



PROJECT MUSE®

Breaking Silence, Breaching Censorship: "Ongoing Interculturality" in Alice Shields's Electronic Opera *Apocalypse*

Danielle Sofer

American Music, Volume 36, Number 2, Summer 2018, pp. 135-162 (Article)

Published by University of Illinois Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/700003>

DANIELLE SOFER

---

# Breaking Silence, Breaching Censorship: “Ongoing Interculturality” in Alice Shields’s Electronic Opera *Apocalypse*

On a warm summer’s eve in 1990, American composer Alice Shields visited her friend, Columbia University colleague, and fellow composer Daria Semegen. Under the stars outside Semegen’s home in Stony Brook, Long Island, the conversation veered—as it often did—to contemporary U.S. politics.<sup>1</sup> Enraged by “bigoted puritanism,” Shields and Semegen criticized the recent influx of conservatism, specifically, the increasing volume of antiabortion groups. The composers began improvising playfully in call-and-response on the risqué behavior they supposed had triggered these groups, eventually settling on the chant “Your hot lips, Apocalypse,” what would later become a line from “Apocalypse Song,” the title aria to Shields’s electronic opera *Apocalypse*, written in 1993 and released a year later on CD.<sup>2</sup>

Your hot lips, Apocalypse,  
Your words divine made flesh in mine,  
Turn my blood back into wine.<sup>3</sup>

Obvious Christian themes in the text include the divine flesh paired with the reference to blood transformed into wine.<sup>4</sup> Shields acknowledges the song’s connections to the Eucharist, accompanied in the Catholic tradition by chant and ritual movements. However, the composer

---

Danielle Sofer is a lecturer at Maynooth University, Ireland. She completed her PhD with distinction at the Kunstuniversität Graz with the dissertation “Making Sex Sound: Erotic Currents in Electronic Music.” A music theorist attuned to gendered hearings and sensitive to cultural context, Danielle has published on the reception of Adorno’s “listening typology” and written analyses of music by Elizabeth Maconchy, Juliana Hodkinson, and Barry Truax.

imparts wider significance beyond Christian themes to the transformation described in this passage. Alongside Christianity, Shields explains, miraculous transformations of this sort are also variously described in Tibetan, Japanese, and Indian dance and theater, Native American shaman rituals, and Egyptian burial rites.<sup>5</sup> Exchanges of religious and cultural signification across different systems of belief are important in the opera, and, more specifically, it was important to Shields that although each tradition realizes the theme differently, many shared the concept of miraculous transformation. Shields cites particular influence from the Indian *bharatanatyam* dance drama, a practice the composer has studied since the 1980s. As is characteristic of *bharatanatyam*'s *devadāsī* dancer, the sole performer takes on various sacred personae and easily transforms from one character to another. In *Apocalypse*, Shields's multiple roles as composer and sole performer allow her, like a *devadāsī* dancer, to make connections through movement, text, and music between several traditions and histories.

The plot of *Apocalypse* is relatively simple. WOMAN embarks on a spiritual journey of self-discovery. After a restless act of independent searching, in the second act WOMAN encounters SEAWEED SEA GODDESS, who teaches her the strength to pursue a path of enlightenment with the support of an accompanying chorus. The opera culminates in the third act when WOMAN meets the Hindu God SHIVA, and together they engage in a choreographed sexual union. The opera parades typical phallic imagery—a “phallus . . . two feet high, with balls the size of grapefruit”—in its culminating scene to combat the post-Reagan conservatism to which Shields and Semegen were reacting.<sup>6</sup> But instead of a climax driven by the stereotypical male sexual drive, WOMAN's encounter with SHIVA is mediated on her own terms: the performance centers around her experience of the act through sound, timbre, voice, text, lights, and physical response. Staging sex in the most obvious, visible, and audible manner, Shields avoids replicating the played-out tropes of male sexual fantasy. Rather, Shields confronts tacit sexual stigmas that plague both her contemporary American political climate and the lingering British colonial attitude toward *bharatanatyam* revivals. In this article, I show how *Apocalypse* addresses sexual censorship through music, text, and choreography to envision a world for which sex is not stigmatized but instead exists as a productive and inseparable aspect of culture and music.

### *Alice Shields, Some Background*

Alice Shields's early success at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center (CPEMC) is evident. She worked at the center for over three decades as a technical instructor and in various administrative roles,

but despite years of service, she hardly received the recognition of her predominantly male colleagues.<sup>7</sup> As she recalls, when joining Columbia in 1961, “supposedly no one, not even the musicologists specializing in medieval or renaissance history, had ever heard of a woman composer, including Hildegard von Bingen or Elizabeth Jacquet de La Guerre, who were famous in their time.”<sup>8</sup> During her early days at the CPEMC in the 1960s and 1970s Shields says she rarely encountered other women, and given the figures most commonly associated now with the center (Vladimir Ussachevsky, Otto Luening, Milton Babbitt, Bülent Arel, Mario Davidovsky, Charles Dodge, and Charles Wuorinen), it remains apparent still that women were scarcely represented there. Pril Smiley and Daria Semegen, who themselves also went on to become successful composers of electronic music, studied alongside Shields and, like her, were active for several years in the CPEMC, though they too, until recently, were omitted from printed histories about the center.<sup>9</sup> In her book *Women Composers and Music Technology in the United States*, Elizabeth Hinkle-Turner suggests that failure to acknowledge Shields among her contemporaries occurred possibly on account of academia’s typical “cost-cutting and exploitation,” but Shields’s gender, as one of few women working among a predominantly male staff, was likely also a factor.<sup>10</sup> In conversation, Shields recalled to me a confrontation with a fellow composer in the Columbia music library:

I remember, still an undergraduate, walking into the music library looking for a score and [seeing] a guy who was in one of my classes—I was the only girl typically in classes in composition. I don’t remember any other girls—girls, women, I was a girl. And we were talking about composing, and he said, “No woman could compose melody, you know, rhythms like Beethoven, if she were *normal*.” . . . And so I realized afterwards, that meant, I couldn’t be what I thought I was, a straight woman—which I was—and be *normal* and write exciting music. It was meant as an insult, and I think it was a defense statement that you can’t write music as good as me, or better . . . but that was very typical.<sup>11</sup>

Whatever the reason for the neglect of her influence in the history of electronic and electroacoustic music, it seems that Shields’s official status at the center, along with her unusual compositional choices, certainly set her apart from the studio’s more recognizable names.<sup>12</sup>

To escape her male-dominated professional life, Shields turned to folklore and mythology, where she found more encouraging female roles. She immersed herself in writing by female authors and was drawn to women represented in religion—those depicted as powerful, knowledgeable, and liberated in the classic Greek, Hindu, and Gaelic myths, to name a few recurring sources. What especially piqued Shields’s interests was

the freedom with which non-Western mythology and religion portrayed women's sexuality, praising every part of the body, from her facial expressions to her feet. In Indian mythology, says Shields, "each part of the body of the 'Great Goddess' is lauded, every part, toenails, everything! And I thought, how magnificent that a woman could be celebrated—and celebrated in the Indian case as fearsome. All these goddesses are powerful and are not just addressed, though some are, in moments of grief, like the Virgin Mary can be addressed by some Christians here, but they are to be feared and at the same time intensely sexual, which was such a relief."<sup>13</sup>

Shields has devoted a large portion of her music to literary and religious icons. The goddess Devi is a character in *Apocalypse* who appears also in the miniopera *Shivatanz* (1993) and is invoked in *Sahityam* (2000) for solo marimba or bassoon, based on the intonation pattern of a Sanskrit poem to Devi. The Virgin Mary, the quintessential woman from Shields's Christian upbringing, appears in *Ave Maris Stella* (2003) for SATB chorus and *Kyrielle* (2005) for violin and tape, based on Gregorian chants associated with the Virgin Mary. According to the composer's note: "Since it has the French 'elle' ('she') embedded in it, the word *Kyrielle* can also evoke a female deity, not just the Christian Mary, but all compassionate female spirits such as the Chinese Kwan-Yin, the Japanese Kannon, and the Tibetan Tara."<sup>14</sup> In a reconstruction of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, the composer returned to Boccaccio's Italian text to retell the story from Criseyde's perspective in an opera named after the title role, *Criseyde* (2010), and, not restricting herself only to religious and mythological texts, Shields has also drawn inspiration from living (or once living) women such as the Japanese poet Komachi (*Komachi at Sekidera* [1987/1999]) and Rachel Corrie, a woman crushed to death by an Israeli forces bulldozer as she stood before it trying to prevent the demolition of a Palestinian home in the Gaza Strip (*Mioritza* [2003], requiem for trombone and "computer music on tape").

The composer's initial attraction to these women may have been motivated by a need to represent in art the idols she longed for in life. Yet her compositions betray greater ambitions than mere fantasy. Art is a reflection of lived experience, but, more than this, the context of art affords certain liberties that are not normally tolerated in "real" public spaces, especially when it comes to sexual situations. In an interview conducted in June 1982, Michel Foucault remarked that contemporary art was one context in which individuals could express sexual tendencies that are ordinarily ignored or suppressed by society: "When you look at the different ways people have experienced their own sexual freedoms—the way they have created their works of art—you would have to say that sexuality, as we now know it, has become one of the most creative sources of our society and our being. My view is that we should understand it in

the reverse way: the world regards sexuality as the secret of the creative cultural life; it is, rather, a process of our having to create a new cultural life underneath the ground of our sexual choices."<sup>15</sup> Foucault confronts the artistic autonomy on which the modernist European avant-garde prided itself, arguing instead that postmodern (and postwar) art enriches real life, such that life should be modeled after art and not the other way around, a model such as one finds in Shields's *Apocalypse*.

On the recording, the composer, who trained as an opera singer, performs the opera's three roles, WOMAN, Devi the SEAWEED SEA GODDESS, and SHIVA.<sup>16</sup> Since the performer is expected to sing along with the recording as the "tape" accompaniment, any live performance will inevitably rely on the composer's own interpretation in terms of timing and delivery. This limitation is perhaps one reason the opera has yet to be staged.<sup>17</sup> As is possible only in the electronic medium, Shields herself also sings the variously sampled voices that make up the opera's chorus. Beyond her immediate compositional aspirations in the opera, the possibilities afforded by electronic processing situate Shields conceptually with other women electroacoustic composers who, to paraphrase Andra McCartney, create worlds for their music to exist.<sup>18</sup>

### *Closing the Gap*

Because of the allure of their bodies, historically, women have been characterized as a threat to the dominant masculine rationality. Friedrich Nietzsche once wrote: "The magic and the most powerful effect of women is to produce feeling from a distance, in philosophical language, *actio in distans*, action at a distance; but this requires first of all and above all—*distance*."<sup>19</sup> It is no coincidence that Nietzsche in this very passage contrasts Poseidon's pained singing with what he observes as women's curious silence, silence being one form of distance. Situated apart from the source, listeners distance themselves until they are far enough away not to hear anymore or in such a way that they hear what they want, like Odysseus's encounter with the Sirens, whose singing he could enjoy only if he was bound distantly to the mast of his ship.

Distant women's voices have long been presented in sexually curious terms. Jean-Jacques Rousseau confessed as much when he described his encounter with the practice of *clausura*, the invisible cloistered singing of nuns, in Venice in 1742. Rousseau had imagined that the celestial disembodied voices belonged to matching angelic bodies, but the experience fell short of his expectations when he saw the singers for the first time. His attraction to the sounds came on account of their unattainability, their relentless slippage from disacousmatization—the inability to discover their true source.<sup>20</sup> Often, such allure comes precisely on account of an illusory ideal—the image of woman rather than any woman's

actual appearance. In his recollection of this account, music theorist Brian Kane echoes Mladen Dolar to claim that the source of the acousmatic voice—similarly to Jacques Lacan’s unattainable *objet a*—can never be revealed from its sound alone, and if the source is revealed, that object changes in kind.<sup>21</sup> For this reason, Kane argues, the veiling *medium* in electroacoustic music is of central appeal, and more so than either the originating source or its sounding result.<sup>22</sup> Yet, this prioritization of the medium invites speculation. Theories that privilege mediation in this way strategically undermine the human element in composition, performance, and audition. Such theories stifle aspects of sociocultural identity in favor of some abstracted notion of sound as an object from which gender is suspiciously absent. The fact, however, remains that, among those who ally their music with electroacoustic practice, most composers are men.<sup>23</sup> And when voices sound in the electroacoustic world, however manipulated—whether or not they remain recognizable—they are most often the voices of women.<sup>24</sup> Such seem to be the criteria for women’s participation in electroacoustic sound, that their presence be at once both implied and denied. This is in contrast to men’s controlling hands at the mixing desk or their roles as representatives on prestigious institutional boards and committees.<sup>25</sup>

Sexually speaking, men are also more present than women. Men’s pleasure has long belonged to the visible—at least since the Dionysian phallic processions and, more recently, in pornographic films.<sup>26</sup> Though women’s bodies silently masquerade on the covers of magazines, women’s sexual pleasure is generally not represented visually; the visible realm is reserved for the phallus. According to philosopher Luce Irigaray, women’s sexual pleasure lingers in folds of the skin. It is ec-static (Gr. ἕκστασις), situated “elsewhere,” out of place and removed from the site of intercourse.<sup>27</sup> Women’s pleasure is not usually seen, though it is often heard, their satisfaction most often equated with the “quality and volume of the female vocalizations,” and, in *Apocalypse*, Shields capitalizes on this trope.<sup>28</sup>

In the third part of the opera, typical phallic symbolism is taken to its literal extreme. The chorus is instructed to rip SHIVA to shreds, but, failing to reconstruct him, the chorus erect a comically large phallus and testicles instead of a man’s body, thereby reducing the god’s status to the extent of his biological apparatus. When SHIVA is finally restored to his original form through a ritual performed by the WOMAN, he commences the sexual union with her as if that is his sole purpose. A torch “held behind his erect phallus silhouette,” SHIVA maintains a figurative and actual spotlight on his manhood.<sup>29</sup> Breaking with tradition, in this scene WOMAN does not resolve herself to the typical moaning and cooing à la Donna Summer’s “Love to Love You Baby”; instead, as the libretto instructs, “The God and the Woman sing together in a voice that is neither male nor female, but both at once.”<sup>30</sup> In this way, the Woman’s

sexual pleasure retains a link with the sonic, not with a reflex inferior to the man's control but by way of shared song. Such a vision of unity, the title of "Woman" notwithstanding, leans away from binaristic notions of gender and aligns more closely with Shiva's dual apparition (as detailed below).

After three ritualized orgasms, "a chaos of light and sound takes over," and the human forms vanish into a choreographed light show. Here, Shields calls on the electroacoustic tradition, with its history of severing the link between voice and body. As I have argued elsewhere, there are generally two competing, though not exclusive, theories of the disembodied voice.<sup>31</sup> The first claims that the voice can never be disembodied from its source and sound; the second claims that, once disembodied, a listener will never be able to fully reconcile this voice with its origins. Of course, the context for each depends on several criteria of recognition. Is the name of the performer known? Is the voice processed electronically or digitally and to what extent? What parameters qualify the source as recognized? Is it enough to acknowledge the gender of the speaker, their age, or their ethnicity? Or need listeners identify the vocalizing individual beyond a doubt? If the voice is paired with a body in performance, should listeners identify this body with the sound's origin or with another, possibly different, source? These are all questions that Alice Shields's performance raises, and none have a clear answer. While these questions are certainly of interest when investigating electroacoustic music, this essay does not dwell on them. Instead, it will investigate another facet of the opera, one that rests on the possibilities granted by the opera's electronic medium but is not solely beholden to it. This analysis demonstrates how Shields uses the electronic operatic medium to address sexual censorship, to explore the ways in which the medium grants her greater flexibility and freedom than she would have in her everyday life. In addressing sexual taboos through performance, Shields reinterprets and hence moves to alter her society's attitude toward sex through its "cultural life," to recall Foucault. In particular, the analysis will compare the right-wing conservatism of the post-Reagan political climate in which the opera was composed to the stigma against sexual expression in early twentieth-century colonialist revivals of the Indian *bharatanatyam* dance drama to show how *Apocalypse* confronts the silencing of sex in both by borrowing symbolism and meaning common to both. Before exploring the *bharatanatyam* revival and its role in *Apocalypse*, first a summary of the ancient theory of emotions in the Indian drama.

### Navarasa Theory and Bharatanatyam

*Bharatanatyam* is a form of South Indian classical dance with origins in the *Natyashastra*, an aesthetic theory and dramaturgical text written by Bharata-Muni ca. 300 B.C.<sup>32</sup> The dance form, known originally as *sadir*,

was performed in temples by *devadāsī* dancers who would personify and embody the spiritual presence of the deities to which they were devoted. The *devadāsī* dancer could transition between several personas without a moment's notice, each character possessing its own attributable gestures. For example, the *abhaya*, or "fearless," *mudhra* invokes the god Shiva (figure 1), the raised right hand protecting from evil and the lowered left hand, outstretched or giving the sign of the elephant, leading through the jungle of ignorance.

Shiva's mundane appellation, Shakti, appears as an expression of his feminine energy, her hair flowing like fire. In characteristic statues, Shiva and Shakti are frequently depicted with the bodily form of the man



Figure 1. Shiva as Lord of Dance (Nataraja), Chola period (880–1279), c. 11th century. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Copper alloy, H. 26 $\frac{7}{8}$  in. (68.3 cm); Diam. 22 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (56.5 cm). Gift of R. H. Ellsworth Ltd., in honor of Susan Dillon, 1987. Acc.n.: 1987.80.1. Photo: Bruce White. © 2017. Image copyright The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource / Scala, Florence.

and woman in ecstatic entwinement, the transition from Shiva to Shakti achieved through erotic union, or *maithuna* (figure 2). But where sculpture captures only an instance of movement, dance brings gestures to life. Dancers can transform from Shiva to Shakti instantaneously.

In *bharatanatyam*, not only does the performer imitate the poses of the characters she invokes, but her gestures are also said to imbue emotional inflection. The *devadāsī's* *mudhras* (signifying gestures) are expressive of *bhavas* (moods) that draw on a long history of associations. The *mudhras* convey the dancer's experience but are also intended to arouse a specific response, or *rasa*, meaning "flavor or essence," from spectators.<sup>33</sup> *Navarasa* theory, as expounded in Bharata-Muni's transcription of the oral tradition in the *Natyashastra*, serves as a guide for Indian drama



Figure 2. Loving couple (mithuna), Eastern Ganga dynasty, 13th century. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Ferruginous stone, H. 72 in. (182.9 cm). Purchase, Florence Waterbury Bequest, 1970. Acc.n.: 1970.44. Photo: Bruce White. © 2017. Image copyright The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource / Scala, Florence.

performers on how to evoke the emotional complex in spectators. The eight *rasas* arise in four pairings, where the first of each pair is dominant.<sup>34</sup>

love/humor (*sringara/hasya*)  
 valor/wonder (*vira/adbhuta*)  
 anger/sorrow (*raudra/karuna*)  
 disgust/fear (*bibhasta/bhayanaka*)

The treatise likens the experience of *rasas* to flavors enjoyed in a delicious meal, where a diner does not relish each taste distinctively but rather takes joy in the entire experience.<sup>35</sup> A drama arouses many *rasas*, the tones of one *rasa* lingering behind another, though Bharata advises, in a successful drama “only one *rasa* must be predominant and others subordinate to it.”<sup>36</sup> According to feminist scholar of Indian art and philosophy Ranjana Thapalyal, of the eight *rasas*, *sringara*—love, either romantic separation (*viyoga*) or sexual union (*samyoga*)—is the “king of *rasas*.” This is because “love is the one emotion that, by definition, encompasses all the others.”<sup>37</sup>

Whereas in Western classical traditions of dance, music, and performance art the audience may observe and even identify with the action onstage, there is no expectation that the audience take part by entering the mind of the character to embody that character’s feelings as their own. However, *sadir*’s movements draw on a convention of complex physicality and emotion, and the *devadāsī*’s gestures are expected to arouse a web of associations between narrative, meaning, and emotion: “[Bharatha’s] ideal spectator (*sahrydaya*), absorbed in the religious stories evoked in the conventionalized mode of representation, experiences *rasa*, or aesthetic delight—a state of joy characterized by emotional plentitude. Endowed with superior artistic and intellectual capabilities, Bharatha’s sympathetic spectator harmonizes differences into unities by the power of his own mind. He, like the performer, perceives the sublime in the erotic, the divine in the human.”<sup>38</sup> This depiction has as much to do with the dancer as it does with the ideal spectator, who was expected to possess certain knowledge and to be invested in the performance along *with* the dancer.

Dancer Avanthi Meduri writes of the shifting ideology surrounding Indian dance aesthetics from the height of the *devadāsī*’s importance in the ninth through twelfth centuries, under the rulership of Chola kings, and until the dance revival of the early twentieth century. In former times, the dancer was wed to the deity of a particular temple in a sacred thread ceremony (*tāli kettu*, colloquially, “tying the knot”), and she resolved never to marry a mortal man, yet it was expected that she would conduct “discreet sexual relations with priest or king.”<sup>39</sup> The realities of the *devadāsī*’s position therefore extended beyond her religious devoutness and Bharata’s idealized image of her.<sup>40</sup> Such duties became problematic

in the nineteenth century, when, under the British occupation of India, the dancer's reputation was sullied by her extracurricular activities. By the 1920s *devadāsīs* were deemed "a seedy symbol of a perverse and backward Indian culture," such conservatism seeping into the rhetoric of those attempting to revive classical dance practices at this time.<sup>41</sup> A movement to preserve Indian classical culture gained momentum, and in 1932 important societal figures were attempting to redeem the practice from its association with *devadāsīs* by renaming the practice *bharatanatyam* and therefore solidifying its association with Bharata's more idealized theory than with the realities of the practice.<sup>42</sup> In 1947 the Madras Devadasis Prevention (Prevention of Dedication) Act was implemented, which "officially outlawed the social, ritual, and aesthetic practices" of *devadāsīs*.<sup>43</sup>

### *Reinventing Bharatanatyam*

In the revival, *bharatanatyam* was taken outside the temple and brought to the secular stage. New interpretations of the tradition as described by practicing artists like Rukmini Devi (1904–86), an upper-class Brahmin and wife of Lord Arundale, the head of the Indian Theosophical Society, leaned on Bharata's ideal of the practice as interpreted by Abhinavagupta, an Indian aesthetician who shifted the significance of dramatic love from a physical to a transcendental spiritual form. Meduri argues that the secularization of the dance removed its carnality and hence compromised the role of dancers, who were now charged with recreating a tradition from its idealized traces. "Today's *bharatha natyam*," writes Meduri, "with its danced stories of God evoked in a secular world, is analogous to a human being walking forward with his face turned backwards."<sup>44</sup> Dancers who aimed to cleanse their association with prostitutes while also restoring their "respectable" position reinterpreted *sringara rasa* by removing the dance's explicit "amorous mood [conveyed] through posture, gait, gestures, glances, adornment, perfume, and accompanying song" and instead substituting inoffensive hand waving.<sup>45</sup> According to Rukmini Devi, "love was not sensuality . . . but rather devotion (*bhakti*), and she therefore began to exalt devotion in the presentations."<sup>46</sup> In order to convey this more exalted version of the practice, practitioners deliberately excluded some of the more blatantly erotic gestures from the repertoire to give the semblance of respectability and modesty.<sup>47</sup> By removing actual *devadāsīs* from the picture, (male) spectators could shirk their shared responsibility in shaping the practice and hence relieve themselves from the guilt of association with individuals of questionable character, "the concubines, mistresses, or 'second wives' of South Indian elites . . . implicated in a larger world of servitude focused on the fulfillment of male desire."<sup>48</sup> Members of the right-wing Indian high caste invented a

nationalist narrative that was simultaneously anti-British colonialism, anti-Muslim, anti-Dalit (the lower-caste groups to which most *devadāsīs* belonged), and, in many ways, antiwoman, as caste, class, and religious discrimination also diminished the role women played in redefining Indian nationalism.<sup>49</sup> Right-wing high-caste Hindu patriarchies eventually renounced *sringara rasa* altogether, and as the *bharatanatyam* revival grew in popularity throughout the twentieth century both within India and internationally, the movement retained a stigma against sex. Severing the link between music and dance, revivalists redrew the lineage of the practice to emphasize its ancient link to Bharata-Muni and thereby lessen the importance of practicing *devadāsīs* in favor of the perceived “purity” of some disembodied (desexualized) classical ideal.<sup>50</sup>

American composer Alice Shields obviously has no hereditary ties to the practice, so, although she attempts to reinstate some aspects of *bharatanatyam*'s lost traditions, to some extent she also reinforces aspects of its new interpretation. After all, *bharatanatyam* was traditionally a *hereditary* performance practice of music *and* dance, the revival period being the first time in history the dance became divorced from its paired music, a division that was wholly a result of the colonial dismantling of the practice. But as with many dance and music practices, Shields learned *bharatanatyam* from another form of inheritance: by apprenticing with her teacher, Swati Bhise. In reparative fashion, Shields worked to reunite the dance gestures with the music, albeit outside of the *sadīr* tradition, which had been fragmented and fractured many times over at the hands of both revivalists, who appropriated hereditary musicianship and dance from many parts of India, and non-Indian practitioners. Instead, as the next section demonstrates, Shields uniquely incorporates features of Indian music and dance together with many other traditions so as to rekindle the *bharatanatyam* spirit of creating music and dance side by side.

Furthermore, *Apocalypse* confronts sexual stigmatization by bringing the classical dance moves back into contact with explicit sexuality. Though *sringara rasa* is more commonly depicted by the deity Krishna and his compatriot Radha, Shields casts Shiva because of his dual appellation as Shakti. As she explains, “Instead of Krishna’s emphasis . . . on duty and emotional detachment . . . Shiva teaches identification with all life, the breaking of the illusion of separateness, through the vivid metaphor of sexuality.”<sup>51</sup> In our conversations, Shields repeatedly emphasized a distinction between classical Indian dance and Western ballet on the basis of liberties *bharatanatyam* extends to the female(-presenting) body. Shields recalled her excitement at first encountering Shakti in Nepalese statues: “Shakti’s typical gesture would be of her curling hair, her breasts, her hips. . . . In the act of intercourse, Shiva’s hair, which is fire, is circling around the world, and she is there with her leg partially over him—intense intercourse—and I loved it!” The transformation from

Shiva to Shakti is “so well defined that the two are one, and this is where the *maithuna* in *Apocalypse* comes from.”<sup>52</sup>

Shields’s incorporation of *sringara rasa* is an example of how the composer contributes to *bharatanatyam*’s continued development, providing, as Gilles Deleuze would say, theater as a “condition of movement under which the ‘actors’ or the ‘heroes’ produce something effectively new in history.”<sup>53</sup> She does not attempt to evoke the original setting of the language, music, or movements she chooses; rather, her setting rereads and newly envisions these texts. For example, the opera’s performer is expected to have experience both dancing *bharatanatyam* and singing in a Western operatic style. The gestures and postures in the libretto draw from the classical Indian tradition but are not so advanced that a novice could not perform them. The hand gestures (figure 3), for instance, recall Shiva’s *abhaya mudra* (figure 1), while the postures (figure 4) are inspired by poses from the *Kama Sutra*, Greek statues, and Irish educator and clergyman Gilbert Austin’s *Chironomia*, an eighteenth-century treatise on rhetorical delivery.

In fusing Indian *muhdras* with the gestures preserved in Greek statues and the postures of Austin’s *Chironomia*, Shields contributes to the ongoing

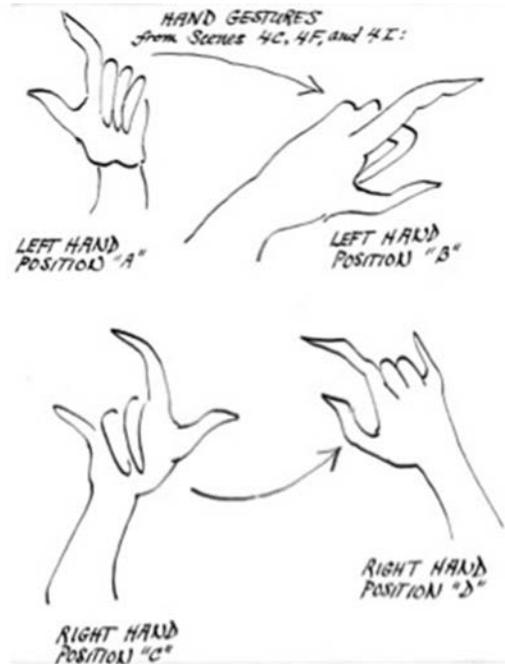


Figure 3. Hand gestures illustrated by Alice Shields in the *Apocalypse* libretto, page 82.

SELECTED POSTURES  
from Scenes 4D, 4G, and 4J:

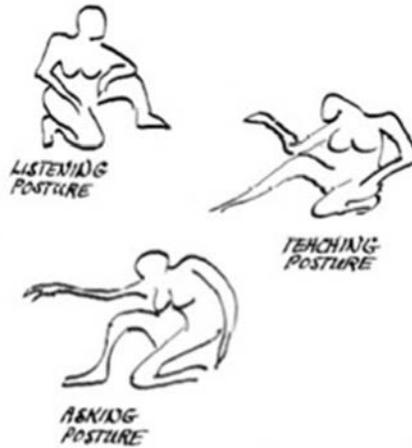


Figure 4. Postures illustrated by Alice Shields in the *Apocalypse* libretto, page 81.

choreographical reformulation typical for centuries of *bharatanatyam* practice, thereby placing these traditions in dialogue. The gestures carry deliberate and meaningful significance beyond the boundaries of the opera, but fused together they act as no simple citation of an already existing practice. Finding gestures common in two or more traditions, Shields elaborates in one direction or the other, thereby taking existing movements as inspiration toward new intercultural realizations.

Beyond the simple overlapping of gestures, Shields uses the same practice of commonality to address the sexual stigma both in *bharatanatyam*'s revival and her contemporaneous political climate in the United States. The resistance to *sringara*'s carnal message parallels the censorship and abstinence campaigns that later emerged under Ronald Reagan following the outbreak of AIDS—at the same time Shields was composing her opera. Shields confronts both traditions by way of a staged insurrection of sexual norms. Like the great Greek tragedian Aeschylus or the *devadāsī* dancer, Shields casts herself in the principal roles of *Apocalypse*, performing every character, WOMAN, SEAWEED SEA GODDESS, the divine SHIVA, and even the voices of the Aeschylean chorus.<sup>54</sup> When asked about the WOMAN's role—her role—the composer replied definitively, "I consider art transformative at best, so for me, writing a piece, I'm looking for not just healing, but transformation. And that was one of those moments, when I created that piece. The woman is the hero—the true

hero and no one is dying, as in so many operas by men."<sup>55</sup> By performing and magnifying the "malestream" symbolism of the sexual act, Shields instigates a social transformation—a reevaluation of sexuality—by placing the act front and center, in plain sight.<sup>56</sup> In reclaiming female sexuality from its relegated "elsewhere," to recall Irigaray, Shields's *Apocalypse* makes sex audible and visible, both current and present.

In the scene just prior to the culminating *maithuna*, WOMAN's over-protective chorus stand fearfully before the God SHIVA. When he arrives they attack him and shred him to pieces. Shortly thereafter, however, they feel remorse, and the group attempts to reassemble the god. They fail, being able only to repeatedly reconstruct a giant two-foot phallus with testicles the size of grapefruits. The WOMAN arrives thereafter and, to everyone's relief, recites a chant to revive the god in his original form. In the *maithuna* scene, the Woman lies atop a conveniently placed sofa shrieking ecstatically in "three choreographed, ritualized orgasms, one at the end of each verse of music."<sup>57</sup> Unlike the chorus, for whom the phallus is the male's sole representative purpose, the woman appeals to higher powers. Carefully choreographed movements combine with the composer's electronically modified voice to confirm her multiplicitous presence, which flows like a *devadāsī* effortlessly between the characters—WOMAN and SHIVA, as well as the remorseful chorus. More than phallic imagery, sex for her is a powerful spiritual union. The *maithuna* scene celebrates "the ecstasy of sensuality" to confront the "bigoted puritanism" Shields recognized together with her friend Daria Semegen.

Despite common parlance today, the premodern etymology of "apocalypse" is not associated with a literal end to the given world. With roots in Christian eschatology, the concept is more closely attuned with the process of revelation, an end to life *as we now know it*. After the chorus attacks and devours SHIVA, following his subsequent reincarnation, the god and the chorus chant together "ahpohkahléoh" (to call back); the woman then responds "to give up the ghost again"; and the God and chorus echo her in Greek, "ahpohkahpüeyen tsükáyn" (to give up the ghost once again).<sup>58</sup> The metaphoric and sonic repetition apparent in this slightly transformed exchange of the *ahpohkah* prefix (from the same root as "redeem" and "reclaim") echoes throughout the lyrics of the opera, and Shields likewise embeds this repetition in the opera's structure. For example, the dialogues that take place between the WOMAN and SEAWEEED and between SHIVA and the Woman turned Devi are repeated three times. In our conversation, Shields acknowledged the common three-part structures in *bharatanatyam* dance, connecting these to her training as a psychoanalyst. "In music or anything," says Shields, "you can't repeat beyond three times, but to fully have the pattern it seems to be a cross-cultural, human thing—three times that's it." Shields

likens the therapy session to a rondo, where the patient and/or therapist “[return] to a certain concern, feeling, or thought, alternating with new material.”<sup>59</sup> In this way, she explains, both music and therapy are cyclic and hence temporally relational activities, always in motion. Writing on the relationship between music and therapy, Shields cites Melanie Klein’s definition of repression, which results from the patient’s projection of a “bad object.” The “bad object” or Jungian “shadow” dwells in the patient’s subconscious. It is the therapist’s duty, writes Shields, “to help the patient become aware of their internal Shadow, the complement of verbal expressions and nonverbal, sound expressions.”<sup>60</sup> Like therapists, dancers are uniquely capable of facilitating such revelations: “Dancers are trained to kinesthetically feel, see, and improvise with spatial relationships, weight shifts, repetition, and mirroring of movement themes, boundaries, and rhythm. Like visual artists, dancers are trained in an aesthetic mode of perception that has elements in common with other arts, but which also has its unique kinesthetic dimension. This language, which articulates forms of process, can be helpful in describing the process of the therapeutic dance.”<sup>61</sup>

Alice Shields’s *Apocalypse* helps the spectator to identify, recognize, and acknowledge sex, to retrieve sex from the shadow, and, more than that, to shed light on the erotic currents of (electroacoustic) music. Her manner of making sex sound (literally and metaphorically) is to stage sex in the most obvious, visible, and audible manner so as to avoid any ambiguity in the matter. For Shields, more than sexual intercourse, *maithuna* expresses “the universal joy of being alive” and presents an opportunity for continually developing artistic expression. Music, in addition to gesture and narrative, is yet another way of forming this artistic intercultural dialogue.

### “Cock Rock” Revisited

In their seminal article “Rock and Sexuality,” Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie recognize rock as a contributing force to constructions of male sexuality. Frith and McRobbie dub the genre “cock rock” because the music exhibits a hypermasculine aesthetic in which “mikes and guitars are phallic symbols; the music is loud, rhythmically insistent, built around techniques of arousal and climax; the lyrics are assertive and arrogant, though the exact words are less significant than the vocal styles involved, the shouting and screaming.”<sup>62</sup> It seems that these are common stereotypes with which Alice Shields was familiar. As one reviewer put it, *Apocalypse* is “a full-blown electronic opera, based in Indian classical music and . . . ‘heavy metal rock,’” and it is the strong image of “cock rock” to which I believe *Apocalypse* responds musically.<sup>63</sup> Pairing certain characteristic traits of rock music—including the occasional electric

guitar riff—with ornamentation, instrumentation, and modes typical of Carnatic music, as Shields does, opens an exchange between musical epistemologies but also between the gendered and sexual epistemologies constructed within such musical expressions.

Similar to the manner in which Shields pairs gestures common to *bharatanatyam* and Greek chironomy, she uses musical mode and ornamentation to forge bridges across musical traditions, and these traditions all meet under a synthesized electroacoustic canopy. Instead of recording a real sitar or piano, Shields chooses electronically synthesized timbres so as to limit her peculiar sound solely to the electronic world—the only medium in which these particular timbres are available. The sounds of electroacoustic music are not mere imitations of some real, preexisting world; these sounds belong entirely to virtual simulation, an electronic setting for Alice Shields's utopian vision of a world in which sex is freely expressed.

The opera's central number, "Apocalypse Song," discussed in the opening of this article, is more readily identifiable with an album "single" than an aria. The song features extensive vocal acrobatics, jam-band guitar flights, and a synthesizer accompaniment to rival any psychedelic improvisation, not to mention the jocular humor that stands so starkly in opposition to how Frith and McRobbie imagine female sexuality. Alice Shields's voice soars multiple octaves, at times tinted with a rock guttural rage, and the song's lyrics boast typical rock buzzwords ("blood," "flesh," and "hot lips"—think Foreigner's "Hot Blooded" for comparison), though, as mentioned, the context points as much to Christian themes. Additionally, the violent imagery alludes to the scene in the opera in which SHIVA's flesh is torn apart, a form of punishment recalling the Hindu *Vishnu Purana*, in which a thief's body is to be torn apart by scorching iron balls and tongs. That several traditions share this imagery allows Shields to easily depart from and again return to the rock tradition. Combining throaty "shouting and screaming" with heavy vibrato and an operatic "head voice," as Shields does, brings 1970s rock into dialogue with theatrical vocal techniques, thus inviting members from each audience to engage jointly in the experience.

The campy synthesizer accompaniment in "Apocalypse Song" centers on G, unfolding through F to E and back again. Here the vocal motive D–E-flat sounds together with the G in the left hand of the piano, harmonized by an open-position blues accompaniment but with straight eighth notes that are occasionally ornamented by diminished rhythms—sixteenth notes, quintuplets, and triplets. In the A section of the song (example 1, mm. 39–46) the voice lingers on the half-step D–E-flat, while the B section's melody (example 2, after m. 47) breaks away into a scalar ascent D–E-flat–F, returning to D and then repeating the inversion of this fragment D–C–B-flat–C, as in the first section.

Example 1. "Apocalypse Song" A section, composer's transcription.

The image displays a musical score for the "Apocalypse Song" A section, consisting of two systems of vocal and piano accompaniment. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats), and the time signature is 4/4. The first system begins at measure 39. The vocal line starts with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic, followed by a fortissimo (*f*) dynamic. The lyrics are: "Your hot lips, A - po - ca-lypse, Your hot lips, A -". The piano accompaniment features a repeating rhythmic motif of eighth notes in the right hand and chords in the left hand, with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The second system begins at measure 42. The vocal line continues with a fortissimo (*f*) dynamic. The lyrics are: "po - ca-lypse, Your words di-vine made flesh in mine, Your". The piano accompaniment continues with a fortissimo (*f*) dynamic, maintaining the same rhythmic motif.

As mentioned, "Apocalypse Song" was the compositional seed for the opera, and many of its fragments are elaborated elsewhere. The repeating half-step motive D-E-flat from the A section is heard much earlier, in the First Greeting (Part II, 4C), when WOMAN first encounters SEAWEEED. WOMAN chants to Devi "An tu? An tu?" (Gaelic, "Is it you? Is it you?") to the pitches B-C B-C, and Devi responds, likewise adding a descending Phrygian tetrachord. The quintessentially rock Phrygian modality is used by Iron Maiden, Rush, Metallica (think "Wherever I May Roam"), and many others to achieve a "dark sound," but similar variations also exist in Indian music, the influence of which is apparent in the music of this scene. Whereas "Apocalypse Song" features an electric guitar played by Jim Matus, the Greeting features electronically synthesized bells and a chorus, and whereas "Apocalypse Song" retained more or less straight repetition, in the Greetings (there are six in total), repetition becomes ornamented by turns from above the note or *zanzama* both in the voice and in the synthesizer accompaniment. As the scene progresses, the voice becomes more acrobatic, with more twists and turns and heavy,

Example 2. "Apocalypse Song" B section, composer's transcription.

The image displays a musical score for the B section of "Apocalypse Song". It consists of two systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment.

**System 1 (Measures 45-47):**  
 - **Vocal Line:** Treble clef, key signature of one flat (B-flat major/D minor), 3/4 time. The melody is: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (quarter). The lyrics are: "words di - vine made flesh in mine, Turn".  
 - **Piano Accompaniment:** Grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The right hand plays chords: G4-B4-D4 (quarter), A4-C5 (quarter), B4-G4 (quarter), F4-E4 (quarter), D4-C4 (quarter), B3-A3 (quarter), G3-F3 (quarter), E3-D3 (quarter). The left hand plays chords: G2-B2-D2 (quarter), A2-C3 (quarter), B2-G2 (quarter), F2-E2 (quarter), D2-C2 (quarter), B1-A1 (quarter), G1-F1 (quarter), E1-D1 (quarter). Dynamics: *f* (measures 45-46), *mp* (measure 47).

**System 2 (Measures 48-50):**  
 - **Vocal Line:** Treble clef, key signature of one flat, 3/4 time. The melody is: C4 (quarter), B3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), G3 (quarter), F3 (quarter), E3 (quarter), D3 (quarter), C3 (quarter). The lyrics are: "my blood back in - - -".  
 - **Piano Accompaniment:** Grand staff. The right hand plays chords: G4-B4-D4 (quarter), A4-C5 (quarter), B4-G4 (quarter), F4-E4 (quarter), D4-C4 (quarter), B3-A3 (quarter), G3-F3 (quarter), E3-D3 (quarter). The left hand plays chords: G2-B2-D2 (quarter), A2-C3 (quarter), B2-G2 (quarter), F2-E2 (quarter), D2-C2 (quarter), B1-A1 (quarter), G1-F1 (quarter), E1-D1 (quarter). Dynamics: *mf* (measures 48-50).

exaggerated vibrato reminiscent of the Hindustani *kampan* (quivering or undulation between two pitches).

Again, like the pairings of gestures common to multiple dance practices, Shields uses instruments, modes, and ornamentation to forge bridges across musical traditions. She imitates the rock instruments and the traditional instruments of Indian classical music while also creating sounds that exist wholly within the electronic soundscape by employing synthesizers, a half ring modulator called the Klangumwandler, MIDI, and the then-new MAX visual programming language.<sup>64</sup> Today it is easy to dismiss the synthesized (i.e., *synthetic*) "dulcimer" or "lyre" sound patches, since they fail to elicit the sounds of the *real* piano, lyre, sitar, or whatever. We might say that Shields's playful music has an audible, lo-tech artificiality, given the capacity of synthesizers in the early 1990s, when the opera was composed. And one may attribute this failure to remain faithful to "high fidelity" to the hardware limitations of the Buchla synthesizer or describe it generously as a characteristic sound of the times. But I don't think this is a fair assessment. Pairing the

lyre and piano already provides a strange, panstylistic dissonance, one that I believe Shields institutes deliberately. She purposefully couples the instruments of disparate traditions, both classical and modern, to create a unique soundscape, not unlike Led Zeppelin's "The Battle of Evermore" or the Indo-Jazz fusions of Coltrane's "India."<sup>65</sup> However, instead of recording a real sitar and piano, Shields chooses electronically synthesized timbres over "concrete" referential associations and in doing so limits her peculiar sound to the electronic world.

If we envision the 1990s context in which Shields was composing, what the composer saw in her everyday life, both in and outside the music profession, was a hypermasculine attitude toward music and sex, but what she imagined in *Apocalypse* is a musically rich universe in which sex is no unique act but one of life's many pleasures. *Apocalypse* employs typical phallic symbolism—vulgar lyrics, electric guitars, and even a two-foot papier-mâché penis—but it does so in order to confront the distancing of women's sexuality from rock music, opera, *bharatanatyam*, and the everyday politics in which music is ensconced. Introducing the visible phallus alongside the electronic guitars, mics, and amps embellishes their significance to the point of banality and farce. In pairing familiarity with unfamiliar language, novel electronic sounds produced by invisible instruments, and choreographed gestures more subtle than the typical sexual gyrations, viewers are made aware of sedimented and accepted norms so as to examine and question their own preexisting cultural investments.

### "Ongoing Interculturality"

In the early 1990s when *Apocalypse* was composed, *bharatanatyam* performances were becoming more common in America, but skeptical cultural theorists at first characterized these displays as inflexible idealizations and appropriations of an authentic Indian culture. Yet with the growing international popularity of *bharatanatyam*, perceptions of its cultural heritage also changed. By the early 2000s practitioners of the dance pointed out its part in constructing, defining, and delimiting the roles of women of Indian heritage in India and abroad. Subsequently, postcolonial studies began to question the need for its practitioners to even be of Indian heritage.<sup>66</sup> As mentioned, Shields brings her contemporaneous regional politics into dialogue with other cultures through *bharatanatyam*. She confronts her audience with particular sexual symbolism both visually and aurally so viewers and listeners will "examine their own cultural investments" and stigmas alongside the subtleties of traditions with which they may have little to no familiarity.<sup>67</sup> In thus challenging the audience to engage with unfamiliar texts, choreography, and music, *Apocalypse* is an example of what dance theorist Janet O'Shea has termed "ongoing

interculturality," in which "methods of exchange between epistemologies . . . circumvent or reverse an orientalist problematic" that might emerge in non-Indian performances of *bharatanatyam*.<sup>68</sup>

It is easy to fall into the Orientalist model of co-optation when attempting to invoke some expressive music or dance movements foreign to one's time and/or place. For example, Antonin Artaud's famous Theater of Cruelty was inspired by a Balinese dance performance he witnessed in 1931 at the Paris Colonial Exhibition. His review of this performance admires the "mystery" of Balinese gestures and movements, describing them as "hieroglyphs" that "Occidental" intellectuals had long since forgotten.<sup>69</sup> Artaud's ambition to return to a "repressed" reality, as he calls it, presumed that Balinese dance somehow preserves some primitive and preexisting practice from which the West has since moved on. Whereas Artaud demanded that Western theater adapt and adopt new cultural practices, he did not afford the Eastern tradition the same opportunities to evolve. O'Shea describes this problem as "the orientalist model of translation," which rests on the assumption that an interlocutor with "specialist knowledge" "could unlock [the] mysteries [of Eastern practices] for 'the West.'"<sup>70</sup> Shields, in contrast, does not presume to uncover any hidden meaning in *bharatanatyam* or any other tradition from which she draws. Rather, her works draw on the epistemologies of disparate traditions without attempting to reconcile their differences for an uncomprehending audience.

O'Shea's "ongoing interculturality" refers specifically to intercultural exchanges of the language, dance, and music associated with *bharatanatyam*. While *Apocalypse* certainly participates in intercultural exchanges within these dimensions, I expand O'Shea's term to include less overt concepts, such as gender and sexuality, concepts conveyed through performance but not in any one aspect explicitly. Prior to incorporating *bharatanatyam* movements in *Apocalypse* and other works, Alice Shields took years to study the practice. She employs choreography in a productive way without attempting to convey supposedly foreign symbols through explanation or translation. Those already familiar with particular movements will benefit from the added significance without any further explication; however, the text assists the audience in making connections more overtly. In addition to movements, the libretto is comprised of text portions from Sanskrit sources, fragments of ancient Greek, and Old Irish, *alongside* the composer's own English text, which does not serve as a primary language or translation but as an equal counterpart to the other languages. Furthermore, the music's text setting, ornamentation, and instrumentation also participate in this "ongoing interculturality."

Shields's role as *devadāsī* functions as what Janet O'Shea would call a "transnational interpreter," placing the history of the stigma against

sex from the *bharatanatyam* tradition into dialogue with the opera's contemporary American political atmosphere. Reagan's Mexico City Policy (initiating the "global gag rule" on abortion for institutions receiving federal funding), Nancy Reagan's Just Say No campaign, and the feminist antipornography agenda of the 1980s and 1990s all opposed forms of explicit sexual representation, even those that presented sex in a positive light. By using the phallic symbolism typically representative of sexual desire, Shields cites a history long dominated by masculine sexual imagery, but she does not reinscribe this history. The comedic size of the two-foot papier-mâché phallus forces the audience to confront the typical imagery in order to question its function as a symbol of sexual arousal or pleasure. Whereas the visible symbol serves as a literal confrontation with masculine sexual imagery, the music more subtly converges on a metaphorical reappraisal of such symbols.

### *Sexual Stigma Today*

In our interview, Shields told me that *Apocalypse* was reacting to the suddenly more pervasive resistance to abortion and women's reproductive rights in the United States in the 1980s. On the coattails of the AIDS scare, when the U.S. government finally began to acknowledge that the disease was spreading indiscriminately—without heed for the host's sexual proclivities—Ronald Reagan brought into law the 1984 Mexico City Policy, a "global gag rule" that effectively prohibited family planning centers receiving government funding from performing abortions or even from providing counseling and referral services regarding abortions.<sup>71</sup> As Shields recalled in our interview, "I remember an outrage with Reagan, because when he took over in the 1980s, the country radically changed. . . . As for women's rights, which I consider to be one of the main problems of the entire world, unless women take over or at least become fifty percent of the rulers everywhere, we're done for. Though many women have fallen to the male thing of dominance too, so there isn't one simple answer."<sup>72</sup>

Political scientists Barbara B. Crane and Jennifer Dusenberry, who specialize in reproductive rights issues, assert that in the 1980s and 1990s "opposition to the government-supported family planning services, like abortion, grew from a set of beliefs about the role of modern contraception in promoting promiscuity, moral breakdown and the weakening of the traditional male-dominated family structure."<sup>73</sup> Reagan's policy proliferated widely through his wife Nancy's Just Say No campaign, which in one fell swoop waged a "war on drugs" while simultaneously condemning (implicitly heterosexual) premarital sex and sex acts understood as homosexual or queer by linking these two issues through self-control and abstinence.<sup>74</sup> In addition to an obvious resistance from the

conservative Right, the stigma against promiscuity was also advanced by vocal antipornography feminists, who masked their biases as women's liberation.<sup>75</sup>

Dissident feminist Camille Paglia explains that America of the 1950s and 1960s was dominated by Protestantism, which "systematically repressed both sex and emotion as part of the Puritan bequest." Writing in the 1990s, Paglia insisted that "repression continues in current American liberalism, which is simply Protestantism in disguise." She recognized sexuality as a deeply complicated expression of humanity: "Above all, to understand sex and emotion, you must study the world history of art, music, and literature, which is the precious record of the strange, kaleidoscopic human imagination."<sup>76</sup>

When articulated as an attitude about sex rather than any quantifying measure of actions, the "promiscuity" buzzword deceptively amplifies the supposed risks associated with sex. Under the canopy of "promiscuity," all sexual activities are magnified and scrutinized to the point of censure, where only certain sexual behaviors are permitted. According to sex activist and academic Gayle Rubin, those who publicly lampoon pornography "have condemned virtually every variant of sexual expression as anti-feminist," Rubin herself having been a firsthand victim of these accusations. Antipornography activists, which most feminists were in the 1980s and 1990s, claimed to be performing a social service, while, in Rubin's words, the discourse presented "most sexual behavior in the worst possible light. Its descriptions of erotic conduct always use the worst available example as if it were representative."<sup>77</sup> To punctuate Rubin's theory, we can recall Theodor Adorno's description of the supposed sexual liberation of the 1960s: "Everywhere prostitutes are being persecuted, whereas they were more or less left in peace during the era when sexual oppression was allegedly harsher."<sup>78</sup> Ultimately, both conservatives and antiporn feminists pushed similar agendas: both aimed to remove sex from the public eye altogether, thus condemning sexual intercourse (an evolutionary trait designed to promote population growth and to prolong the human condition), ironically, as an antihuman act. Not only does such censure delimit which sexually charged images, ideas, and acts are permissible in the public domain, but, given Reagan's proposed restrictions on family planning services, these prohibitions inevitably invade private domestic spaces, the typical venues for viewing pornography and engaging in sexual activities.

Recently, Reagan's "global gag rule" was in the news again. As has each Republican administration since Reagan, Donald Trump's administration has once again instituted the rule, barring institutions receiving federal funding from mentioning abortion as a viable option to patients and expanding Reagan's original policy from applying only to foreign NGOs to forbidding all global organizations receiving funding from mentioning

abortion. This amendment most harshly impacts centers working to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, as abortion is hardly the sole or even primary treatment at many centers. Just as in 1984, when Reagan first instituted the policy, today's supporters of the ban have a vested interest in maintaining silence. While the main motivation for securing the norms of (hetero-/homosexual) monogamous sex have remained, rather than shy away from acknowledging such consequences, today's constituents have enthusiastically expressed the benefits of such policies to the "silent majority"—Trump's largely white constituency. Many of Trump's adversaries have made the connection between antiabortion and prowar rhetoric, citing racial and ethnic discrimination as a major link. In forming an alliance across geographic and chronologic borders, Alice Shields's work anticipated criticism of these ongoing developments by aiming to illuminate and sever the false separation between sexual policy and cultural influence.

Partha Chatterjee points out that the Indian nationalist movement and its enduring history have only recognized women insofar as they *contribute* to the national reconstruction, as if the movement were advancing independently of women, regardless of their roles.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, the history of electroacoustic music, as told until now, is often presented as being merely enriched by select compositions by women without acknowledging how innovations by women like Alice Shields actually molded the tradition into its current form. I understand Shields's *Apocalypse* against this social backdrop as a response to and commentary on the community in which its composer was living. The work serves as an important example of how composers contribute not only to musical culture but, more than this, to issues of social relevance beyond music's sonic profile alone. Shields's utopian enterprise truly reflects a world absent sexual stigmas, a world very different from the one in which she lived, but not so distant from the world envisioned by many people today.

## NOTES

---

I extend my gratitude to Alice Shields for providing me with the *Apocalypse* libretto and other documentation and for taking the time to respond to my various questions via email and in person. Without her assistance this analysis would not have been possible. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers of this journal for their touching encouragement and to the editorial staff for their dedication and support throughout the publication process. I also wish to thank members of the Subvention Committee of the Society for Music Theory for recognizing the merits of this research and members of the AMS Publication Committee for a grant from the AMS 75 Publication Awards for Young Scholars Endowment of the American Musicological Society, funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

1. Alice Shields in private email communication with the author, December 27, 2013. Confirmed by Daria Semegen in private email communication with the author, August 30, 2016.

2. Alice Shields, liner notes to *Apocalypse: An Electronic Opera*, Composers Recordings NXCR647, 1993, compact disc.

3. "Apocalypse Song," IV:10C, Alice Shields, "Apocalypse" (unpublished libretto, 1991–94), 65. References to *Apocalypse* include part number in roman numerals and, following the colon, scene number according to the opera's libretto. Unless otherwise noted, all text and stage notes are from the unpublished libretto.

4. Alice Shields does not prioritize the Christian significance of these themes. My choice to begin from the text's Christian framing was motivated by my experiences presenting this research in Anglo-American settings, where questions from the audience overwhelmingly focused on Christian symbolism, presumably on account of the speakers' own points of reference. Portions of this article were presented at the "Deleuze + Art: Multiplicities | Thresholds | Potentialities" conference, cohosted by the School of Drama, Film, and Music at Trinity College Dublin, Trinity Long Room Hub Arts and Humanities Research Institute (April 8–10, 2016, Dublin, Ireland); and at the fourteenth annual plenary conference of the Society for Musicology in Ireland, hosted by Dublin City University (June 10–12, 2016, Dublin, Ireland).

5. Shields email, December 27, 2013.

6. "Regrets," III:8A, Alice Shields, "Apocalypse" (unpublished libretto, 1991–94), 52.

7. Alice Shields was technical instructor at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center from 1965 to 1982, associate director from 1978 to 1982, and associate director of development from 1994 to 1996.

8. I am indebted to Anna Giulia Volpato, a.k.a. Johann Merrich, for providing me with the original transcripts for this interview, which appears in Italian translation in Johann Merrich, *Le pioniere della musica elettronica* (Milan: Auditorium Edizioni, 2012), 91.

9. Pril Smiley began working with Vladimir Ussachevsky at the CPEMC in 1963. Daria Semegen studied with Ussachevsky from 1971 onward. Elizabeth Hinkle-Turner, "Daria Semegen: Her Life, Work, and Music" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1991), 18–19, 92.

10. Elizabeth Hinkle-Turner, *Women Composers and Music Technology in the United States: Crossing the Line* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 21.

11. Alice Shields in conversation with the author, July 25, 2014.

12. For a more extensive history of Alice Shields's role among her colleagues at the CPEMC, see Hinkle-Turner, *Women Composers*, 16–21.

13. Shields conversation, July 25, 2014.

14. Alice Shields, note to *Kyrielle*, *Soundcloud*, <https://soundcloud.com/user-aliceshieldscomposer/kyrielle-for-violin-and-computer-music>. The work appears on track 6 of Airi Yoshioka, *Stolen Gold*, Albany Music Distribution Troy 1305, 2011, compact disc.

15. Michel Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," in *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 163–64.

16. Occasionally, SHIVA's voice takes on a male tone and is performed by jazz guitarist Jim Matus.

17. *Apocalypse* has never been performed. Although Shields was approached by the Akademie der Künste in Berlin in the early 2000s for a proposed filmic adaptation of the opera, this staging has yet to be realized. For a work posing comparable performance challenges that has been performed, see *Mass for the Dead* (1993).

18. Andra McCartney, "Creating Worlds for My Music to Exist: How Women Composers of Electroacoustic Music Make Place for Their Voices" (master's thesis, York University, 1997).

19. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), §60, quoted in Luce Irigaray, "Veiled Lips," trans. Sara Speidel, *Mississippi Review* 11, no. 3 (1983): 104. The quotes of Nietzsche in Irigaray come from, and hence serve also as commentary on, Derrida's reading of Nietzsche. Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), quoted in Irigaray, "Veiled Lips," 123n8.

20. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, book 7 (London: Aldus Society, 1903), 695; Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 68–70.

21. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, book 11, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller and trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1981), 165.

22. Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 131–33.

23. Simon Emmerson, “EMAS and Sonic Arts Network (1979–2004): Gender, Governance, Policies, Practice,” *Contemporary Music Review* 35, no. 1 (2016): 21–31.

24. Hannah Bosma, “Bodies of Evidence, Singing Cyborgs and Other Gender Issues in Electrovoical Music,” *Organised Sound* 8, no. 1 (2003): 5–17.

25. Keir Keightley, “‘Turn It Down!’ She Shrieked: Gender, Domestic Space, and High Fidelity, 1948–59,” *Popular Music* 15, no. 2 (1996): 149–77; Andra McCartney, “Ethical Questions about Working with Soundscapes,” keynote address at the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology’s conference “Ideologies and Ethics in the Uses and Abuses of Sound,” Koli, Finland, June 19, 2010, <https://soundwalkinginteractions.wordpress.com/2010/06/24/ethical-questions-about-working-with-soundscapes/>; Emmerson, “EMAS.”

26. In translation, Aristotle’s attribution is to “the phallic songs.” It should, however, be noted that Aristotle’s original reads “*phaulika*,” meaning trivial business, and not “*phallika*.” Nevertheless, most English translations employ the latter. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 4:12, trans. S. H. Butcher (London: Macmillan, 1902), 1449a10–13.

27. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 77.

28. John Corbett and Terri Kapsalis, “Aural Sex: The Female Orgasm in Popular Sound,” in “Experimental Sound & Radio,” special issue, *TDR (1988-)* 40, no. 3 (1996): 103.

29. “Heat Drum,” IV:11A, Alice Shields, “Apocalypse” (unpublished libretto, 1991–94), 66.

30. *Ibid.*

31. Danielle Sofer, “The Macropolitics of Microsound: Gender and Sexual Identities in Barry Truax’s *Song of Songs*,” *Organised Sound (Context-Based Composition)* 23, no. 1 (2018): 80–90.

32. Avanthi Meduri, “Bharata Natyam—What Are You?,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 5, no. 1 (1988): 1.

33. Judith Lynne Hanna, *Dance, Sex, and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 102.

34. The theory is attributed to Bharata, but Adya Rangacharya, the preeminent English translator of the *Natyashastra*, speculates that many authors have since “interfered” with Bharata’s original manuscript. Adya Rangacharya, *Introduction to Bharata’s Nāṭya-Śāstra* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966), 69.

35. *Ibid.*, 70–71.

36. *Ibid.*, 75.

37. Ranjana Thapalyal, “Sringara Rasa: The Feminine Call of the Spiritual/Erotic Impulse in Indian Art,” in *The Sacred and the Feminine: Imagination and Sexual Difference*, ed. Griselda Pollock and Victoria Urvey-Sauron (London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 2007), 137.

38. Meduri, “Bharata Natyam,” 3.

39. *Ibid.*, 4.

40. According to Meduri, Bharata’s theory pertained more to the technical details of the arts, dance, music, and theater and their mutual signification. It was only in the eleventh century that Abhinavagupta reinterpreted the *Natyashastra* to include more lofty transcendental psychologies (ibid.).

41. Pamyla A. Stiehl, "Bharatanatyam: A Dialogical Interrogation of Feminist Voices in Search of the Divine Dance," *Journal of Religion and Theatre* 3, no. 2 (2004): 282.
42. Meduri, "Bharata Natyam," 2.
43. Daveshe Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory, and Modernity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 3. Soneji replicates the Madras Devadasi Prevention Bill in an appendix (235–36).
44. Meduri, "Bharata Natyam," 4. One could compare this secularization and growing popularity to the Tai Chi and Yoga crazes that caught on in the West.
45. Stiehl, "Bharatanatyam," 282–83; Hanna, *Dance, Sex, and Gender*, 103.
46. Meduri, "Bharata Natyam," 9.
47. Stiehl, "Bharatanatyam," 285.
48. Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures*, 3.
49. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 136.
50. I am grateful to Rasika Ajotikar, PhD candidate in the music department at SOAS University of London, for emphasizing to me the importance of this point.
51. Shields, liner notes to *Apocalypse*, 3.
52. Shields conversation, July 25, 2014.
53. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 10.
54. Alan H. Sommerstein, *Aeschylean Tragedy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 25.
55. Shields likely paraphrases Catherine Clément here, who writes, "In opera to love is to wish to die." For Clément, operas unfold as if in slow preparation for the death of the central female character, Puccini's fifteen-year-old Cio-Cio San sacrifices her body and her life for her American hero, Lucia is driven from madness to death, and Wagner's Isolde dies simply of love sickness. Catherine Clément, *Opera, Or, the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 53–54.
56. On the "images and myths invoked in mainstream discourses associated with electro-acoustic music, in popular magazines, course texts and software," see McCartney, "Creating Worlds," 43–76.
57. Shields, liner notes to *Apocalypse*, 7.
58. Shields, "Apocalypse" libretto, 62. As the composer chose and composed the Greek text herself, it occasionally departs from strictly correct Greek grammar.
59. Alice Shields, "Patient and Psychotherapist: The Music," in *The Psychoaesthetic Experience: An Approach to Depth-Oriented Treatment*, ed. Arthur Robbins (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1989), 60.
60. *Ibid.*, 58.
61. *Ibid.*, 57.
62. Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, "Rock and Sexuality," in *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (1978; New York: Routledge, 2005), 319.
63. Excerpt from review by *The Splatter Effect*, "What the Press Is Saying," Alice Shields's website, <http://www.aliceshields.com/reviews.html>.
64. For details on the Klanguwandler employed by Alice Shields, see Vladimir Ussachevsky, "Musical Timbre Mutation by Means of the Klanguwandler, a Frequency Transposition Device," paper delivered at the Audio Engineering Society Convention, White Plains, New York, September 1, 1958. The instrument was first encountered by Ussachevsky and Otto Luening, whom Shields later assisted at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center, in 1955 on a trip to Baden-Baden while conducting "research on electronic music" funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. Otto Luening, "An Unfinished History of Electronic Music," *Music Educators Journal* 55, no. 3 (1968): 136–37.

65. Other examples include John Mayer's Indo Jazz Fusions, the Mahavishnu Orchestra, and Turiyasangitananda (a.k.a. Alice Coltrane, jazz pianist, organist, harpist, and composer and John Coltrane's second wife).

66. Anita Kumar, "What's the Matter? Shakti's (Re)Collection of Race, Nationhood, and Gender," *TDR* 50, no. 1 (2006): 72–95.

67. Janet O'Shea, "At Home in the World? The Bharatanatyam Dancer as Transnational Interpreter," *TDR* 47, no. 1 (2003): 182.

68. *Ibid.*

69. Artaud writes, "The actors with their costumes constitute veritable living, moving hieroglyphs. And these three-dimensional hieroglyphs are in turn brocaded with a certain number of gestures—mysterious signs which correspond to some unknown, fabulous, and obscure reality which we here in the Occident have completely repressed." Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1958), 60.

70. O'Shea, "At Home," 177, emphasis added.

71. The Mexico City Policy was later reinforced by *Rust v. Sullivan* (1991) and *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* (1992).

72. Shields conversation, July 25, 2014.

73. Barbara B. Crane and Jennifer Dusenberry, "Power and Politics in International Funding for Reproductive Health: The US Global Gag Rule," *Reproductive Health Matters* 12, no. 24 (2004): 128–37.

74. I borrow the phrase "sex acts understood as homosexual or queer" from Lauron Kehrer (private communication, May 1, 2018) to refer to what contemporaneously would have been designated "same-sex relations," a limited construction that implicitly omits trans and intersex identities, though these identities were certainly stigmatized in this politically conservative rhetoric. I thank Kariann Goldschmitt for helping me articulate this point (any errors are my own). Other "behaviors" condemned in this discourse, as outlined by Gayle Rubin, include, "prostitution, transsexuality, sadomasochism, and cross-generational activities." Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 166.

75. For more on the feminist antipornography campaigns and the stigmatization of sex regarding electronic music, see Danielle Sofer, "Making Sex Sound: Erotic Currents in Electronic Music" (PhD diss., University of Music and Performing Arts Graz, 2016).

76. Camille Paglia, *Sex, Art, and American Culture: Essays* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 30.

77. Rubin, "Thinking Sex," 165, 166.

78. Theodor Adorno, "Sexual Taboos and Law Today," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (1963; New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 77.

79. Chatterjee, *The Nation*, 136.