

Mandeville Pentacle

"Mandeville Pentacle" features five passages taken from *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. The unknown author, writing in French around 1350, claimed to be a British knight who had traveled to the Holy Land as a pilgrim and then gone on to India and China. It is clear today that much of the book is an artful compilation of earlier accounts by others. Descriptions of fabulous creatures and people coexist with accurate observations of places and practices a traveler may have seen and may still see today.

Several software applications were used to create these pieces, including Pro Tools, Ableton Live, Paul Lansky's RT mixing program ported to Mac OSX by Douglas Scott as QRT, and Max/MSP including the PeRColate objects created by Dan Trueman and Luke Dubois. Specific processes used include phase vocoding, convolution, granular synthesis, pitch shifting, resonant filters, and the speech synthesis process known as concatenation.

Each piece features a different speaker and different sound sources and processes in order to evoke the diverse environs and people described in each passage. The first piece combines six commercially available synthesized voices, while the remaining four pieces use live speakers of different backgrounds and nationalities whose voices, however, have been painstakingly and subtly manipulated, altering pitch, phrasing, pacing, amplitude and inflection for maximum expressive effect. Sound samples used include a reproduction of a baroque organ, a reproduction of a medieval portative organ, tympani, cymbals, marimba, bells, bass drum, wind, insects, flocks of birds, water, ice, a monorail train accelerating and decelerating, duct tape being unwound, finger snaps, a pile driver, electric guitars, 'cello, violins, a jet plane, saxophones, and double stops played on an electric bass. Many of these sounds have been altered by several sound processing techniques so as to be unrecognizable.

The overall aim of the piece is not only to create a different "sound world" for each passage, but also to raise again the age-old question of where the borders lie between speech, song, and music, and perhaps to obscure those borders.

Selections from *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*

Of the Difference Betwixt Idols and Simulacres

THE folk of that country have a diverse law. For some of them worship the sun, some the moon, some the fire, some trees, some serpents, or the first thing that they meet at morrow. And some worship simulacres and some idols. But between simulacres and idols is a great difference. For simulacres be images made after likeness of men or of women, or of the sun, or of the moon, or of any beast, or of any kindly thing. And idols is an image made of lewd will of man, that man may not find among kindly things, as an image that hath four heads, one of a man, another of an horse or of an ox, or of some other beast, that no man hath seen after kindly disposition.

Of the Goodness of the Folk of the Isle of Bragman

AND beyond that isle is another isle, great and good and plenteous, where that be good folk and true, and of good living after their belief and of good faith. And albeit that they be not christened, ne have no perfect law, yet, natheles, of kindly law they be full of all virtue, and they eschew all vices and all malices and all sins. For they be not proud, ne covetous, ne envious, ne wrathful, ne gluttons, ne lecherous. Ne they do to any man otherwise than they would that other men did to them, and in this point they fulfil the ten commandments of God, and give no charge of avoir, ne of riches. And they lie not, ne they swear not for none occasion, but they say simply, yea and nay; for they say, he that sweareth will deceive his neighbour, and therefore, all that they do, they do it without oath.

Of the Well That Changeth His Odour Every Hour of the Day; and That Is Marvel

AND at the foot of that mount is a fair well and a great, that hath odour and savour of all spices. And at every hour of the day he changeth his odour and his savour diversely. And whoso drinketh three times fasting of that water of that well he is whole of all manner sickness that he hath. And they that dwell there and drink often of that well they never have sickness; and they seem always young. I have drunken thereof three or four sithes, and yet, methinketh, I fare the better. Some men clepe it the well of youth. For they that often drink thereof seem always young-like, and live without sickness. And men say, that that well cometh out of Paradise, and therefore it is so virtuous.

Of the City of Constantinople, and of the Faith of Greeks

AND men say in these countries, that philosophers some time went upon these hills, and held to their nose a sponge moisted with water, for to have air; for the air above was so dry. And above, in the dust and in the powder of those hills, they wrote letters and figures with their fingers. And at the year's end they came again, and found the same letters and figures, the which they had written the year before, without any default. And therefore it seemeth well, that these hills pass the clouds and join to the pure air.

Of Other Marvels and Customs Used in the Isles Marching Thereabout

AND from that isle men go by sea, from isle to isle, unto an isle that is clept Tracoda, where the folk of that country be as beasts, and unreasonable, and dwell in caves that they make in the earth; for they have no wit to make them houses. And when they see any man passing through their countries they hide them in their caves. And they eat flesh of serpents, and they eat but little. And they speak nought, but they hiss as serpents do. And they set no price by no avoir ne riches, but only of a precious stone, that is amongst them, that is of sixty colours. And for the name of the isle, they clepe it Tracodon. And they love more that stone than anything else; and yet they know not the virtue thereof, but they covet it and love it only for the beauty.