

t r a n s f o r m e r

The phrase “Before the Law” suggests two concepts to consider; chronologically and spatially. If the Law is a cosmic order, then that which came before was likely disorder. Spatially, to come before something is to stand in front of it, perhaps to challenge it or at least try and understand it. In Kafka’s parable, a common man stands at the gates of the Law, goaded on yet still shut out by the gatekeeper. As the man ages, he attempts with increasing desperation to enter, but to no avail. The gate keeper tells the man in the last line of the story, “No one else could ever be admitted here, since this gate was made only for you. I am now going to shut it.”

In order to explore aspects of the parable, without re-telling the narrative, the artists experimented with playing video along with a variety of scores. What became most exciting was having the agency to change the emotional force of the images by finding new combinations for video and score. Romero created the video with a range of sources- from family home movies to newly shot scenes. He considered the phrase “before the law” in terms of technology, specifically our cultural and sentimental connections to forms of media in the wake of the internet. The video appears on a studio TV monitor, with a small screen.

Carver composed music that suggested very specific emotional charges: fear, romance, sadness- influence by a range of sources, from classical music, diaphonic singing, and Bulgarian folk music. Two tones that are one half-step or whole-step apart on the tempered scale, create a vibration that is both disarming and alluring to the ear; a striking tension which reminds the listener that sound is a physical force. These close intervals in singing styles, called diaphonic singing, are used in different cultures: Tuvan, Calabrian, and Bulgarian to name a few.

Carver was introduced to diaphonic singing through *Les Mystere Des Voix Bulgares*, a volume of different folk ensembles that became popular worldwide when it was re-released in 1986 by Peter Murphy, the singer from Bauhaus. He had listened to a third or fourth generation cassette tape of Bulgarian ensembles recorded by Marcel Cellier, and released in 1975. This lineage of dubbed tapes, creating mystery wherever they went, at last made available the efforts of Georgi Boyadjiev, who had originally assembled a national Bulgarian choir. As Kim Burton writes, “Founded in 1952, it was part of the newly established Communist government’s desire to underpin national cohesion and present itself as a patriotic and national undertaking by creating a musical language based on Bulgarian folk styles and a cultural mechanism to support it.”

The exhibit invites the audience to watch the video while listening to different scores they may change out, available as cassette tapes. This invitation is to make the gallery a space of action, where all may find agency interacting with seemingly archaic media and creating new connections between image and sound.

-Raúl Romero