

## **WAVE + E :: Looping Events, S(tr)ung through Prayer**

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**[For the duration of the performance, a microphone is hooked up to the loom to amplify and overlay the sound of weaving.]**

**[Play Ice Cream Truck recording from YouTube - 0:31 sec]**

Something about this warm weather makes me feel indulgent. The melodic emissions of ice cream trucks advertising sundaes and SpongeBob popsicles causes me to salivate. Basking under the beating sun, I dream of shaved ice topped with condensed milk and mango. At other times, I find myself nostalgic for the pink cotton candy consumed at county fairs; that fluffy substance so reminiscent of sheep's wool, ready to be spun into thread. What is it about sweets that is simultaneously comforting yet shameful? Even the word 'sweets' with its prominent 'EE' seems to effuse a kind of twee, but I'm here for another 'E' and excessive sentimentality.

According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the letter 'E' comes from a Semitic consonant, whose original character was derived from an earlier pictograph representing a lattice window. If we insert a window into a wave, what sonic reverberations might come through this slit?

The double-slit experiment first conducted by Thomas Young in 1801 revealed that light can exhibit the characteristics of both waves and particles. Overtime, it was deduced that the observer plays a crucial role in the outcome of the experiment, determining whether the quanta observed behaved as a wave or particle. Quantum theory posits that a photon or electron acts like a wave until it is observed; when observed, it behaves like a particle. This baffling phenomena underscores the entangled role of the observer. Rather than dwell on the wave-particle duality paradox in order to attempt to describe sound as a wave or particle, I forgo this desire caught between nouns to propose the study of a verb. I am more interested in what it does than what it has been named. What happens when one adds another 'e' to wave – can we interchange wave for weave? Can we understand matter not as a particle or wave, but a weave that we, as observers, are entwined within?

Summers in Chicago are synonymous with the feeling of sweat which coats my skin while I weave in the living room of my apartment. With the windows open and the box fans whirling, I begin to sense the faint vibrations of Maiden's Prayer as it grows louder, resonating through the four walls of my domestic space. The sound waves

weave through my dwelling – meeting the noise of the loom as it responds to my movements. I am an instrument, trying to harmonize with the ice cream truck. As I release the tension in my toes, I hear the delightful noise of children squealing, their footsteps propelling their bodies towards the sound.

Finally the frequency steadies and the mellisonant waves of Maiden’s Prayer becomes clear and consistent. The phrases of the song seem to oscillate, the notes traveling upwards then down, sustaining the same undulating movement, thereby creating a sweet tune that coincides with the contents of the truck. On a loop, the same stanza repeats over and over, as if trudging up and down rolling hills. With the beginning and end severed, Badarzewska’s song has been sampled, distilled to a syrupy segment and tasked with the Sisyphean fate of continuous repetition. As soon as I take note of its electronic flourishes, the frequency is already changing as the source of the prayer travels towards the traffic on Blue Island Ave. And while the air molecules that vibrate from the truck’s speaker are now too far to touch my inner ear, they still resonate within me. Awash in its waves, I am elsewhere.

This twinkling music box rendition of Maiden’s Prayer carries me across time and space to the island of Taiwan. While living in Taipei, around dusk, I’d scramble at the distant echoes of Maiden’s Prayer – untie the belt to rise from the loom in order to quickly gather the recycling, the compost, the trash can trash, and swing myself down four flights of stairs – around and around in a spiral, fling open the metal gated front door of the apartment building and follow the stream of mothers and elderly men, trash bags pushed up my forearms and cardboard folded beneath my armpits as my sandals slap against the unevenly tiled sidewalk all the way to the root of the music.

**[Play Trash Truck recording from Taiwan - 1:25 min]**

Both the words “wave” and “weave” find their origins in the Old High German “waben,” meaning “to wave, undulate.” Beginning from the 13th century, weave acquired the definition “to move from one place to another.” From as early as the 14th century, weave meant “to move to and fro,” and by the 1590s, “to move side to side.” Definitions waver. Distinctions between particles and waves are unstable; they move to and fro in relation to the presence of the observer.

The Maiden's Prayer also wavers; its emotional resonance is differently perceived and interpreted depending on the observer. Tekla Badarzewska's masterpiece was despised by music critics and academics – said to be tasteless and sentimental, “a dowdy product of ineptitude,”<sup>1</sup> perhaps because it was written by a young woman in the 19th century. Since it was first published in 1856, the Maiden's Prayer has been written into ghost stories, operas, films, and adapted to country music. The prayer now beckons people from around the world to exit their homes and gather in the streets – to dispose of trash in Taiwan or to retrieve ice cream in Chicago. As I weave by the window, I notice the music box tune appears low in the distance, gradually getting louder and higher in pitch as it looms nearer. The movement of the notes mimic the pattern of a wave or series of waves. On sheet music, the cascade of notes appear like the s-twist of a thread.

**[Play La Prière D'une Vierge by Tekla Badarzewska - Mitsuru Nagai - 4:11 min]**

By encountering the vibrations emitted by moving ice cream trucks, I recall the places that I have lived and loved – Chicago, Taipei, Tainan. The affective quality of these sonic vibrations stir a gathering and dispersal movement of people – the lives which compose a community, a social fabric. This truncated and twinkling version of Maiden's Prayer is familiar, an integral part of the sonic landscape of summers in Chicago and a nightly occurrence in Taiwan. Flowing from moving speakers, the melody is amplified. The ice cream truck and trash truck gathers and disperses matter – engaging the senses of whomever is present for the ritual – scents, taste (in the case of the ice cream truck), as well as visual and sonic information is received and experienced. The performance of the speakers that emanate Maiden's Prayer is ordinary, cyclical – it comes and goes, and everyone who dwells nearby knows its pattern and function.

There is a sense of excess that overflows from the materiality of the trucks – sonic amplification, the smell (and taste) of sugar and waste. The tune is saturated with excessive leaking; it becomes memorable through its looped repetition. Not only does the soundbite loop continuously, but day after day the trash truck comes traveling along the same looped route. The sound of the ice cream truck similarly signifies the arrival of warmer weather. In Chicago, the prayer evokes the cycle of the seasons, marking another year around the sun. The energetic sound waves vibrate the surrounding air molecules, pushing their way through to the ears of folks with trash to toss or a hot and hungry body to satiate.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women, and Pianos: A Social History*.

For me, this tune triggers memories of this everyday intra-action. Karen Barad describes a public as the “intra-action” of humans and nonhumans. In contrast to the term ‘interaction,’ which reinscribes a subject-object dichotomy, Barad uses ‘intra-action’ to “signify the *inseparability of ‘objects’ and ‘agencies of observation.’*”<sup>2</sup> Barad notes, “*agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don’t exist as individual elements.*”<sup>3</sup> An observer is also a participant. As the Maiden’s Prayer echoes through my eardrums, I become a part of its weave. The waves which carry the prayer are absorbed by my body. Becoming electrical signals as they move through my inner ear, we intra-act.

**[Pause for the sound of weaving/overdub of weaving - 1 min]**

Bruno Latour suggests, “There is no object, no subject... But there are events.”<sup>4</sup> There is no particle, no wave that can be considered an individual unit; they are intertwined by events. The Maiden’s Prayer consists of ongoing sound waves that weave together the repetitive events of taking out the trash or indulging a sweet treat on a hot summer day. The movement of weaving interlaces and demonstrates “difference without separability,” as Denise Ferreira da Silva writes. This re-imagining of sociality as a weave challenges the distinction between subject and object, between particle and wave. Because of the slit, that lattice window, the reality of our entanglement is undeniable. Likewise, the cotton, linen, and ramie warp becomes enmeshed with the paper cotton and wool weft. The dye made from boiled madder (spelled m-a-d-d-e-r, but also matter) remains; the red still clings to the fiber after being buried and uncovered thousands of years later.

Madder (m-a-d-d-e-r), also known as *rubia tinctorum*, is a Eurasian plant whose roots have been used to dye leather, wool, cotton, and silk red since 3000 BCE. This red running through the warp here was dyed outdoors one May in Tainan.\* The steam from the dye pot rose seamlessly into the balmy atmosphere.

As I weave I attune to the sonic qualities of this loom – the constant beat of the batten or sword against the woven ramie was a cherished sound to be heard by others. The loom is not only an instrument to produce

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<sup>2</sup> Qtd. in Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

<sup>3</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.

<sup>4</sup> Qtd. in Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

\* This script will be pre-recorded and will play for the duration of the presentation while I will weave on the floor.

fabric, but it was said that Atayal and Seediq women in Taiwan would beat down upon the woven material so that the box with which the warp threads wrap around resonates. Not only does this create a tighter weave and a strong textile, but this gesture ensures that the neighbors would hear them weaving, thereby connecting the community through sound. The sound of interlacing fibers signifies the virtues (as well as the virtuosity) of the weaver who dutifully provides for her family. Beginning in 1895, however, during the Japanese occupation of Taiwan, weaving became a banned activity, to be quietly performed in the secrecy of night. Despite this, the music has never stopped and has instead been moving towards a slow crescendo.

On this particular weaving, the warp consists of ramie, linen, and cotton – the weft with a mohair that I dyed blue with synthetic chemicals in my kitchen while living in Chicago. The pattern of this fabric is loosely inspired by the lines of sheet music as well as line paper. My eyes take in Tekla Badarzewska's notations and recycle the lines into a loop. The indigenous Taiwanese loom produces cloth in a loop; the beginning and end draw towards one another, becoming indistinguishable. While weaving on a backstrap loom, I meditate on loops – on the twinkling audio loop of ice cream trucks and trash trucks emitting the Maiden's Prayer, as well as on the emergence of the cloth as it begins to wind around the wooden box. As I weave I wonder what waves resonate from the loom:

“Let me consider a possibility: What if, instead of The Ordered World, we could image The World as Plenum, an infinite composition in which each existant's singularity is contingent upon its becoming one possible expression of all other existants, with which it is entangled beyond space and time.”<sup>5</sup>

**[Ice Cream Truck recording from Chicago - 0:35 sec - Untie belt, roll up the weaving, and distribute ice cream]**

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<sup>5</sup> Denise Ferreira da Silva, “On Difference without Separability.”