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ABSTRACT

In the Danish environmental documentary Ekspeditionen til verdens ende (Expedition to the End of the World, 2013), music from Mozart's Requiem sounds several times as Greenland's melting ice and swelling ocean fill the screen. This recording is not mere Anthropocene ambience, however; the performance, captured in a church in Copenhagen, sounds surprisingly provisional and fragile. Unlike the rhapsodic-atmospheric use of music in Werner Herzog's environmental films, recent climate-science documentaries like Chasing Ice and Ice and the Sky, or sentimental viral videos of Arctic piano playing, the Mozart fragments in Daniel Dencik's film sound as contingent material artifacts of human presence in a rapidly dissolving visual landscape. Apparently clumsy interruption and closed caption-style paratext amplify this critical distance, a refreshing disturbance in a sea of smoothly mediated elegiac nature films. Ultimately, Expedition to the End of the World illuminates global warming as the «hyperobject» that Timothy Morton argues is difficult to reduce to cognitively manageable dimensions; roundabout commentary and the music's own slippery codes mirror this difficulty, further complicating a film that refuses reduction to an activist or aesthetic-philosophical position.
Mozart on ice

MUSIC AS ANTHROPOCENE ARTIFACT IN
EXPEDITION TO THE END OF THE WORLD

BY HEIDI HART

And yet there are massive traces of life.

the Geologist

INTRODUCTION

AN UNDERWATER ROAR opens the 2013 environmental documentary Expedition to the End of the World, as ice and waves and bubbles overwhelm the camera. A low hum follows, with deep orchestral chords recalling the classically evocative 2003 Master and Commander film score. Sure enough, a tall ship comes into view: an old Baltic schooner repurposed for a journey of curiosity into Greenland’s dissolving icescape. This is Danish poet and filmmaker Daniel Dencik’s collaboration with producer Michael Haslund and a ragtag crew of scientists and artists, all trying to get their heads around the rapid climate change most noticeable in Greenland’s northeastern fjords. Introduced with screen text reminiscent of Brecht’s theater placards – «A Captain,» «A Marine Biologist,» «An Art Photographer» – these explorers comment on their experience with wry humor throughout the film. Fragments of music, from Mozart and atmospheric electronica to Metallica and a diegetic keyboard-pounding scene, bump up against spoken word and screen image to create more of an intermedial collage than a linear narrative or what Marija Ciric has called the «super-libretto» function of film music;¹ this film features more seemingly random, disorienting breaks than Eisensteinian montage. Its apparent clumsiness – something for which Dencik’s work has been criticized² – works, in this case, as an effective contradiction to those climate crisis films whose smoothly filmed beauty might lull viewers more into passive comfort than creative response.

Fragments of Mozart’s Requiem might be expected to carry associations with lush nature films that favor classical music, with the swelling, action-movie soundtracks of other recent climate change documentaries such as the National Geographic’s 2012 Chasing Ice and Luc Jacquet’s 2015 Ice and the Sky, or with the soundtracks of this film’s quirky Werner Herzog predecessors: Ernst Reijseger’s folk-jazz-ethereal «Requiem for the End of the World» for cello and voices in Herzog’s 2005 Wild Blue Yonder, or the choral rhapsody that accompanies the plane-flight scene opening his 2007 Antarctic quasi-documentary Encounters at the End of the World.³ In Dencik’s film, however, these fragments’ function is more complicated. He describes the film’s sound-
track approach as contradictory insofar as «[t]he expedition members are artists and scientists, so it's a really old school expedition in a way – but at the same time very contemporary, they listen to Metallica while they discover new species of life»; while Dencik does not comment on the fragility of music as artifact per se, he does rhapsodize somewhat (and quotes a Sting song title, perhaps unintentionally) on the film as «an essay upon what life is, how strong it is and how fragile we are.» In fact, the fragile nature of recorded sound – even in the digital editing mode – is what gives the film's soundtrack its strange urgency. A small choir and organ recorded in a Copenhagen church, with the voices' individual timbres and vibratos protruding at times, conveys a provisional and even brittle quality. This is not ambient sound or the kind of environmental elegy circulating on social media, such as a Greenpeace video of Ludovico Einaudi playing New Age piano on an ice floe; this is music drawing attention to itself as music, an artifact of the Anthropocene that also exposes the oscillating subject-object perspective of this geologic age, the difficulty of apprehending how and when it will end, and the fragility of human art. Its reified status recalls the 1960s and 70s Film Studies distinction between «soundscape» and «sound object (l'objet sonore).» Its closest comparison may be the opening sequence of the dystopian animated film Wall-E (2008), in which the chirpy song «Put On Your Sunday Clothes» from Hello, Dolly turns out to be playing on a diegetic, post-human videotape.

As Margaret Ronda notes in «Anthropogenic Poetics,» her essay drawing on Bruno Latour's work on human surprise at our own consequence and contingency, to see or hear an artwork from the Anthropocene perspective is to experience «estranged recognition.» She asks,

For what does it mean if an entire geologic epoch ‘bears the face of a human,' as the etymology of anthropos suggests? Does this not describe an unfathomable extension and redirection of the ‘human’ — and also a new, equally confounding, sense of its limits?

One manifestation of such a paradox of self-conscious surprise is a defacing or unmaking of the human figure, as Ronda also notes, employing Paul de Man's take on prosopopoeia; another, which my analysis develops here, is a reification of human-generated and technologically mediated images and sounds, a more Brechtian approach adapted for the digital age. Contemporary environmental film has the opportunity to read the human epoch like a geologically layered book, as Bronislaw Szerszynski has posited. Though sentimental scenes of endangered natural beauty are still commonplace in documentaries and activist YouTube clips, times have changed since the «nature meme» in Scandinavian cinema – often used as a contrast to gritty urban life in such films as Sigve Endresen's 1989 For harde livet – could be taken for granted. From an «Anthropoetic» perspective, the encrustedness of bits of history and art is taken into account with as much critical distance as human critics can muster, though this reading is, of course, hardly objective while our epoch's timeline still unfolds: «After all, the human is the first geological force to become conscious of its geological role.» An increased concern with humans' potential to destroy our own planet can lead either to activist-sentimental images and music, as in the Einaudi piano clip noted above, or to montage and other techniques that allow for more critical distance. In films like Herzog's Encounters, jarring cuts to clips from The Lone Ranger or sudden images of Ernest Shackleton's doomed 1914–16 Antarctic expedition create a distancing effect within the director's ecstatic-cinematic take on extreme geography; despite some critique of capitalism and a sense of eco-melancholy within that film, however, its point is less concerned with global warming's potential to end the world than with human image-making, which always falls short of approximating «Nature.»

Though visuality tends to come first in Anthropocene-conscious film, sound plays a more important eco-cinematic role than may be obvious at first. As the field of intermediality begins to absorb and reckon with Anthropocene discourse, Jørgen Bruhn's combination of semiotic and technological ap-
proaches is helpful in addressing «medialities as material communicative devices,» adaptable and transferrable between senders and receivers, whether human or not. In this context, digitally mediated film music can be seen as a «significant soundscape 'under' both verbal signs and visual signs» as in some activist films such as the Nature Is Speaking internet campaign. What happens when musical-material devices do not work as stable underpinnings of an activist narrative in environmental film? Expedition to the End of the World, however, does not fit securely into either the activist or «abstract,» «philosophical» (according to Bruhn's distinction) approach to the Anthropocene, but fluctuates between the two. Just as the film's classical music is interrupted by heavy metal (in a seemingly clumsy splice that also draws attention to itself), the film's rhapsodic cinematography gives way to another form of sound-mediation: deadpan remarks by the ship's crew, distanced further from the film's visual field with English subtitles, such as «so in many respects we are some kind of algae mat,» «as an artist you deal with a lot of stuff you don't know anything about,» «so this is the world, more or less,» and «it kind of gives me the creeps.» A line like «okay, it heats up, so what,» referring to planet Earth, further undermines any straightforward activist agenda. This disjointed dialogue echoes the «associative and fragmentary» comments by an equally ragtag group of adventuring experts in Herzog's Encounters at the End of the World, though Dencik's project makes more room for humor. Its wobbly threshold between rumination and fun, sometimes intended and sometimes just observed, pulls the film away from documentary sobriety and leans almost toward mockumentary at times. In the end, as ice threatens to squeeze the tall ship into splinters, the Art Photographer attempts to explain the meaning of life with a complicated triangular diagram. This visual-material «message» is turned toward the camera for inspection, as cast members nod indulgently. The film itself breaks off before we know whether the crew is rescued; in a strange meta-cinematic conclusion, it becomes clear that the film would not exist otherwise, a human artifact in itself.

Music functions as a particularly reified Anthropocene artifact in Expedition to the End of the World, «homeopathically» drawing attention to this very reification, as Fredric Jameson has noted in his interpretation of Brecht's Verfremdungseffekt. Though more obvious forms of musical estrangement have become commonplace in film since Brecht's time – for example, in Stanley Kubrick's use of cheerful music during violent scenes – Mozart surprises in Dencik's film not for its affective contrast but for its fragile materiality in recorded performance, interrupted in a way that further exposes its contingency as music edited into film. Expedition exploits both this doubled material estrangement and what Steven Shaviro has called «[t]he movement from narrative organization to database logic» in twenty-first-century cinema, a mode of digital montage that allows sound clips to function more as interchangeable, cut-and-paste chunks in their own right than as linear supplements to visual action. The jarring cuts in Dencik's film may seem more improvisational than freighted with Brechtian estrangement-intent, when in fact Brecht's own stage directions often included the word «schwerfällig» («clumsy») as an indicator of gestic contradiction. In this article, analysis of each Mozart excerpt in the film will reveal music's potential to estrange the Anthropocene perspective, as it shows, in eco-feminist Stacy Alaimo's terms, «flimsy» human-made materiality «escaping human control.» Ultimately, environmental film music reflects the difficulty of apprehending climate crisis as what Timothy Morton calls a «hyperobject,» since music, with its slippery associative codes, is often assigned the task of voicing the «inef-fable.»

FOSSIL MUSIC

The story behind Mozart's Requiem is well known, if partly apocryphal: a commission by a mysterious visitor, likely an emissary of Count Franz von Walsegg, who attempted to take credit for the work; the young composer's fevered writing in the midst of what would be his final illness; his death with only portions of the work complete, in December 1791.
Through the iconic paupers’ grave scene in Peter Shaffer’s 1984 film *Amadeus*, the rocking, Bach-like «Lacrimosa» became familiar to many moviegoers; Mozart had sketched only the first eight bars of that movement before he died. That this music breaks off shortly after that point in Dencik's film, not even at an expected cadence or resolution-point but in the middle of a word, evokes a brittle quality in an already provisional-sounding recording. This is not merely atmospheric or elegiac music but a fragile artifact that, had Mozart died a few days earlier, would not exist at all. Hearing a film-music artifact this way is a reminder that humans, foxes, insects, and ice floes are all subject to the passing of time, geologic or otherwise, however striking the sounds we make.

This first excerpt from the *Requiem* comes early in the film, at the end of the opening credits. A calving iceberg crashes, disturbing the gray sea in sound and image; now we hear the first bars of Mozart’s «Lacrimosa,» played by a single organ rather than the full orchestra for which the work is scored in Franz Xaver Süssmayr’s finished version. A small choir begins to sing, in a recording made in Copenhagen’s Brønshøj Kirke, with a soprano’s slightly wobbly vibrato sticking out, another indicator that this is a provisional human trace, rather than a lush and seamless score embedded in the audiovisual field. Listeners who know Bach’s vocal music will likely hear several seams of human history within this fragile sampling: rocking 12/8 meter, and an initial upward leap of a minor sixth, are clear signs of homage to the *St. Matthew Passion* and other sacred works by Mozart’s predecessor. If viewers or listeners know Herzog’s earlier *Encounters* film, they might recall the sequence of air travel to Antarctica in which David Lindley and Henry Kaiser’s score swells, hardly intimate but rather «evocative of a choir in a vast cathedral.» Meanwhile, in Dencik's film, the ship’s hull thuds against more ice, which gives way as the music is playing; for a moment the «Lacrimosa» could be heard as an environmental elegy, with a slow tracking shot across the sea broken by melting floes, more ice yielding as the ship breaks through. The film's title appears at the top of the screen as the music rises in pitch and volume, as if to underline the words «end of the world» in traditional film-music-supplement form. Then the spell breaks: Metallica’s «Blackened» drowns out Mozart in mid-stream, crashing in on the same pitch as the chorus’ last fully heard melodic note and quickly overwhelming it. This sudden, raucous music crosses the diegetic threshold: a rocky cliff appears; the Artist bobs his head to the beat; we see a radio onboard the ship. Now the Mozart fragment seems to have been just that, a remnant of another time, an anthropogenic trace not so different from the «fossilized algae mat» the Geologist discovers near the film’s opening, or – in more practical terms – a chunk of doubly meditated sound, first in a Copenhagen church with microphones, and then with digital sound processing and film editing. This music is more thing than evocation.

Metallica falls off into silence as suddenly as it interrupted Mozart. Crewmembers begin their deadpan commentary on what may in fact be the world’s end. Though pre-cadential breaks are nothing new in film music, they usually align with a significant narrative moment, as in the suspended non-ending of Bernard Herrmann’s «overture» for *North by Northwest*, corresponding with Alfred Hitchcock's missing a bus. In *Expedition to the End of the World*, the interruption of Mozart, or of the quasi-diegetic music that follows, draws attention to «pit music» as a convention as old as the live organs played along with silent film. Michael Chion has noted the strange similarity of this older convention to the Strauss waltz swinging along with spacecraft in Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*; in that case, the music does not lose its power as rhapsodic atmosphere. Here, crashing ice and shouting humans already undermine Mozart's mournful lilt, even before «live» heavy metal intervenes. In addition, and in case audiences might still be tempted into musical thrall, this opening sequence's sound and music are further reified by closed captioning-style text that accompanies the English subtitles: «[CHORUS VOCALIZING],» «[INDISTINCT SHOUTING],» «[CRASHING],» «[VOCALIZING CONTINUES],» «[HEAVY METAL MUSIC PLAYS],» «[MUSIC CONTINUES].» This paratext, according to Gérard
Genette’s model in literary theory, functions as a threshold and even «transactions» between the page and its viewer, or in the case of film, the screen and its audience. I would add that, like Brecht’s Spruchbänder or placards announcing the action to come onstage, these closed-caption paratexts highlight the film’s musical fragments as cinematic tropes (for example, classical music used to evoke the sublimity of mountains or sea) by drawing attention to them outside the film’s visual-narrative field. Verbs like «vocalizing» and «shouting» introduce a distinctly embodied, human element, but even this is treated with some critical, if unstable, distance, as filmmakers make art out of the very Anthropocene to which they still belong.

The second Mozart fragment in the Expedition film occurs after a dramatic iceberg collapse, followed by a tracking shot of a rainbow and the crew’s references to the biblical Flood. This time we hear, briefly, a few chamber instruments joining the organ heard in the first excerpt. The choir sounds small and slightly unstable as it enters; the «Rex tremendae» from Mozart’s Requiem sounds almost tinny in light of the cinematic grandeur it encounters: now a double rainbow; now raging clouds over the brilliantly lit sea. Left only as a sketch by the composer when he died, this movement combines loud, descending dotted-rhythm orchestral lines with single-syllable choral exclamations of awe and even terror. For such a powerful human trace to sound so fragile in its recorded and cinematically transmediated form recalls the material quality of Mozart’s sketch rather than several centuries of listener-expected sonority. It also draws attention to the vulnerability of the human voice: the sopranos are required to enter on a high, exposed G, on the difficult-to-focus vowel «eh.» As Nicholas Cook has pointed out, «a musical performance isn’t a pot of paint. It is a human action carried out at a certain time and place, normally in the presence of others and marked by the contingencies of the occasion.»

This embodied materiality, mediated through numerous recording and film editing processes, does not merely accompany the grand Greenlandic images on screen but functions as a fragile, and at the same time highly worked-over anthropogenic trace. Once again, closed-caption paratext appears: «[SLOW, ORCHESTRAL MUSIC PLAYS]» and «[OPERATIC SINGING]», perhaps in reference to the still-recognizable, dominant soprano voice. Though the movement’s brief opening fragment does end on a resolved harmonic cadence this time, it is interrupted once again, this time by loudly rumbling thunder. Nature with a capital «N» seems to win out – until this sound is undermined as well, by the Artist’s comment, «Well, okay, it heats up. So what? Then Copenhagen gets flooded, and Hamburg. Okay, then people from Hamburg and Copenhagen have to move to Mongolia. What’s the problem?» The Artist’s rumination on human adaptation is both fatalistic and cheerful. «Oh, no! We need two cars.» No, maybe we need a raft.» Music may be subject to the «nostalgic clinging», the Artist disparages; perhaps it comes and goes like weather, too.

The third and final Mozart fragment in the film is from the Requiem’s first movement, the «Introit.» In the last third of the film, after the crew spots oil explorers on the fjord, and overhears them speaking depth measurements over the radio, the camera moves from these orange-parka-clad invaders landing onshore to water pouring into air from rocky cliffs and then a crashing waterfall. Cue Mozart, «[CHORUS VOCALIZING]:» the funeral-march meter of the «Introit» fills the space. Without the precedent of other Mozart fragments functioning as «sound objects,» this one could be heard as a more traditional and even elegiac supplement to the film’s images. This is not Mozart’s source score but an adaptation, in which the choir enters before its actual, fugue-like entrance on the word «Requiem» and instead vocalizes the bassoon and basset-horn lines that open the movement, on the rounded vowel «ah.» Singing an instrumental line on a vowel has its own precedent in nature and other science films, to the point of cliché, particularly in evocations of the vastness of space. Because of this film’s consistent pattern of breaking up musical material, however, this excerpt fails to saturate the sound-space as mere atmosphere. Also, it is brief. This time silence interrupts the musical fragment, which ends before human voices are even meant to enter. That this frag-
ment almost works as a traditional film-music trope after the earlier, more isolated and reified excerpts, makes it more, not less poignant. In light of the line of «oil hunters» lurching up the shore, and in one of the film's fluctuations toward a clearly activist stance, the music's fleetingly elegiac role is earned.

This spilling over of Mozart into atmospheric supplement is an exception and at the same time part of the film's dialectical project. Throughout Expedition, music oscillates between reified sampling and Mads Heldtberg's minimalist score, which leans into atmospheric background with traditional nature film tropes (synthesized «vocal» vowels and droning string chords) until it's either interrupted or marked by paratext such as «[OMINOUS MUSIC],»38 giving it more weight as cinematic artifact than as mood music. This back-and-forth dynamic between immersion and distance is close to Brecht's famous «V-Effect» as described by playwright Tony Kushner, as «a fugitive inside-outside relationship» between actor and role,39 or in this case, between music's affective tropes and its critical potential. An encounter with a polar bear, breaking into a human hut and destroying its contents, elicits wry anthropomorphic comments from the crew and a brief, brittle music box sample. Before the oil hunters sequence, shots of ice, water, and rock occur simultaneously with several fragments of Metallica's «Through the Never» that break in and break off so suddenly that they seem almost completely random. As Walter Benjamin noted in an essay on Brecht, the more a person or action is interrupted, the more «gestus» becomes available;40 in this case, the film's gestural impulse toward fragility (a few voices in a church; the cracking ice; a starving polar bear; a slipshod human hut) becomes all the more apparent when sound falls away. This time there is no visible radio on deck, heightening a sense of diegetic/non-diegetic estrangement: does this music come and go in the crews' ears, or only in our own? If even Metallica can sound provisional and breakable, human presence, however damaging, seems as contingent as the polar bear's in this vast, cold landscape.

Near the end of the film, two diegetic musical moments carry their own self-conscious quality, as ice threatens to break down the ship (itself a fragile human artifact!). First, the Artist pounds a piano below deck with hands and elbows («[DISCORDANT NOTES PLAYING],»41) not only mirroring the impending destruction of a similarly wooden object, but also highlighting the fleeting materiality of human-made sound. Meanwhile, up on deck, the Captain refers to a tranquilizer used for temporary seafaring insanity, and another crewmember vomits overboard. Ice crashes into the hull; the ship's machinery grinds painfully to a halt. Silence. Now the Geologist plays «Sweet Sunny South» on the banjo. The irony of the song's title resonates in the metacinematic field, and a diegetic slip (into what Ben Winters calls the «intradiegetic» layer42) occurs: the music continues while its player talks to the camera in another shot, referring to the persistence of life, human or otherwise. The film ends with blue water filling the frame, as traces of sea life dart and drop across it, along with three final closed-caption paratexts at the final credits' outset: «[SOFT, ETHEREAL MUSIC PLAYS]» and «CHORUS VOCALIZING]» – not Mozart this time, but richly triadic, vowel-heavy pulses in Heldtberg's score – and then, in one last irruption, «[HEAVY METAL MUSIC PLAYS].»43 As a whole, Expedition to the End of the World plays with and against film-music tropes to expose their contingent materiality as artifacts of the age of particularly large-brained animals – from the tricky perspective of these creatures themselves.

**APPROACHING THE HYPEROBJECT**

If the music under consideration here functions as a human artifact in a cinematic field of «estranged recognition,»44 to return to Margaret Ronda's take on Anthropocene aesthetics, how does music itself, in its various intermedial constellations, speak to this self-conscious human age? How does it approach what Timothy Morton calls the «hyperobject» that is global warming – as he attempts to define «hyperobject,» a «viscous» yet «nonlocal» sum of human or non-human processes, an uncanny cloud of interobjectivity that casts traditional phenomenology in doubt?45 Morton writes, «Hyperobjects force us to
acknowledge the immanence of thinking to the physical. But this does not mean» – in a slightly snarky nod to Heidegger – «that we are 'embedded' in a 'lifeworld.'»46 The brittle materiality of Mozart in the Expedition film certainly signals human thought as physical and fragile under pressure of the world's impending end; the film's oscillating distance as it indulges and then reifies musical tropes reminds the audience that we as humans are never fully at home in our environment; we try to see it from the outside and yet cannot get our heads around the changing climate driven by our own needs and machines. The film's apparently random verbal commentary adds to its quality of talking-around-the-issue. Morton uses film as metaphor to show how objectification works as an attempt to understand the world, or in his objectified treatment of the word itself, «World [as] a fragile aesthetic effect around whose corners we are beginning to see.»47 For Morton, how the «movie» of perception works – whether it is traditional or avant-garde – does not matter; the whole thing is «an objectification of a hyperobject: the biosphere, climate, evolution, capitalism (yes, perhaps economic relations compose hyperobjects). So when climate starts to rain on our head, we have no idea what is happening.»48

Beyond the Expedition film, music itself mirrors the difficulty of apprehending processes such as global warming. From nineteenth-century arguments about «absolute music» to contemporary research on music and the brain, humans have tried to pin down what and how music «means.» Like Morton's «hyperobject,» music has a «viscous»49 quality, sticking to memory and ideology; it moves elusively through time and space; its changing visual-textual codes can seem elusive, too; and for all its performative and technological materiality, it can seem abstract, otherworldly, even sublime. Word and music scholar Lawrence Kramer has critiqued claims to the «ineffable» in music for several decades, since «people who invoke the unspeakable may use it to justify unspeakable things,»50 as in the case of Beethoven blaring through the loudspeakers at Nazi rallies. «Music expresses musically as words do verbally,» he notes in a more recent study, emphasizing that even the idea of the «in-

... For music to voice the ineffable, and voice it in ways words cannot, the music would have to step in where the ineffable had managed to escape even the wreckage of language.»51 And this, for Kramer, would mean that music had failed to «mean» as music does, in its complex of timbre and meter and associative code, however listener-dependent that may be. Likewise, trying to apprehend a «hyperobject» like dramatic climate change depends on the very language the hyperobject evades. Morton's italicized words («viscous,» «nonlocal,» «World,»52) appear on the page as Mozart sounds to me in Dencik's Expedition film: artifacts of human thinking, physical and fragile, drawing attention to themselves as they stick to and fall away from phenomena that are larger than human.

Composers, performers, and film sound editors working from the Anthropocene perspective tend to fall into three camps: evoking a polyphonic dance of human and non-human presences; lamenting the planet's fate in elegiac tropes; or – as we have seen in Expedition – pointing out the material contingency of human art in the «book» of geologic time. All three approaches are themselves provisional, mediated efforts to get our all-too-human heads around the «hyperobject» of what may well end our world. In an example of the first case, American composer John Luther Adams is well known for his sonic explorations of the natural world, as well as for his talks and writings on art that engages with Anthropocene concerns without being explicitly activist. Using acoustic instruments and electronic media, sometimes composing improvisational works meant to be performed outdoors, Adams describes an «ecosystem of sounds» generated by, but not limited to, the human.53 The composer's Become Ocean «invites you to get lost» in the music, as humans may well drown in the rising ocean, according to Adams' notes on the piece;54 this is not a critically distancing Anthropocene work but rather an immersive and even narcotic musical experience. An example of the second, more explicitly elegiac approach would be the 2010 short film Denmark by the Portland Cello Project, with mu-
sic of the same title by Gideon Freudmann: in this dystopian animation, a shrimp-like marionette builds a rocket to escape a gloomy, polluted world, which turns out to be underwater; our shelled hero manages to fly into a human harbor with blue sky overhead, only to find the rocket’s water supply failing; the film ends with a slippery finger touching a button that reads «FIX THIS.»

Throughout the film, the cello ensemble plays a mournful melody underpinned by more «cheerful» plucked strings, in an ambivalent environmental elegy. An example of the third approach, similar to that in Expedition to the End of the World, but operating in spite of its own ostensible agenda, is a short film shot in the (digitally ice-enhanced) Giacometti room of the Louisiana Museum of Art near Copenhagen. The film is titled Rachmaninov 4014 and begins with the following dystopian-positivist, visually flickering text:

The world has been subject to cruel changes. Important parts of the world are moribund, hostile and ice-capped. Only the indestructible forces of the arts are unchangeable and resolute. The arts and Rachmaninov’s music alone, played by Boris Giltburg, restore our everlasting belief in our earth and our humanity.

Flying snow and cracking, crashing ice open the film. Rachmaninoff’s Prelude Op. 23 No. 7 begins as fish swim toward the submerged gallery’s floor to ceiling windows. Inside, Giltburg plays a concert grand piano in the now ice-encrusted space. Questions of suspended disbelief (how on even this post-apocalyptic earth would a Steinway survive intact and in tune?) are unavoidable. The piano and the music it releases work less as feel-good reminders of the persistence of art than as technologically mediated artifacts placed out of place in an imagined future. One emaciated Giacometti sculpture has survived inside the gallery; outside, in the icy water of the Sound turned sea, digital versions of it crowd the windows, listening and looking in. Even the human form is now an artifact, reanimated through music that would in fact no longer sound after the flooding of the earth. This beautiful short film is as difficult to believe as the end of the Anthropocene may be, though it attempts, as human language does, to make it real.

Returning to the Expedition film, its use of music nods to elegiac and immersive tropes, from Mozart to Metallica, but ultimately its sound fragments fall apart and show themselves to be fossilized flakes of «anthro-geologic» time. How better to attempt to grasp a «hyperobject» like a warming planet than to fail at comprehensive and immersive narrative? This film achieves its self-conscious failure without Werner Herzog-style voiceover; its sonic traces speak for themselves, and fall apart. Inventive homo faber has always attempted to make tools, pictures, music, maps, and memorable forms of food and clothing, and its latest project seems to be to stand inside and outside its own world and make art from that wobbly viewpoint, too. This process reveals its very difficulty and keeps humans humble in what sounds like a grand epoch, the Anthropocene.

CONCLUSION

In one of the Expedition film’s short monologues, the Artist quips, «we will only rule for a short time, and then it’s back to the spider, but as far as we know the spider doesn’t write poems.» The intricacy of a spider web can certainly be cited as an art form, and despite the Artist’s words, human traces bear similar, complex, fragile signatures that may not stand the coming tests of geologic time. The Queen of the Night’s famous revenge aria from Mozart’s Magic Flute was launched into space in 1977, part of the Voyager Golden Record flying time capsule, but who knows if or when it will reach—or be technologically accessible to—alien ears (if such ears exist!). For the moment, at least, Mozart keeps leaving marks on earth, not only in the concert hall but also on YouTube and film screen, fleeting bits of digital «translation» marking up the latest Anthropocene volume.

This article has drawn on Margaret Ronda’s notion of «estranged recognition» to take what might be called a neo-Brechtian approach to music in environmental film, showing how Mozart functions as fragile and self-conscious human artifact in Daniel Dencik’s Expedition to the End of the World. The con-
stellation of an intimate and slightly raw recording that draws attention to its own materiality, interruptions in the film editing process, and closed captioning-style paratext that further reifies the music make it sound more like an object than an elegy or evocation. In the «Lacrimosa» fragment that ends the film’s opening credits, Mozart’s metric and melodic nod to Bach adds more material human history to this excerpt, which is abruptly overtaken by Metallica, another, if much louder, artifact. Thunder interrupts the second Mozart fragment, which foregrounds the fragility of the human voice itself, in the sopranos’ difficult entrance. The third and final Mozart excerpt, from the opening of the Requiem, leans more toward the elegiac than the reified, though even here the visual overlay of paratext creates a distancing effect. Throughout Dencik’s film, even diegetic piano pounding and banjo strumming take on a self-conscious quality as material moments that will not last once ice shuts down the ship. The fact that the film ends with more, not less, ice adds to its unstable status between activist and aesthetico-philosophical documentary; the earth is still in flux, and just as humans struggle to apprehend the «hyperobject» and its warming doom, it never ceases to surprise.

Unlike immersive Anthropocene-aware works like John Luther Adams’ symphonic oceans, and unlike elegiac melody in films such as the short Denmark by the Portland Cello Project, music in the Expedition film draws attention to itself as human artifact and even artifice, without the melancholic irony of its predecessor, Werner Herzog’s Encounters at the End of the World. However, the critical distance at work in Dencik’s film makes its Mozart fragments no less beautiful, if that word can itself last this long with some significance attached. This provisional sonority would not even exist without Mozart’s having lived several days into December 1791. That it has lasted this far into our late human age, sung well or not, recorded, edited and folded into cinematic space, gives it the deceptive appearance of durability. In fact, the fragility of the vibrating voices and chiffing organ in Expedition make their artifice less distinct from «Nature» after all; Mozart begins to sound as breakable as ice.

1 See Marija Ciric, «Music as Word: Film Music – Superlibretto?» in Muzikologija, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, journal of the 2013(15), 127-144.
3 For a discussion of the Romantic-melancholic mode in The Wild Blue Yonder, Herzog’s Anthropocene fantasies, see Laurie Ruth Johnson, Forgotten Dreams: Resisting Romanticism in the Cinema of Werner Herzog (Rochester, NY: Camden House), 31-41. While The Wild Blue Yonder contains elements of humor and self-referential material traces that link it to Expedition to the End of the World, it treats music more as atmosphere than artifact. For an analysis of Herzog’s Encounters at the End of the World, see Johnson, 81–93.
4 See Knegt and Dencik, «FUTURES» interview.
7 Margaret Ronda, «Anthropogenic Poetics,» in Minnesota Review 83 (2015), 104.
8 Ibid. 103.
9 Ibid.
12 Szerszynski, 171.
13 See Johnson, 92.
14 See Jørgen Bruhn, «How do ‘we’ react to the Anthropocene? Scientific concepts transformed into media products – and affects,»
draft of material presented at IEAT research centre, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, May 2016, 8–9.
15 Ibid. 11–12.
16 Ibid. 6.
17 Subtitle excerpts from Expedition to the End of the World, directed by Daniel Dencik (Copenhagen: Haslund Film/Det Danske Film-institut, 2013, and New York: Argot Films, 2014), DVD.
18 Johnson, 88.
23 See Stacy Alaimo, Exposed: environmental politics & pleasures in posthuman times (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 133–134 for a discussion of plastic as human artifact.
25 Credits page, Expedition to the End of the World website. DOI: http://expeditionthemovie.dk/about/credits.
26 Johnson, 88.
27 Subtitle excerpts from Expedition to the End of the World, 2013/14.
30 Closed captioning excerpts from Expedition to the End of the World, 2013/14.
31 Gérard Genette, «Introduction to the Paratext,» in New Literary History, 22, 2 (1991), 261. Paratexts can be distinguished spatially from «epitexts,» or materials not in the published source, such as fan-culture tweets or video spinoffs.
32 In some cases, most notably Brecht and Kurt Weil's Mahagonny opera, slogans on placards work as both paratext and performance, treating words as circulating currency or commodity, even as the texts' appearance onstage exposes that very function. Rickard Schönström, «Quotes as commodities – The use of slogans in Bertolt Brecht's and Kurt Weil's Mahagonny,» International Brecht Society conference, Oxford University, 26 June 2016.
34 Nicholas Cook, «Beyond the Notes,» in Beyond the Notes, vol. 53, 26 June 2008, 1187.
35 Closed-captioning excerpts from Expedition to the End of the World, 2013/14.
36 Ibid., subtitles.
37 Ibid., closed-captioning.
38 Ibid.
41 Closed captioning excerpts from Expedition to the End of the World, 2013/14.
43 Closed captioning excerpts from Expedition to the End of the World, 2013/14.
44 Ronda, 104.
45 Morton, 11.
46 Ibid., 12.
47 Ibid. 107.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid. 11.
52 Morton, 11, 107.
54 John Luther Adams, Become Ocean, Seattle Symphony Orchestra, Naxos, 2014. DOI: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG-va1NVWRXk. For commentary, see DOI: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGIEvUOf-JU.
55 Portland Cello Project, Denmark, with music by Gideon Freudmann, Two Penguins Productions, 2010. DOI: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4K8ou0iA_68.
56 Stéphan Aubé, with Boris Gilgib, piano, Rachmaninov 4014, Louisiana Music Videos, 2014. DOI: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFKEKZ9r-08.
57 For a description of various human roles in the Anthropocene, including homo faber, homo consumens, and homo gubernans, see Szerszynski, 172–177.
58 Expedition to the End of the World, 2013/14, monologue in English.
59 Ronda, 104.