that I felt reflected the sounds I was hearing during mid-Autumn, sounds that one may hear as they enter an other-worldly forest. I also gathered many instrumental samples—that of cello, piano, harp, and percussion—and processed these samples to create sounds that expressed the haunting mood I envisioned. In this piece, I wanted to showcase a gradual transition from natural sound to processed sound, where the processed sounds hold only a remnant of the original parent sound—and then showcase an overall return back to natural sound. This processing is shown in the electronics, and imitated through the cello and piano.

This piece utilizes many timbral extensions and rather grotesque instrumental techniques, to accent the aesthetic being recreated. The performers should not be afraid of these sounds, and should embrace the unnatural noises that may occur as a result, this is desired and should be welcomed.

Performance Notes

Most pitches in the piece are generated from harmonic spectrums and spectral analysis, and have been rounded to the nearest quarter tone or sixth tone.

Glissandi begin when the notehead is blank; pitches tied to blank noteheads should be held until the glissando begins. If there is no blank notehead, glissando for the entire duration of the note.

All lines are glissandi, not portamento, and should be interpreted as such.

Microtonal pitches and complex gestures are "approximate" (i.e. Try your best!)

Bow direction changes for the **cello** can occur whenever needed, even on held notes; the clarity of the gesture is paramount rather than perfect connectedness.

Pedal changes for **piano** are at the discretion and capability of the performer, as they will often need to stand up and reach inside the piano, or will have gestures involving the pedal itself (ex. Pedal tremolo) that will cancel all resonance/sustain anyways.

The electronic samples are meant to be cued by the **pianist**, and, as a result, the piano part has been written to accommodate these cues. These cue numbers and a simple visual adaptation of the electronics are given in each of the parts.

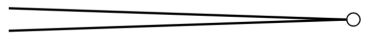
Required Equipment

The designated pianist is responsible for all electronic cueing, to ensure all gestures line up and to eliminate the need for an external individual. Caution must be taken to ensure a balance between the instrumental sound and the electronics. A mixer is optional, but recommended for large halls (where volume is variable), and in this case a third party would be needed to operate the mixer. If performing without a mixer, the pianist may choose to lower the volume via the laptop, but only in necessary cases. The following equipment is required:

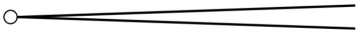
- Mixer (optional)
- Designated Laptop (to the right of the pianist, placed on the piano) with supplied audio files running **Soundplant 47**, a free software that allows for cross-platform sound file cueing. This program will be loaded with a given patch to cue each sound-file in succession. The patch has been set up to allow for easy cueing. Each cue is triggered in succession with a press of the SPACEBAR, so caution must be taken to press the spacebar ONCE only per cue, at the given cue point. An option for a MAX/MSP patch is available.
- Two speakers for stereo audio playback of the fixed electronics

- **For the Pianist:** a plectrum (guitar pick), wire-brushes, and an eraser/rubber

Legend



To silence.



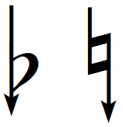
From silence.

Gradually moving from one method of playing, into another (ex. bow position, muting to less muting, white noise to ord. tone). Length of arrow denotes how gradual the change is.

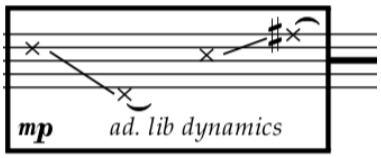
Quarter-tone Sharp: raises a note by a quarter tone.

Quarter-tone Flat: lowers a note by a quarter tone.

Three Quarter-tones Flat: lowers a note by three quarter tones (or a semitone and a half).



Sixth-tone Flat: an accidental with an arrow indicates to lower a note by a sixth tone (approx. 33 cents) lower than the original accidental. One can think of a sixth-tone deviation as being slightly less than that of a quarter-tone deviation.



<u>Boxed gestures</u> are to be performed, arrhythmically, and freely (ad. lib.) as long as the black line denotes. Gestures/notes within the boxes are to be played in random order/ succession (and repeated), with varying amounts of space between them, fluidly, and are guidelines—rather than strict phrases.

Strings

S.T. — Sul tasto.

S.P. — Sul ponticello.

M.S.T. — Molto Sul tasto.

M.S.P. — Molto Sul ponticello.

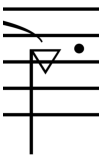
N — Indicates “normal” bowing position only, does not cancel any other technique changes.

Indicates unmeasured, bouncy ricochet, as many instances as possible. May be accompanied by col legno.

A “white noise” sound is obtained through muting the given string(s) with the left hand, with normal horizontal bowing, resulting in a grainy, air-like sound with little pitch. Notehead denotes which open string(s) to produce the white noise on.

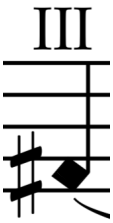
A visual depiction of string overpressure. A gritty, semi-pitched, noisy sound is desired at the apex of the diagram. A gradual overpressure is often desired, and will be shown.

Indicates the highest note possible in a given gesture, often indicated alongside a glissando meaning to glissando to a indeterminate pitch, as high as possible.

 Triangle noteheads indicate to bow the tailpiece of the cello, producing a quiet, ghostly tone. Player should strive to make this particular sound speak significantly.

IV------- String number lines indicate to play a gesture on the given string, for as long as the dotted line denotes.

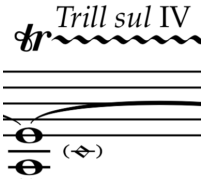
A touch major second artificial harmonic, performed like any other artificial harmonic. Harmonic pitch should be unclear, and the resulting sound should be a combination of the fundamental fingered pitch, the harmonic, and noise.



Diamond noteheads indicate to touch a given string at a specific point, with **harmonic pressure**.

A Variety of Different Harmonic Trills, explained for clarity:

Open string harmonic trill: played by bowing string while lightly and rapidly touching node (given by diamond notehead) with "harmonic" pressure, resulting in a rapid alternation between the fundamental and the harmonic.



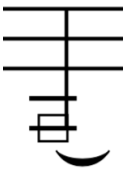
Same as above, but with two strings played and only one being trilled on. The trilled string(s) will be indicated by Roman numeral.

Stopped/artificial harmonic trill: played by bowing and holding down bottom note, while rapidly touching node above the stopped pitch.

Played by alternating between stopped pressure and harmonic pressure on a given string, resulting in an alternation between the fundamental and a harmonic. String will be indicated.

Played by trilling between two given nodes, with harmonic pressure on a given open string. Resulting pitch may be unclear.

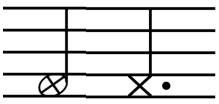
Piano



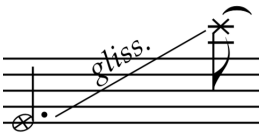
Given string is dampened with an eraser, must be prepared in advance, between the end of the string closest to player and the dampers. Adjust the eraser so the note sustains as long as possible. If the given string is double stringed, place between the strings—if single stringed, place around the string.

Triangle notehead + tremolo denotes to use a plectrum to *scrape* the given single string up or down (if the string is wound or coiled, ex. the bass strings) **OR** *pluck* the given string (if the string is not wound/coiled, ex. treble strings) in a rapid plectrum tremolo/alternation.

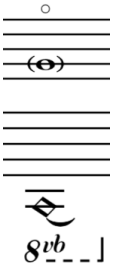
A "+" above a note or a chord indicates to mute the given string(s) with the fingers or palm, with normal key depression.



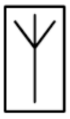
All cross-headed notes are to be played inside the piano, on the strings, with the fingers, nails, or wire brushes.



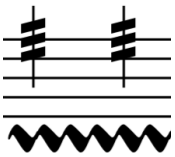
String glissandi, played inside the piano. Indicated to be played with the fingertips, nails, or with wire brushes. Given range is approximate, and need not be replicated exactly.



Harmonic: played by depressing key while touching approximate node on string. Lower pitch indicates the string played, while the top note indicates the sounding pitch. These harmonics are approximate, any sounding pitch is acceptable if time calls for it. The pianist should aim to create a slightly "muffled" sound with a distinct harmonic above it.



Indicates to play with wire brushes on the strings of the piano. Sound should be noisy, and not too loud—adjust technique to performing space, if needed. If wire brushes are not available, playing with the fingernails is acceptable.



Indicates a pedal tremolo, where the pedal is fully or almost fully depressed and released rapidly in alternation, to create a low reverberation inside the piano.

Phantom Remnants

for Cello, Piano, and Electronics

Full Score

Michael Selvaggi
(2020)

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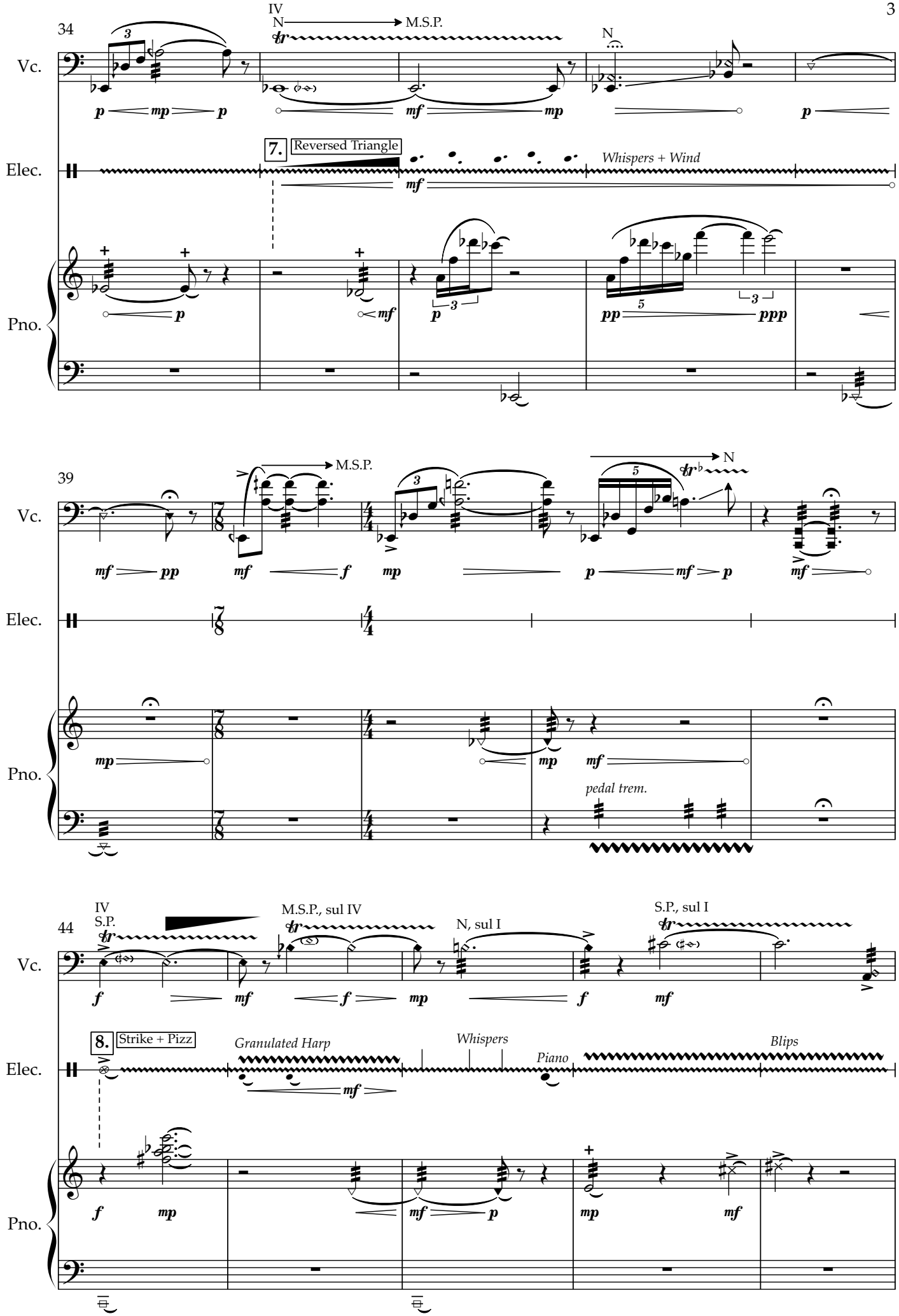
19
N
S.P.
N
S.P.
IV
*becoming harmonic
bowed tailpiece
Vc.
mf pp
mf p
p
mp
p
mf
Elec.
4.
Cello + Clicks
Spectral Noise
Filtered Wind
p
Pno.
mf
p
mf
mf
8vb
24
N
S.P.
IV
Vc.
mp
mf
p
Elec.
5.
Pizz.
Granulated Piano
Stream
Granulated Harp
Pno.
mp
mp
mf
p
29
N
S.P.
Vc.
p
mp
p
mp
mf
Elec.
Resonance
6.
Cello
Piano
gliss.
Spectral Noise
mp
Pno.
mp
p
gliss.
gliss.
ord.
mp


34
IV
N
M.S.P.
N
Vc.
Elec.
7.
Reversed Triangle
Whispers + Wind
Pno.
39
M.S.P.
N
Vc.
Elec.
Pno.
pedal trem.
44
IV
S.P.
M.S.P., sul IV
N, sul I
S.P., sul I
Vc.
8.
Strike + Pizz
Granulated Harp
Whispers
Piano
Blips
Elec.
Pno.