



# HYPNAGOGIA, OPPRESSION, AND SEXUAL DESIRE IN REBECCA SAUNDERS'S O (2017)

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Society for Music Theory – 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
Denver, Colorado - November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023

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Rebecca Saunders – *O* (2017)

Performer: Sarah Maria Sun (premiere performance)

1:10-1:49

## James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922)

- Recounts a single day's events on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1904, in Dublin, Ireland

- Focuses on protagonists Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus

- Some chapters are written in a **stream-of-consciousness** style

  - e.g., **Molly Bloom's monologue – the final chapter of the novel**

- Molly Bloom is dismissed by the other characters as self-absorbed, unintelligent, and promiscuous

  - Molly's monologue is the first glance into her thoughts

  - Saunders's *O* musically sets some of the text from Molly's monologue**

## Molly Bloom's Monologue

"...*I* was a *Flower* of the *mountain* **yes** when *I* put the *rose* in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall *I* wear a *red* **yes** and how he *kissed me* under the Moorish wall and *I* thought well as well him as another and then *I* asked him with *my eyes* to ask again **yes** and then he asked me would *I* **yes** to say **yes** my *mountain flower* and first *I* put *my arms* around him **yes** and *drew him* down to me so he could feel my breasts all *perfume* **yes** and his *heart* was going like *mad* and **yes** *I* said **yes** *I* will **Yes**".

Joyce 1922, 783; italicized text is sung in *O*.

# O (2017) for soprano solo

Gentle, sensual, flowing & smooth.

*Free tempo*

\* ossia: tr.  
[oh/m = o/+ repetition]

\* ossia: vib.

\* Ossia: [la/u]

Stretch breath!

[attaca]

Sensual hold near percussive!

to end of breath

that awful deep down torrent O and the sea the sea crimson sometimes like fire and the glorious sunsets and the fountains in the Mamada gardens yes and all Ah

Moving on!

Simple

ro- [i] ro- [e/o/a] ro- se ve- d ye - red re- [heldi/o] (red) and how he Ki [s/ɛ] Ki [ɛ/ɛ] how Ng [o/a]

# PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

- Approach is based on Judith Lochhead's (2016) analytical framework for contemporary music
  - Encourages analysts to speak with anybody involved in a work's creation, including composers, performers, and audio technicians
- Three recordings of *O* by sopranos Sarah Maria Sun (2017), Juliet Fraser (2018), and Stephanie Lamprea (2020)
- My own interviews (2022) with the three performers are integral to the structuring of the analyses



Sarah Maria Sun



Juliet Fraser



Stephanie Lamprea

# INTERPRETATIONS

- Hypnagogia and/or dream states
- Oppression
- Sexual desire

Each interpretation is communicated by the same sounding elements:

- Timbral effects
- Manipulation of text
- Control of breath/air flow
- Fluctuations in pacing

Conceptual integration network (CIN) template  
(after Fauconnier and Turner 1998)

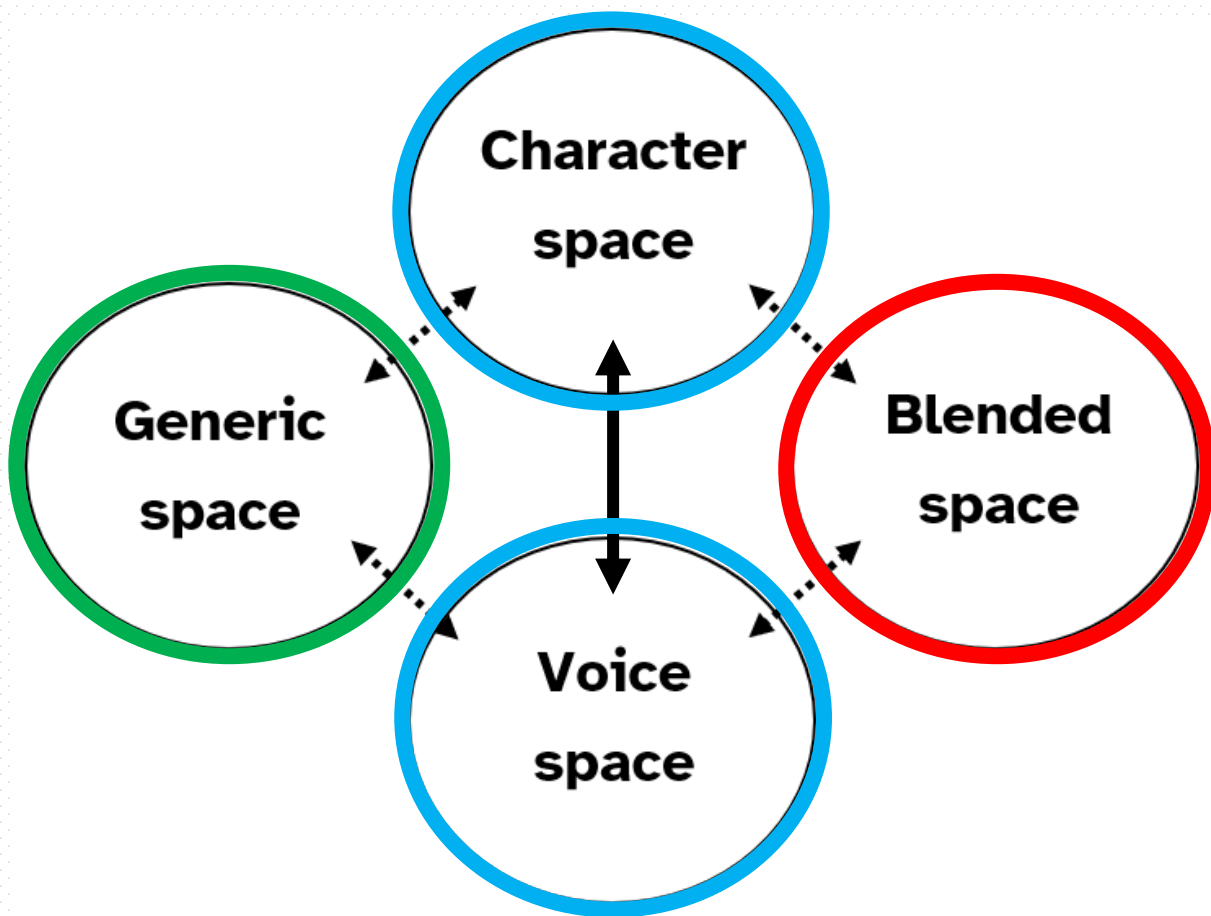
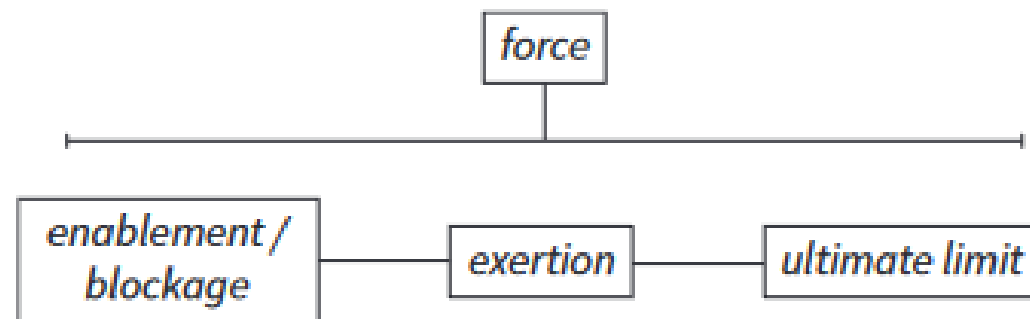


Image schemas of timbre  
(reproduced from Wallmark 2022, 64)



# OUTLINE

1. Overview of three interpretations (with CINs)
  - Hypnagogia and/or dream states
  - Oppression
  - Sexual desire
  
2. Musical passages that can illustrate each interpretation (alongside Wallmark's timbral schemas)
  - System 2
  - System 10

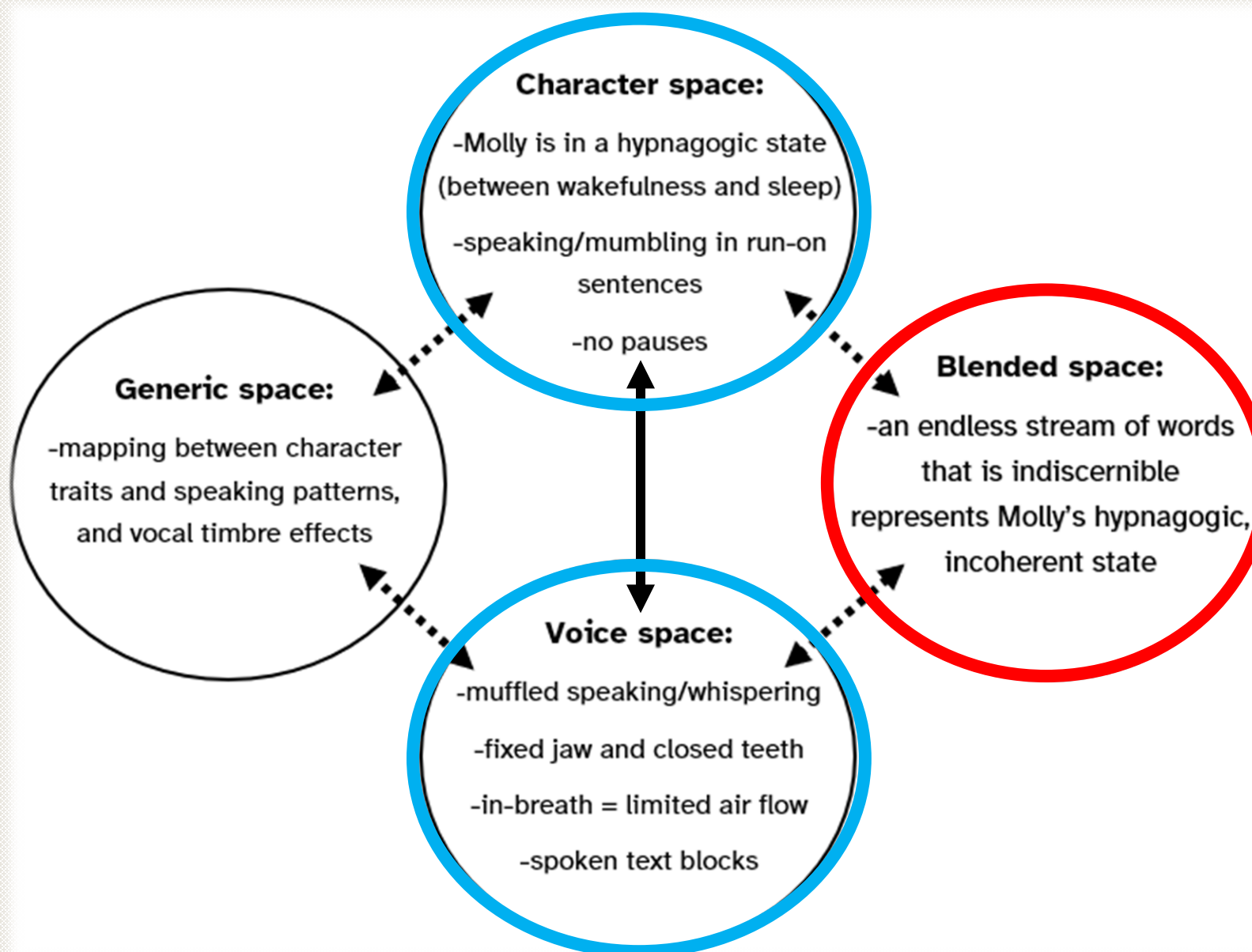


## Interpretation #1: Hypnagogia and/or Dream States

“O” is based on the final chapter of *Ulysses*, Molly Bloom’s monologue by James Joyce. This extraordinary monologue can be regarded as a kind of collage, a woven fabric of innumerable threads of tales, memories, images, and thoughts. This text flows continuously as **[Molly] waits for sleep, in the twilight of her consciousness.**

Saunders, program notes for *O* (excerpt), 2017.

# Interpretation #1: **Hypnagogia** and/or Dream States



## Interpretation #1: Hypnagogia and/or Dream States

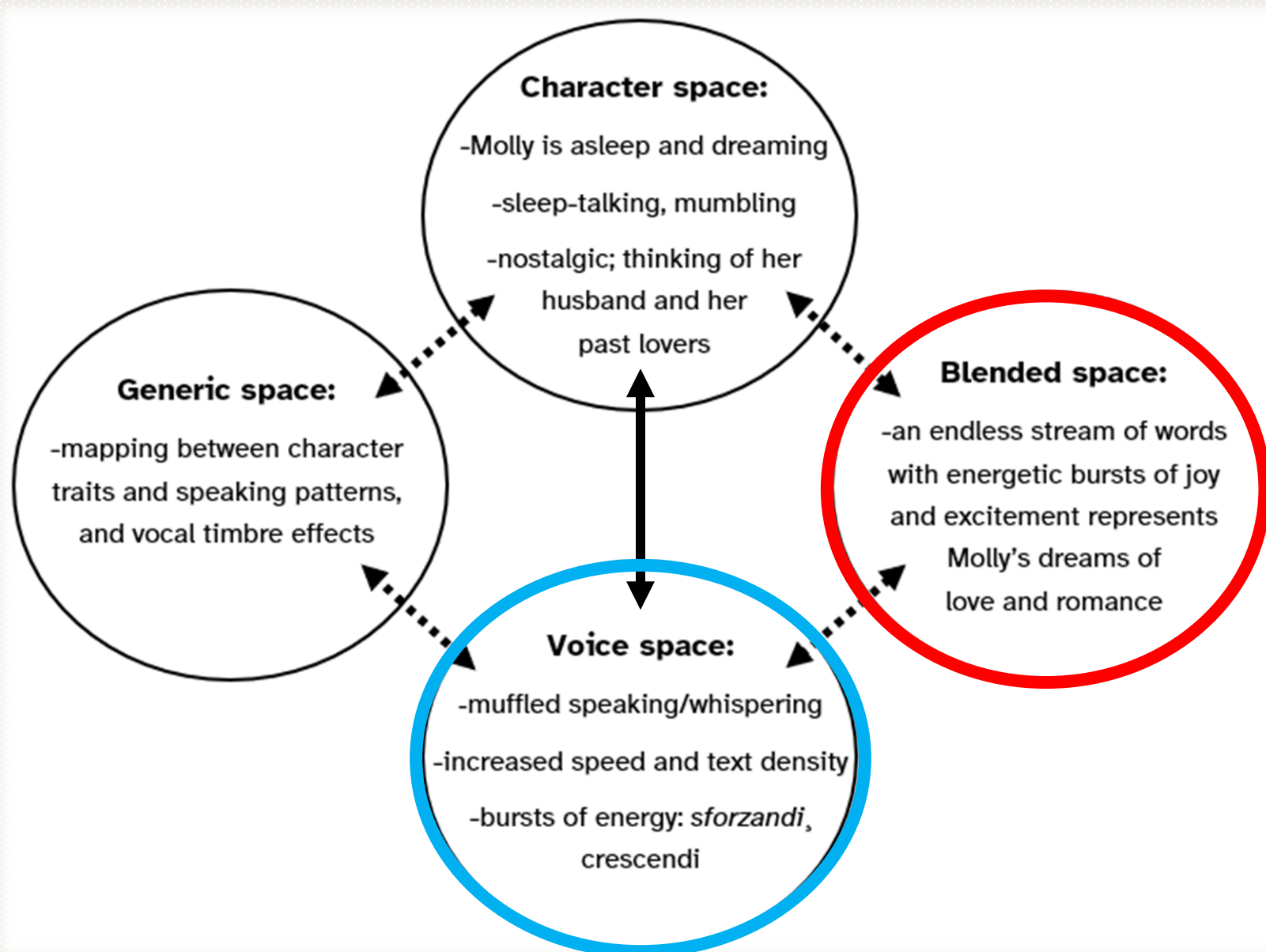
“I think the whole piece is an attempt to reflect or portray Molly Bloom’s inner world. I don’t get the feeling that Rebecca [Saunders] is mocking up what we would hear if we were actually sitting next to Molly. . . we’re put into the interior space, her interior world, her attitude or emotional whirlwind.”

Fraser, interview with author, November 4, 2022.

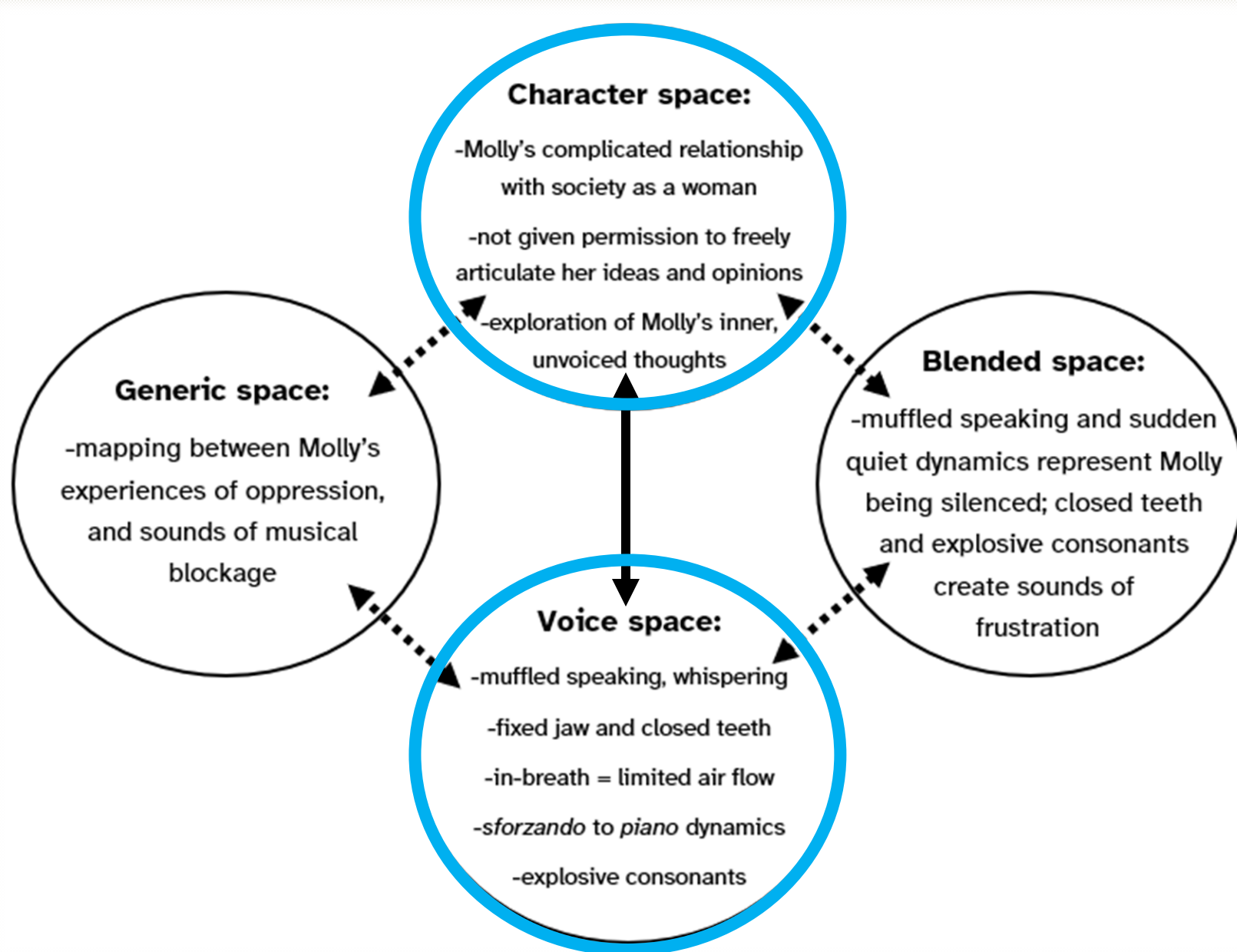
“[Molly] is thinking back on the most beautiful time which is getting to know her husband. To me, I think about having met my partner for the first time, and how ethereal it feels, and naive in a way, and exciting, so I was leaning into those feelings of spring.”

Lamprea, interview with author, November 15, 2022.

# Interpretation #1: Hypnagogia and/or **Dream** States



# Interpretation #2: Oppression

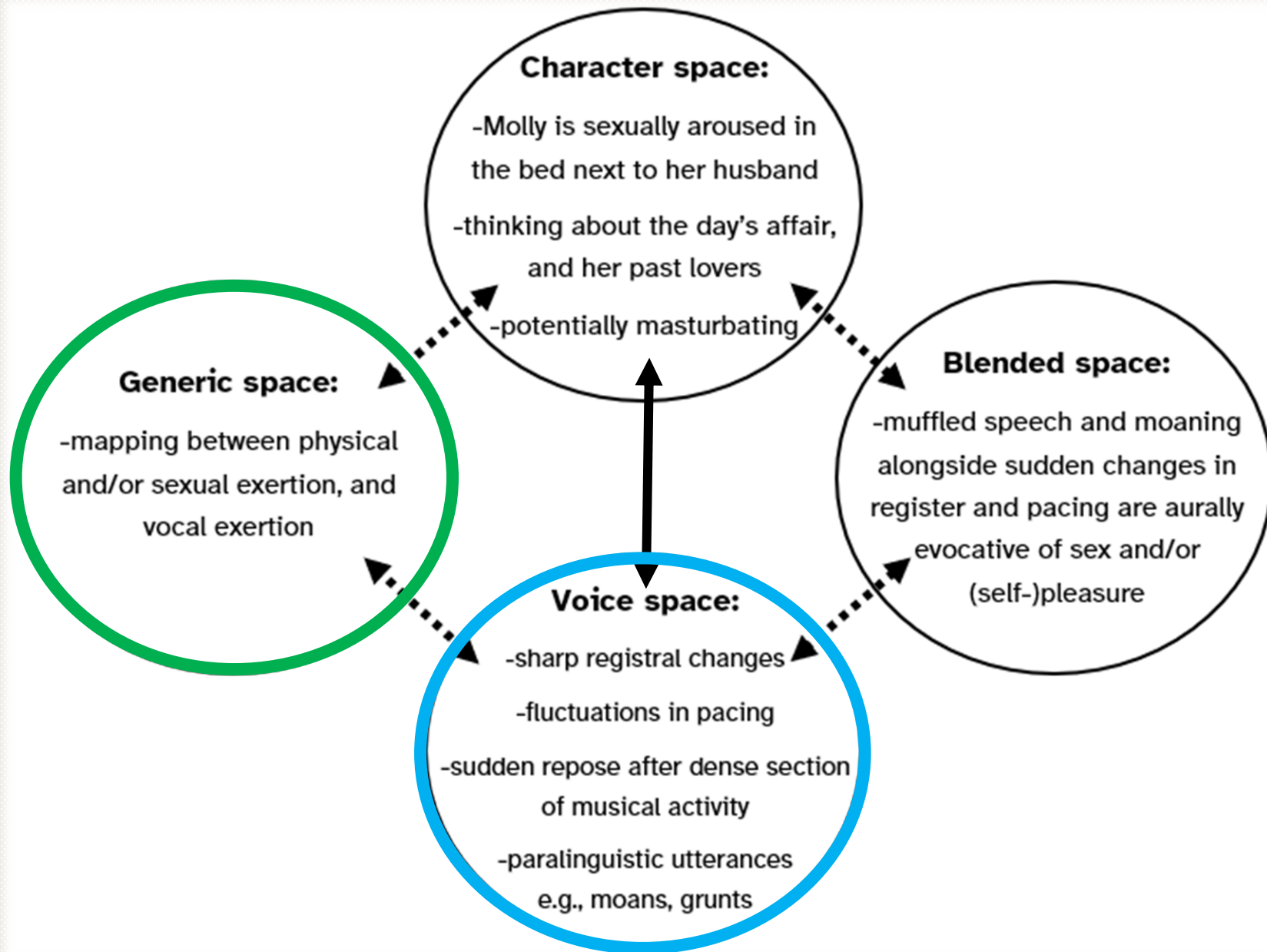


## Interpretation #3: Sexual Desire

“I relate [O] very much to this orgasmic breathing and orgasmic way of thinking that Molly Bloom has. She’s there lying in the bed with her husband next to her, she’s thinking about her lovers, she’s masturbating, very probably. So, for me, all of this going into high register, dropping down into low register, having very dense, fast speaking, or very fast inhaled speaking or singing, and then suddenly a long note, has a lot to do with sex for me in this piece.”

Sun, interview with author, November 9, 2022.

# Interpretation #3: Sexual Desire





Score directions

The image shows a handwritten musical score for voice, consisting of a single system with four measures. The score is written on a five-line staff with a treble clef. The lyrics are written below the staff, and there are various musical notations and annotations.

**Measure 1:** Dynamics *mp* and *pp*. The lyrics are "O - [vlu]".

**Measure 2:** Dynamics *mp*. A green box highlights the instruction "Stretch breath!". A blue box highlights the lyrics: "that awful deep down torrent and the sea the sea crimson sometimes like fire and the glorious sunsets and the fountains in the Kameda garden's up and all".

**Measure 3:** Dynamics *f*. The lyrics are "Ko - a tch no [i/ei] no".

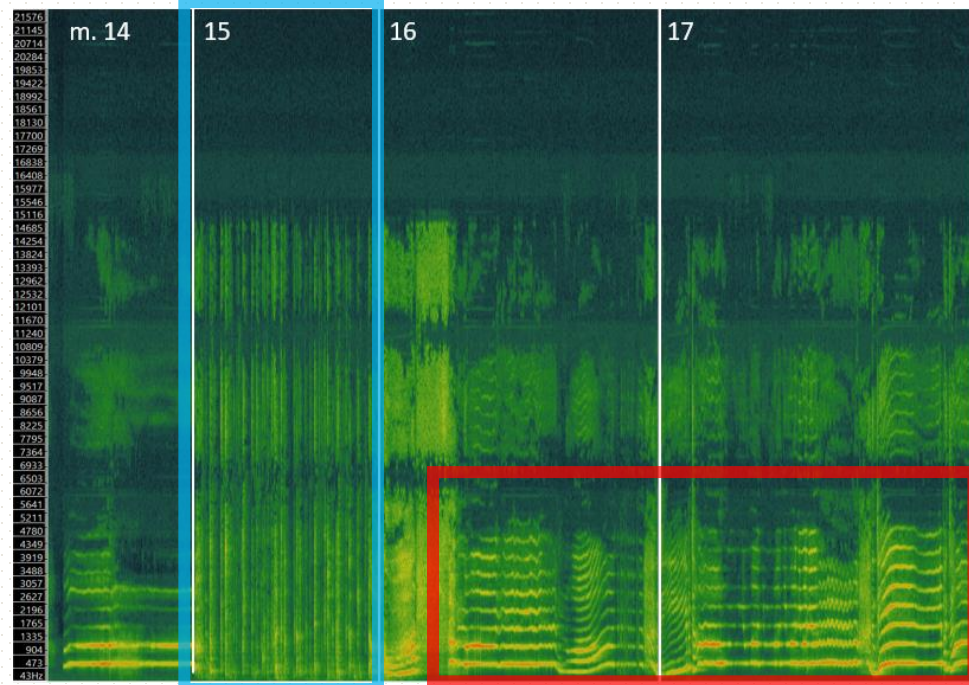
**Measure 4:** Dynamics *mp*, *pp*, *p*, *sub mp*, and *pp*. The instruction "[attaca]" is written above the staff. The lyrics are "[d/p/t] deep down [d/y/a] → [a/e/ue] [deepdown]".

Other annotations include a large slur over the first three measures, a bracket under the first two notes of the second measure, and various performance markings like accents and slurs.

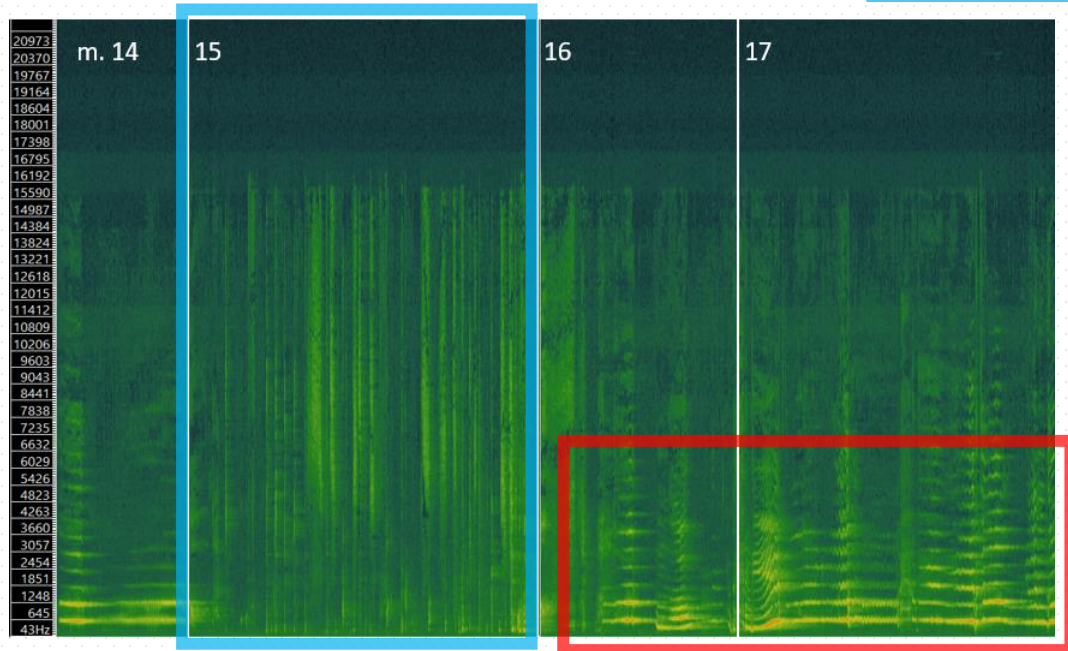
Excerpt #1: Saunders, O, system 2, first 4 measures.



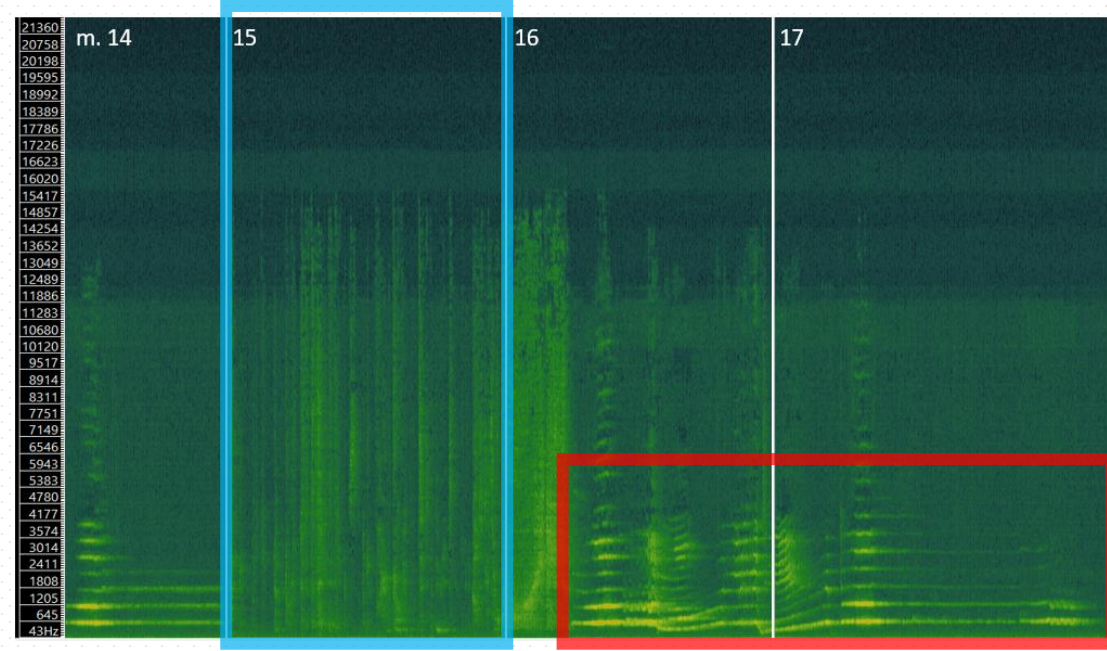
# LAMPREA



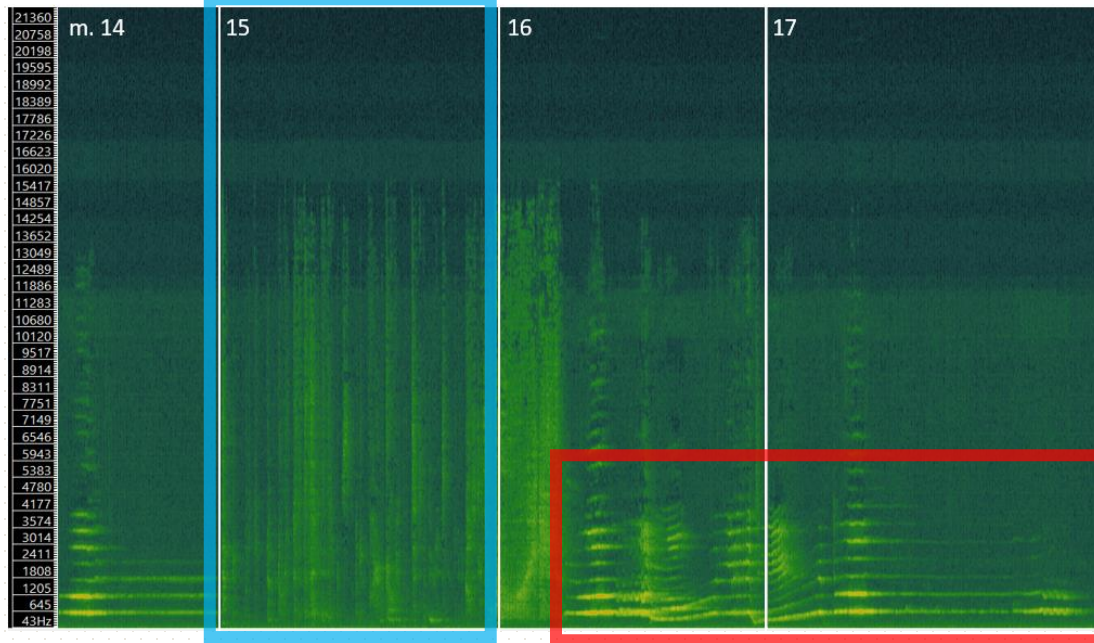
# SUN



# FRASER



# FRASER



Performer: Juliet Fraser  
0:58-1:22

Handwritten musical score with lyrics and performance instructions:

*Stretch breath!*

*[attaca]*

*mp pp mp pp P sub pp mp*

*0 - [vcl]*

*> that awful deep down  
torrent and the sea the  
sea crimson sometimes  
like fire and the glorious  
surrounds and the fireflies in  
the Kameda gardens yes and  
all*

*[ch]*

*no — a tech no [i/ei] no [d/p/t] deep down [d/p/t] → [a/e/ue]*

*[deepdown]*

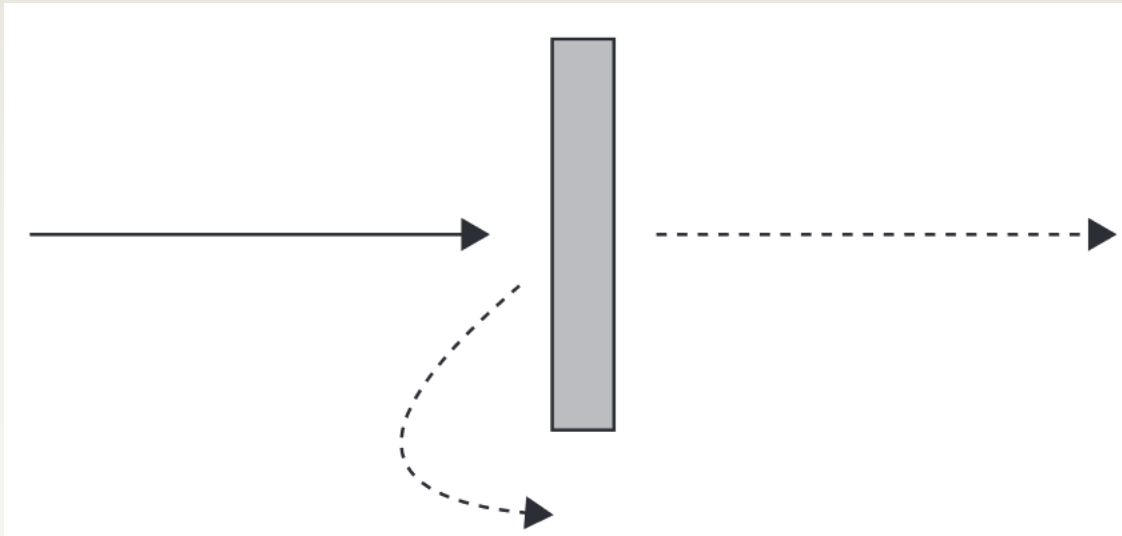
*tr. 9*

# HYPNAGOGIA

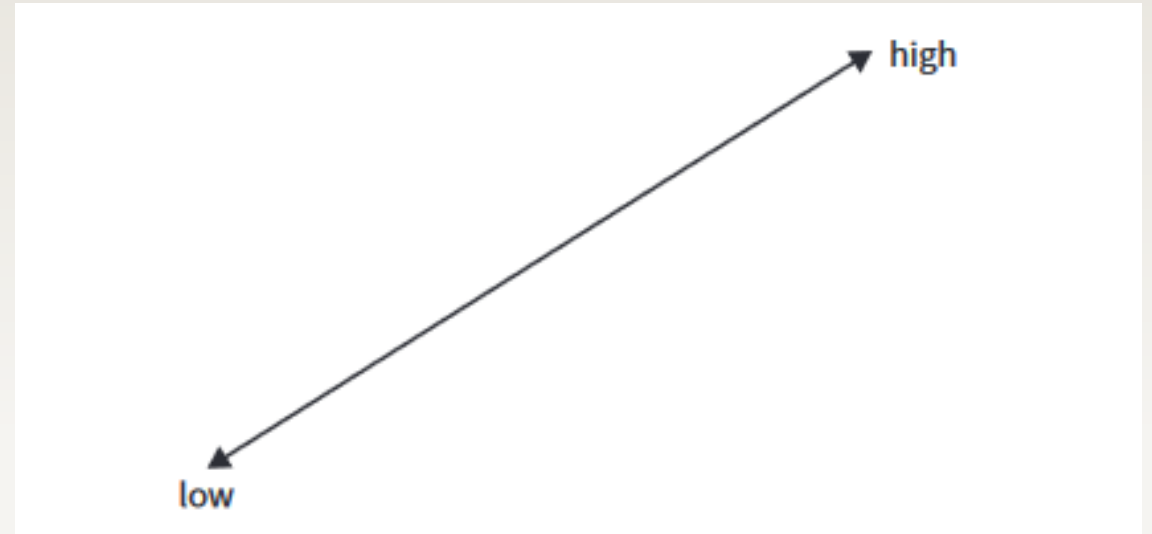
- Blockage and exertion schemas
- Breathiness, quiet dynamic, closed mouth/fixed jaw



Performer: Stephanie Lamprea  
1:00-1:07



Blockage schema (reproduced from Wallmark 2022, 65)



Exertion schema (reproduced from Wallmark 2022, 66)



# OPPRESSION

- Blockage schema
- Fixed jaw, closed teeth, explosive consonants (notation indicated in green boxes below)



Performer: Juliet Fraser  
1:02-1:13

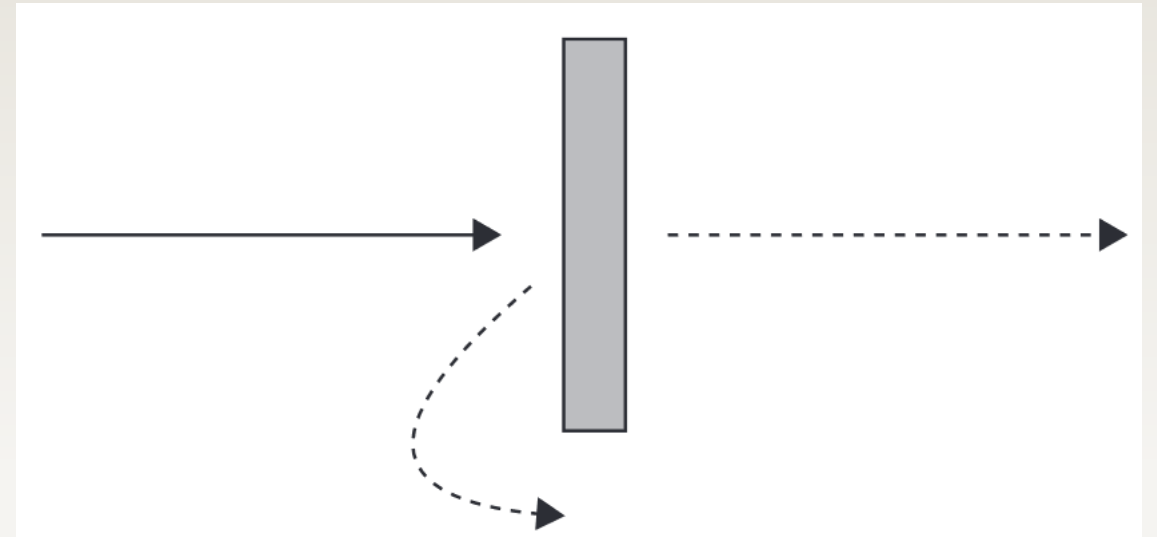
Stretch breath!

mp p

O - [REDACTED]

> that awful deep down  
torrent O and the sea the  
sea crimson sometimes  
like fire and the glorious  
sunsets and the pillars in  
the Klameda gardens yes and  
all

Saunders, O, system 2, first 2 measures.



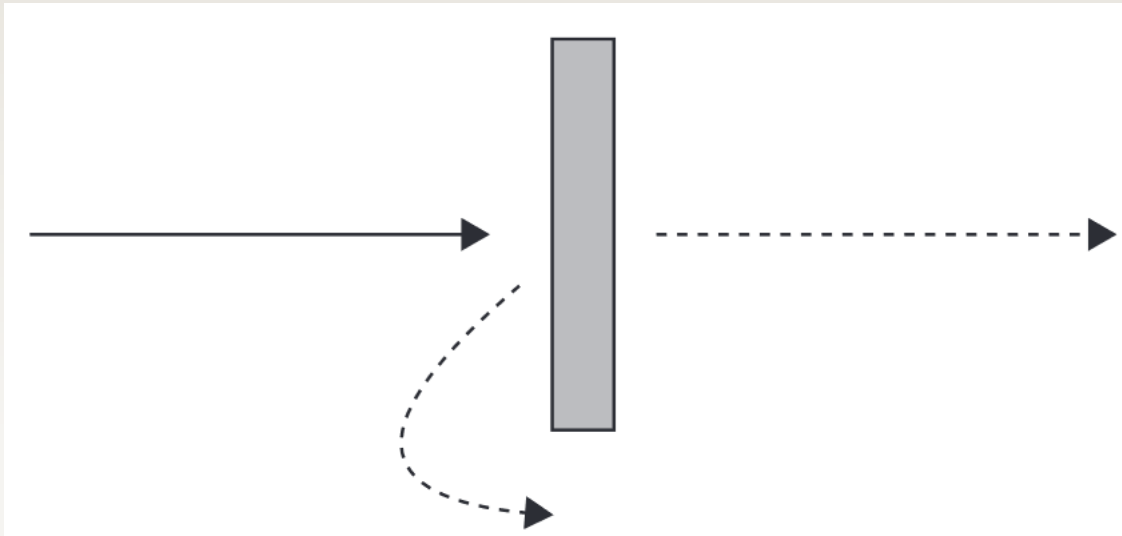
Blockage schema (reproduced from Wallmark 2022, 65)

# SEXUAL DESIRE

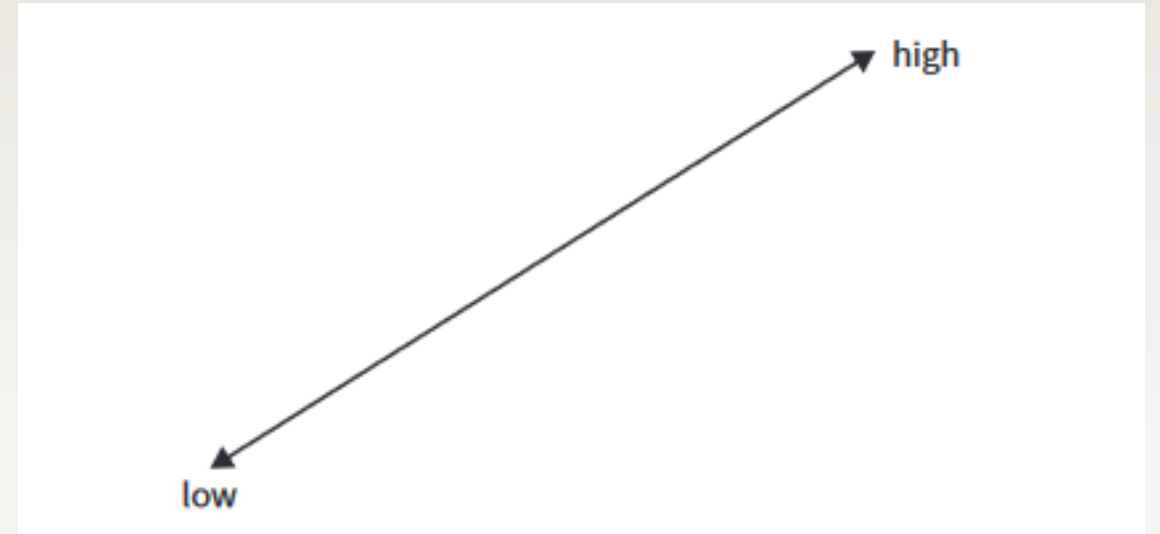


Performer: Sarah Maria Sun  
1:20-1:41

- Blockage and exertion schemas
- Muffled sounds and breathiness; shift from restricted vocal production to singing in full voice



Blockage schema (reproduced from Wallmark 2022, 65)



Exertion schema (reproduced from Wallmark 2022, 66)

gentle  
pp → mp sub pp

light + smooth  
mp of 1/2 +

in sha-dow [u] My ng sayo ([u])  
[wa] [wa/i] →

sensual, electric and urgent!

hold no air 4' 3' 4' 4 1/2'

Out! sf sample

relieved

Oh!

intense

relieved

eyes

Out! sf sample

Oh!

yes will I  
yes said I  
yes dead I  
going like  
yes and then  
yes when I

Out over the sea the sky I was thinking of so many things he didn't know

vague fellows in the cloaks asleep in the shade on the steps and the

castles thousands of years old yes and those handsome Meors all in white and turbans like Kings

eyes a lattice hid for her lover to kiss the iron and yes o and I

awful deepdown torrent O and sea the sea crimson!

19

Excerpt #2: Saunders, O, system 10.

(‘o’s above the system indicate an open mouth; + symbols indicate a closed mouth.)

# DREAMING

- Enablement schema
- Transition from closed-mouth speaking to open-mouth singing, crescendi, ascending vocal line

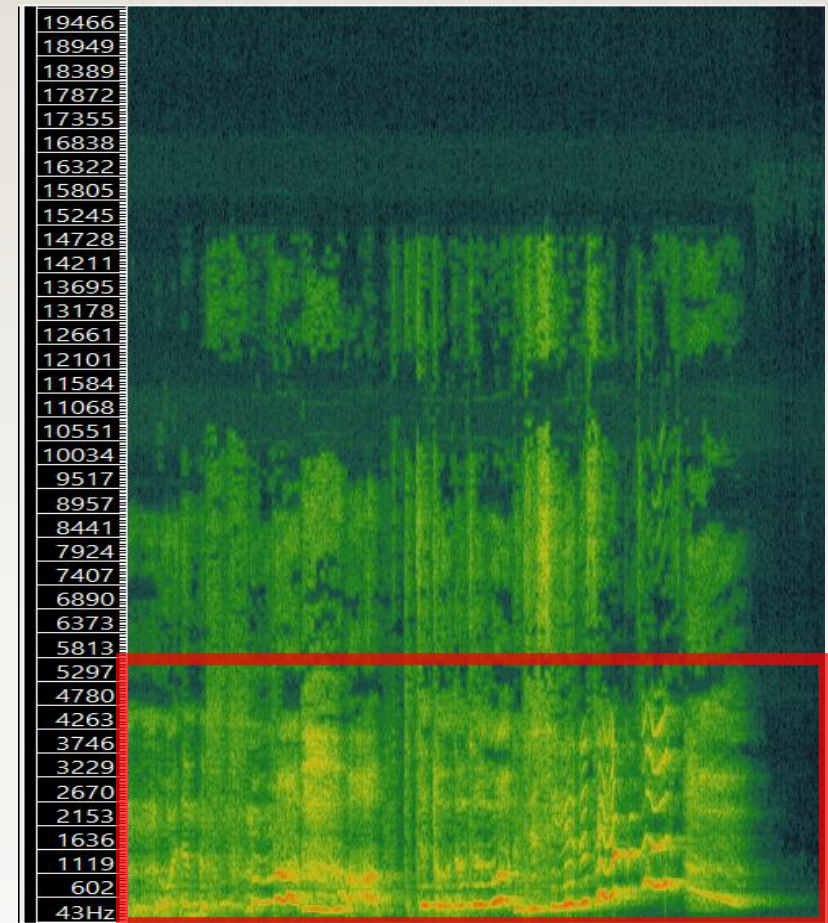


Performer: Stephanie Lamprea  
8:02-8:06

The image shows a handwritten musical score on a five-line staff. The score is divided into two sections by a vertical line. The left section is enclosed in a blue border and contains the lyrics "lattice hid for / ver to kiss the / and yes o and". Above the staff, there is a tempo marking of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  and a dynamic marking of  $(\rightarrow 0)$ . The right section is enclosed in a red border and contains the lyrics "awful deepdown / torrent O and / sea the sea crimson". Above the staff, there is a tempo marking of  $3'$  and a dynamic marking of  $mp$ . The musical notation includes notes, rests, and a crescendo hairpin.



Enablement schema  
(reproduced from Wallmark 2022, 65)





# OPPRESSION

- Blockage schema
- Alternation between free and restricted vocalization (closed mouth), lack of breath (in-breath and “hold no air”), explosive consonants

sensual, electric and urgent!

hold no air 4' 3' 4' 4 1/2'

Out! sf sarphe

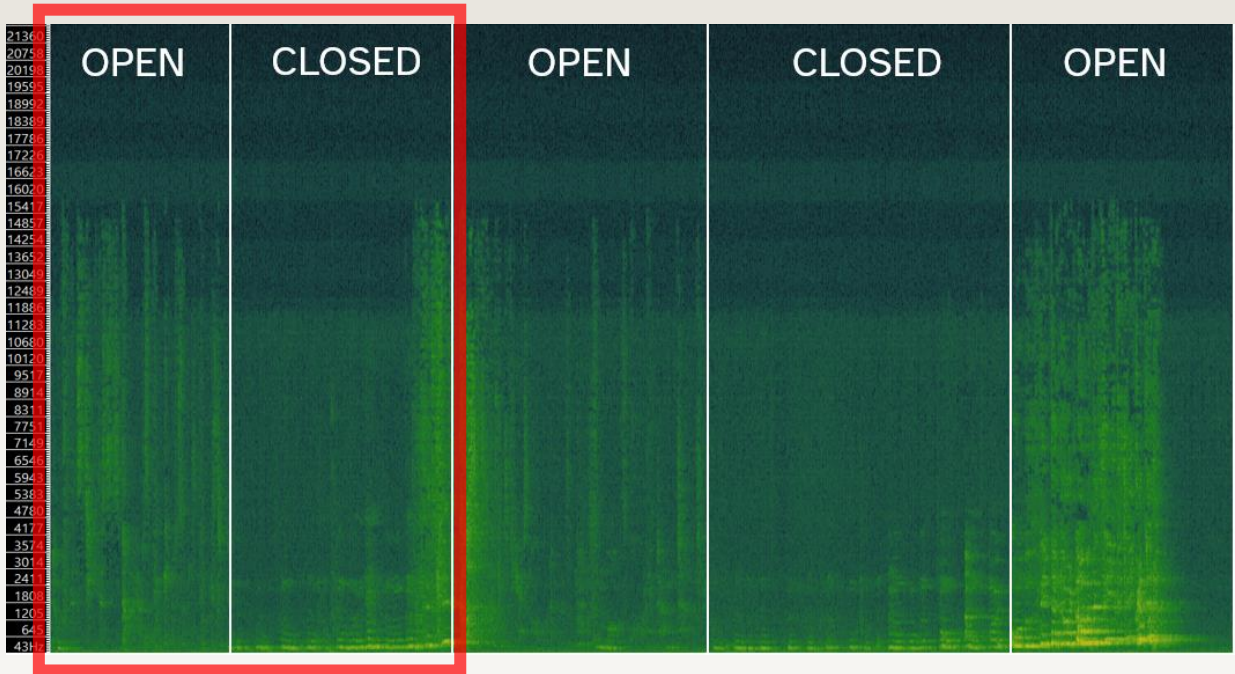
Out over the sea the sky I was thinking of so many things he didn't know

vague fellows in the cloaks asleep in the shade on the steps and the

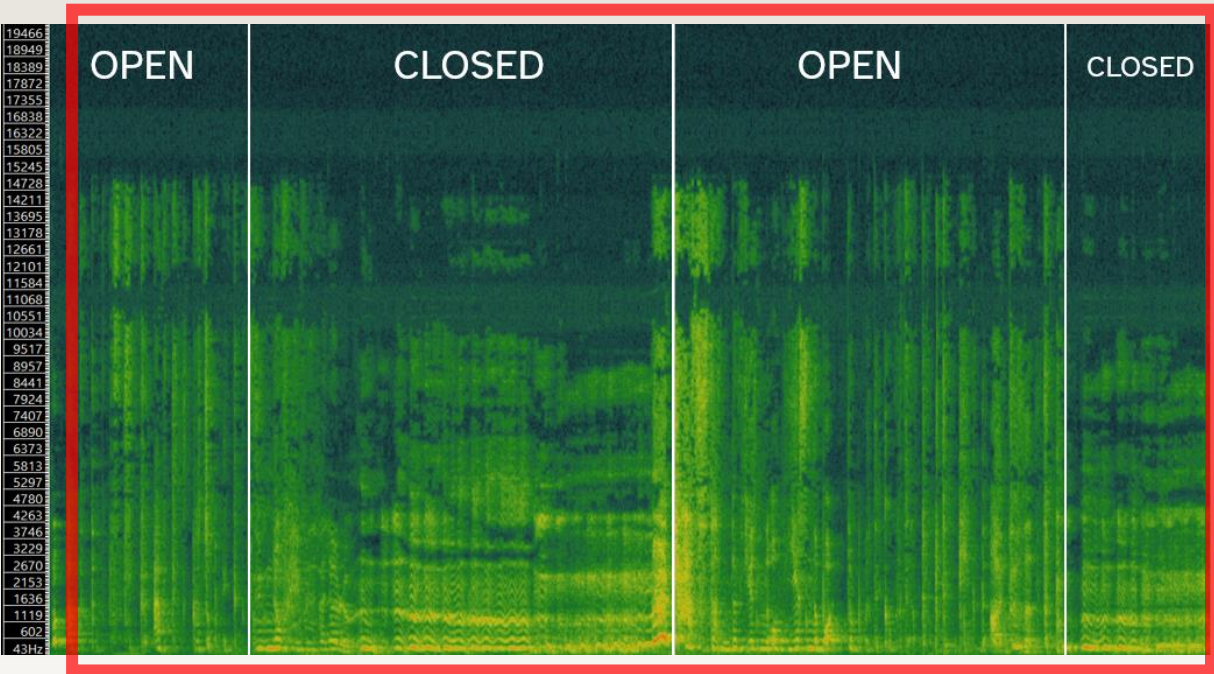
Castles thousands of years old yes and those handsome Meers all in white and turbans like Kings

eyes a lattice hid for her lover to kiss the iron and yes o and I

19



Performer: Juliet Fraser  
7:03-7:10



Performer: Stephanie Lamprea  
7:49-8:00

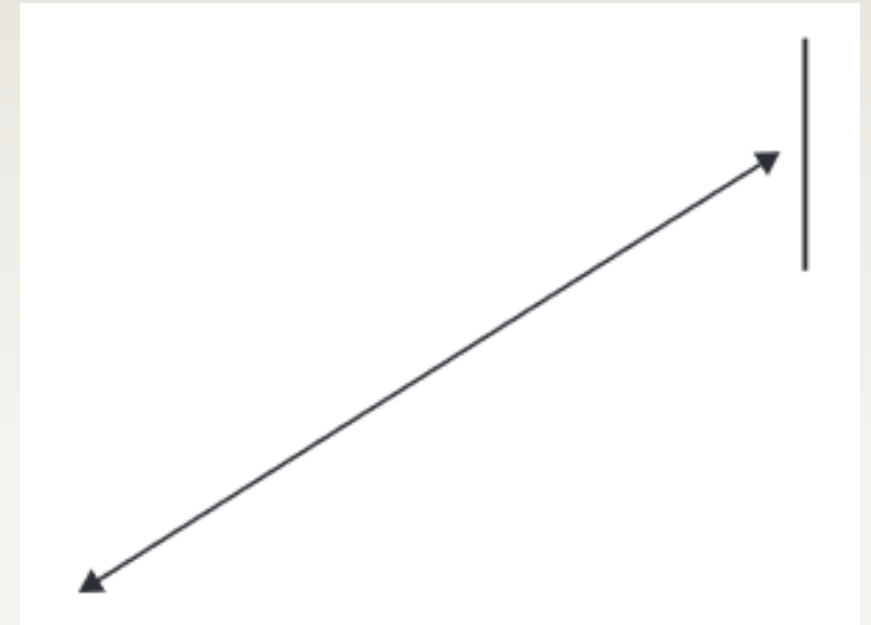


# SEXUAL DESIRE

- Ultimate limit schema
- Ascending vocal line culminating on high note; followed by sudden pause and whispers



Performer: Juliet Fraser  
7:19-7:31



Ultimate limit schema  
(reproduced from Wallmark 2022, 67)





# CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

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Thank you for listening!  
Questions?

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O (2017)  
for soprano solo

"O" is based on the final chapter of *Ulysses*, Molly Bloom's monologue by James Joyce. This extraordinary monologue can be regarded as a kind of collage, a woven fabric of innumerable threads of tales, memories, images and thoughts.

This text flows continuously as she waits for sleep, in the twilight of her consciousness.





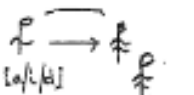
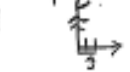


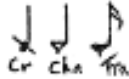




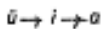

In "O", Molly Bloom's words flow with the in- and out-breath, between moments of absence and presence: the voice switches relentlessly back and forwards between fragments of an inner and an exterior monologue.

Although not always audible, the original text is still present and implied: For a moment words surface and become visible, audible, comprehensible, like the emergence of an image or tale - momentarily words takes form, and then submerge again into the flow of time.

And this thought was central to the development of "O":

A singer stands on the stage - even still and silent this is in itself a theatrical moment - our expectations, the human body, breathing, waiting. Alone the blink of an eyelash, the turn of the mouth, the breath, suffice to allude and imply.

Legende

	Sung		Projected whisper		Spoken
+	Closed mouth	o	Open	1/2+	1/2-close mouth and throat
	1/2-air, pitch is not exact. An expressive function, with a little deprec. at end. Ossia: pp poco vib.			CH	Air/whisper with German CH exaggerate vowels.
	Scat, slow to fast. Phonetics, consonants and vowels, e.g. [a/ɪ/h], always lyrical, fluid and smooth. Like murmuring to yourself. Adapt the scat phonetics to your voice if necessary - timbre, shape of mouth and throat - using the text immediately before and after.				
	Scat repetitions in triplet feel in free tempo.		Fixed jaw and nearly closed teeth, exaggerate diction. Consonants at front of mouth are explosive.		
	Speed of diction from slow to fast.		Always extreme percussion (consonants), long exaggerated sh, ss, r, w, qu, ch, etc. and low and long vowels, where possible.		
	Phonetic noise attack - complex spectrum.		Also known as "pigeon", a quasi-Monteverdi (baroque) trill: Glottal trill, close and bubbling - unstable rhythm with a re-articulation of air.		
tr.	Tight classical trill, max. 1/4 tone interval, less where possible.		Soft rolled "r", e.g. r[u] "oo", low in mouth near back of throat.		
	Front roll (tongue), with different vowels.		Nasal very gradual transition from one vowel to next.		
	In-breath.				

Generally, adapt sounds - scats, consonants and vowels, and other timbral techniques - to make your interpretation natural to your voice at all times, e.g. use instead a different scat vowel/consonant, a vibrato, an o/+ [ah/mm pulse], a roll [r] or [R] or employ the "trillo" to make a note more comfortable.

Note, difference between 1. "r" non-rolled = is as in English "rose", and 2. rolled "r" indicated by double-line on stem.

Diction of spoken, "silent" and whispered text very exaggerated:

1. always extreme percussion of consonants and hard accents where possible; 2. exaggerate the long consonants sh, ss, v, w, qu, ch, etc. ; 3. draw out the long vowels wherever you can.





dark

\*Ossia: trillo on 'I'

6. *chest*  
*simple + gentle*  
*held to air*  
 ye-[a]n[ma], ge-[a]n[ma] (jasmine)  
 0 Hen-[a]w - fu[ma] deaf  
 dea[n] do[n] yes and all the queer little sheets  
 red pink and blue and yellow  
 heaves and the rosegardens  
 and the jessamine and geraniums  
 and catfishes and Gibraltar as a  
 girl when  
 was a flower of the mountain yes when  
 I put a rest in my  
 hair like the

7. *Moving on!*  
*legato + sensual*  
*1/2 + gentle*  
 the [a]n sea (sea)  
 Che care care  
 Oid[ma] Cris-ton sode times life  
 (rinson) v[ma]

8. *Moving on!*  
*legato + sensual*  
*urgent!*  
*moving on!*  
 fi- fi-[a]n (Lin)  
 He said I'll wait  
 'till you and  
 your little  
 head was  
 shaking  
 your head  
 yes when I  
 put the rest in my hair  
 like the Andalucian  
 girls used - shall I wear  
 a red top and how he  
 kissed  
 rough and hairy like King  
 asking you to sit down in  
 their little bit of a shop and  
 drink wine, the old windows  
 of the period glowing  
 eyes a leather lid for the  
 later to kiss the iron and the  
 windows half open at night  
 and the  
 some love so some fine  
 [a]n  
 Yes O [a]n I [a]n and  
 and and and  
 and  
 \* (muttering)  
 (spoken) (9) allaacca

9. *moving on!*  
*simple*  
 My ar-[a]n with my eye  
 (eyes) a [a]n red  
 [a]n [a]n [a]n  
 (eyes) (eyes)  
 - s per- fine yes how heart[ma] [a]n Mad  
 (oyes) cap  
 Ma - - agty... (Mad)  
 Held still!

10. *gentle*  
*light + smooth*  
*sensual, electric and urgent*  
 in sha-dow [a]n  
 My ag  
 My ag  
 [a]n  
 Out on the sea the sky  
 I was thinking of so  
 many things he didn't  
 know  
 vapor-belows in the  
 clouds along in the  
 shade on the ship  
 and the  
 endless thousands of eyes  
 old eye and blue  
 handsome Moors all in  
 white and turbans like  
 King  
 does a leather lid for  
 her lover to kiss the  
 iron and yes + and  
 awful deepdown  
 torrent O and  
 sea the sea crimson!  
 yes will  
 you sail  
 you sail  
 you sail  
 you sail  
 you sail  
 you sail  
 you sail  
 you sail  
 you sail

\*[9. is a climax gesture. Carry over this energy to the second half of 10.]

\*you need to communicate but are held back.

1. *fragile* *hard* *moving on!* *Short*

and that was the end - I'd deep down  
flow (flower)  
do-[w/ta] tai-[w/ta] rose (mountain)  
ng [o/o/a] yes how [o/e/a]  
[ye/ta] a [h/i/ja] M-L (yes) (and he) (me)  
\*Ossia: [R]u  
\*Ossia: tr. + ng

2. *murmurs* *sensual + simple* *moving on!* *short* *very short* *release* *Short*

ng [o/a/i/c]  
ah yes I know them well who was the first  
ye- ye- [ye/ta]  
r[u] ng [o/a]  
ah [h/i/ja]  
I (I'm)

2 1/2" *hold still!* *Slowly go to a closed lips smile* *Wow! unbelieved*

ah ah

© J. Duke 2017 / final take 2018 Berlin



