

Lisa Bielawa

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Note

Premiere: April 18, 2014, ODC Theater, San Francisco, CA. Commissioned by the Paul Dresher Ensemble for the Paul Dresher Ensemble with Amy X Neuburg

Duration: 8'

Instrumentation: Soprano Solo w/percussion; Clarinet in Bb / Bass Clarinet; Violin; Electric Bass; MIDI/live sound processing

The title “Ego sum” oscillates between its meanings in Latin – “I am” – and in English – loosely, the aggregate of conscious beings. An incurably urban sort, I tend to find inspiration, solace and even radiant joy in transient public spaces, where I can feel the sum of so many egos around me. I become aware of myself as just one consciousness among many, flowing shoulder to shoulder through our modern world. It is no accident, then, that, long before the invitation from Amy X Neuburg and the Paul Dresher Ensemble to create a short work for inclusion in their set of pieces inspired by Diane Arbus, providing literal and musical snapshots of “intimate reflections on contemporary American life,” I had already written an entire body of work based on overheard fragments of speech that I collected all over the world over the course of 14 months. Even after creating the 35-minute “Chance Encounter” for soprano and orchestra (for performance in transient public spaces) and several other small works using these overheard texts, I have nowhere near exhausted the poetic charms of this library. In “Ego sum” I have selected phrases from it based simply on their use of the first-person subject “I” at the beginning of the sentence (and further refined the list based on the inherent charms of each phrase). On discovering Ourit Ben-Haim’s gentle yet gritty images of various “I”s assembled in public space, mostly in the NYC subway system where so many of these texts were collected, I knew I had a new context for these restless egos to which we are both drawn, over and over again, in our work. Ben-Haim says, “Lisa knows the world I found in street photography...It’s such a wonderful vibrational match.”

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Text

(overheard in transient public spaces)

I won't be staying long.
I think I should take a day off.
I'm losing my appetite really quickly.
I don't really understand her at all.
I just can't wait any longer.
I gotta do this.
I didn't even see this the first time.
I knew that, that's what I was trying to tell you this morning.
I've made a lot of mistakes and they're my fault.
I'm hoping to get married again – get another husband.
I was thinking of you, so I was wondering if I could see you sometime today.
I open my eyes, I look around: everyone is fake, phony.
I feel sorry for her – maybe she was nice.
I heard the news. Any idea what it means?
I just talked with God.
I usually don't invite anyone to stay with my parents unless it's serious.
I owe you forty-two cents? For what?
I should be home by four.
I think it might have cheese in it.
I think that it signifies that there's nothing there.
I'm sure you guys are all in this thing together.
I got a call from your brother.
I haven't gotten any checks.
I can't believe I missed it.
I'm trying to catch my breath.
I met him before he was famous.
I know her – well, sort of.
I didn't feel like I could give him my all.

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