

Reconstructing Babel

by Austin Shadduck

text based on last stanza of “to start,to hesitate;to stop” by E. E. Cummings
translations and vocals by Raphael Glazer, Tiffany Ng, Dianne Prasad,
Stephen Rice, Simon Stampe, Brendan Tracey, and Julia Voronov

electroacoustic work for CD playback

4:23

completed May 5, 2008

Composer's Notes

Reconstructing Babel takes for its subject the story of the Tower of Babel and depicts confusion, a struggle to be understood, and a slow merging of languages. The last stanza of the poem “to start,to hesitate;to stop,” which is perhaps Cumming's own depiction of Babel as an allegory for life and death, was recorded in seven different languages (English, Danish, Dutch, German, French, Hebrew, and Russian) by seven different people. Using Max/MSP I created a patch to randomize the playback of each recording, every few seconds adjusting playback speed (only slightly), direction (forward or backward), and starting location in the recording. This created, in a sense, seven new languages from familiar sounds. Using a combination of the Max/MSP file, SoundHack, and Audacity I mutated sounds into and out of each other, applied granular synthesis effects, and performed pitch shifting. All of the sounds were compiled and edited within Cubase.