

Theorem

for violin and electronics

Eliza Brown

2021

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violin score

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duration ca. 30'

Written for and with Clara Lyon

Theorem investigates the geometry of secrets that we carry through our lives, in our bodies, and within the spaces we inhabit. This immersive performance uses sound, image, story, and environment to meditate on a long-held silence, mapping its form and legacy.

Theorem began in 2017, when visual artist Antonia Contro and poet Elizabeth Bradfield decided to collaborate. Together, they created a visual, tactile, and lyric experience in book form. In 2019, Candor Arts published a fine art edition of *Theorem*. In 2020, Poetry Northwest Editions published a trade edition. Now the Theorem Collective is working to bring this unique expression into a performative space with violin, recordings, and animation in a designed environment.

This score presents the violin part, with cues drawn from the electronics, which should be diffused using a sound design responsive to the specific performance space. The electronics are made of field recordings recorded by the composer and Liz Bradfield's reading of *Theorem's* poetry recorded at Electronic Sound Studio. For more information about the work's electronics, please contact the composer at brown.eliza@gmail.com.

Performance Notes

- Barlines and meter: most of the score has no time signature. Dashed, solid, and double barlines appear. Dashed barlines indicate structurally relevant divisions of musical time rather than audible “downbeats.” Solid barlines imply that an audible downbeat follows; bars enclosed by solid barlines should be felt metrically. Double barlines are used at new sections and tempo changes.
- Durations in unmetered sections: time should be always be felt in relation to the electronics, and thus durations are approximate. The length of whole notes and fermatas should be determined by the confluence of listening, technical considerations, audio cues, and other annotations in the score.
- R1, R2, etc. indicate the “*Rauschfärbung*” (“air-noise coloring”) of sounds, adapted from Hans Thomalla’s string quartet *Bagatellen* (see his score for further technical explanation).¹ Thomalla uses R1-4, where the absence of an R number indicates no air-noise coloring. I have adjusted the scale to R1-5. In this version, R1 indicates no air-noise coloring and R5 indicates noise with no audible pitch. The sounds in this piece are almost always colored by some degree of noise, so a point on the scale indicating “no noise” was useful in this context.
- Other non-traditional notations are explained in the score itself and/or are common practice in contemporary music notation.

¹ Hans Thomalla, *Bagatellen*, (Berlin: Edition Juliane Klein, 2015)

Theorem

violin score

score begins after pre-show sound loop

I-5 ♩ per entrance
 ♩ duration and pulse can vary
 change bow on each ♩ or articulate in one bow
 dynamic range from **p** to silence
 tenuto placement ad lib

white noise like wind or steps in long dry grass
 repeat intermittently with variation
 mostly between vocal entrances but not always
 always very gentle
 leave lots of space to listen

Tacet ca. 50" ♩ ≈ 56

Violin

LH mute (R5)

Audio cues

"Theorem" "...measurable forms."

"yet something pulsed..."

Detailed description: This block shows a musical score for Violin. It starts with a treble clef and a single note on the staff. Above the staff, it says "Tacet ca. 50" followed by a quarter note symbol and "≈ 56". Below the staff, there are two audio cue boxes: one for "Theorem" and another for "...measurable forms." A box labeled "LH mute (R5)" is placed over the staff, containing two 'x' marks on the strings and a dynamic marking 'p' with a wedge-shaped hairpin. To the right, a long arrow indicates the continuation of the piece. Below the staff, another audio cue box is labeled "yet something pulsed..."

R4 → R5

R4

"...they have power."

"something bad begun to flow through my body's passages"

Detailed description: This block shows a musical score for Violin. It starts with a treble clef and a single note on the staff. Above the staff, there are two boxes: the first is labeled "R4 → R5" and the second is labeled "R4". Below the staff, there are two audio cue boxes: one for "...they have power." and another for "something bad begun to flow through my body's passages". A long arrow indicates the continuation of the piece.

R4 → R5 R2 → R4

"was it safe?" "I didn't know" "...math made map..."

p *pp*

→ R1 → PSP, R3 and the tiniest, quiveriest tremolo

p $\underbrace{\quad\quad\quad}_3$ *dim. poco a poco*

increasing space between notes and/or pairs of notes
 white space increasingly means silence for listening to the birds
 at least 30' from rehearsal A to end of this system
 staccato - non accent, on string, with bow noise

sim. *ppp*

listen and play occasionally, perhaps in response to birds
 choose what to play from these five cells
 cells can be in any order, repeated with space between, gently varied, omitted
 be part of the sound environment

① anywhere R4-R1 ② R4 ③ R3 ④ R3-R1 ⑤ R4

sempre ppp-pp

A favor ⑤

keep leaving lots of space
remain part of the sound environment

"There were five of us..."

"...the same view, differently."

"...can carve huge swaths"

each notehead a bow change
gentle, irregular rhythm of white noise

p

sim.

"We grew into..."

rhythmic gesture options

rests = minimum space between gestures

choose and time gestures in response to water

① ② ③ (groups of 1-4)

≈ 48

p

"our mother..."

"across the weeks."

"to cube..."

gesture options ② and ③ only

③ only

R4-R3

mp-p

"sbadow"

R4-R5, poco vib.

mp

"at different times."

"...on approach. From elsewhere."

4

slowly mix and match ca. 1' 40"
rhythmic gesture options, R5-R2 ad lib.

SP → ST ① (groups of 3-11)	bow placement ②	ad lib. ③
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hybridize gesture options

pitch options

mf then follow water for density and intensity of gestures - use silences as part of density variation

water: high-pitched falls

deeper rushing

intense close-up falls

Slow

be aware of birds (give them space)

patient - each one a breath

pp rustling leaves and birds

"I was known..."

"...starting then."

"...guide available."

"...the same"

R5 (on bridge) → R3, R5 (br) → R3, R5 (br) → R1

LH mute (R5)

soil." "…remember rain."

II → R3

LH mute (R5)

R4

"…less time to travel."

R2 poco vib. → R3, R1

patient, reverent, steady - you hold the boundaries of a sacred space

"…wonder." "No flat map..." (section 3 text will end sometime near here)

sounds of finding this note welcome
the boundaries fade

in the rest, place bow on bow hook in fluid, gentle motion
using two-hand pizz. meander down instrument, as rain, ca. 50"

(continue pizz.
motion silently)

rain low rumble fades in

instrument down - listen

instrument up

sounds

"One secret..."

♩ = very slow, reflective; molto rubato (one can get stuck on a note as on a memory)

arco, R3 R4, brush flaut. → ord.

"...glowed luminous" *pp* < > ○ *pp* < > ○ "How ridiculous... ..fear." *pp* < > "The other is not mine to tell." *p*

R3 R2 → R4, fragile

"A dark, dense absence" *p* "a singularity" "I can only measure..." *mp* *pp* "It ghosts me...it holds?"

piu mosso (♩ = 60)

fragile sound
change bow/R level ad lib
(swishes)

R3 R3

"too close..." *p* *mp* *sub. pp* "look: I can...first knew as true" *p*

♩ = very slow

R2 - shiny but veiled

suspended melodic fragments

D

waves

"there were five of us...one dog at a time."

pp

"The results...trajectories radiate."

"It divides absolutely."

with infinite patience

R5 (br) → R3, with bow noise, non vib. → R5

"What was created..."

"...for us all?"

"I am still trying to map..."

"...its redshifted source."

improvise quietly, drawing material from elsewhere in the piece

an unhurried exploration of the inward universe

continue beyond the waves

find an ending

E

salt bay waves, Pacific coast