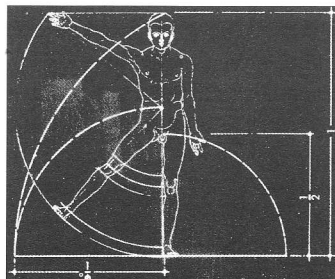


SMALLNESS AND INFINITY

Living, writing, travelling,
making [in] the world



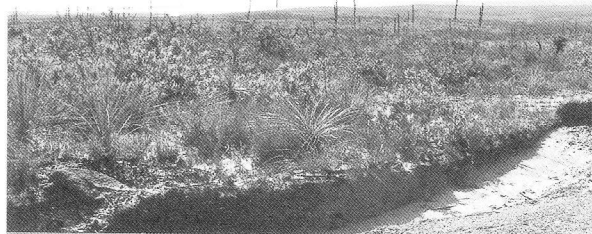
*Zsuzsanna Soboslay Moore is a performance-maker who has taught her own bodytuning method across the eastern states of Australia, and trained in various theatrical traditions including shamanic dance. In this article she discusses two of her performance works: **the awakenings project**, a movement opera with new text which took the German play *Spring Awakening* as its springboard, and **Landscape Jazz**, an ecological cross-form improvisation process she has developed over several years. **awakenings** premiered in Sydney in August 1997; **Burn**, the second of the three interactions in **Landscape Jazz**, was improvised in the Sutherland National Park, Sydney, in May 1996.*

It's suddenly realizing that the world is big, the universe is infinite and we have so little say in it. The Germans would call [the feeling] *Weltschmerz*, world-pain. One feels the vanity of it all. The universal meaning of one's life can only be experienced as emptiness. And the peculiar thing is that we have no choice but to accept it; and yet we cannot.

Interview: Jan Sedivka, violinist and '60s immigrant, Master Resident at University of Tasmania, with Louise Oxley, *Siglo 6* (Tasmania, 1996): 48–9.

... it dawned on me that this is not a new country, it's the oldest country. It seems to be unchangeable because it's been so long there. ... It gives us somehow our identity through its enormity. It's not that we give it the identity. The idea that we came to conquer Australia is somehow silly. This realization made me open my eyes a little bit, and now I not only feel at home, but rather humble, I must say.

Jan Sedivka, *ibid.*: 52.



Royal National Park, Sutherland. Photo: Tim Moore

Tracking: listening to history, memory and time.

Cell memory: documenting coinhabitants.

Excavation: resurrection, reinhabitation.

Territory/ownership: what training aspires to. Who owns it.

1950—AWASH

They travelled the sea in a migration awash with vomit and crying children. Some of the refugees had not seen a toilet bowl before, and used them as vanity-units. The hull festered with people who for three months had no place to wash themselves. They were Magyars, Serbs, Russians, Poles; no one spoke each other's language. My mother escaped to surface duties, saved from this dungeon by her knowledge of English. The sea captain employed her to type his official naval letters home.

They arrived, most of them, to camps and canning factories. Hot summer bush and unheated icy winters on long dry treeless plains. They slept under tin roofs, and ate God knows what—mostly remnants from the canneries. The country hardly welcomed them: they were ordered to speak English in the streets, on trams, the gift horse's teeth knocked out of its head countless times. My mother never spoke much of her experiences, only expressed gratitude for a country which took her away from the spiritual and physical deprivations and political chaos of back home. Although, it's hard to know exactly what she lost: to this day, she speaks as if the worst wound on her country was the blowing up of bridges across the Danube in the Nazi retreat of '45, and the raising of hammer and sickle on top of the Houses of Parliament that still are Budapest's pride. My father's story is another matter: perhaps the experience of the Russian Front was so unspeakable that it marked the death of his former life to which he never again referred. Neither ever particularly wanted gifts of books written in their native tongue. As a child, I used to wonder why.

Slowly they regained some of their familiars, though mostly they did not. A landscape full of new tastes and smells, the occasional excitement of finding poppy-seeds or well-smoked ham. Lusts and tastes of association breed in the blood: to this day, certain smoky-pink and wood-panelled restaurants still trigger in me a desire for cake, coffee and Europe I don't otherwise have. The jumping of landscape across generations is phenomenal; perhaps there's a tastebud DNA. This smell, that timbre, that rise of the mountain; fragments shored, perhaps, against the

ruins of the heart. Or perhaps the heart is a prism of fragile glass, catching old illusions. Whatever, the sensations are real, and remain.

When we talk about landscape, it's not abstract: a copse of trees, the roar of wind, moistness like a halo round the skin, affecting and effecting us. When you turn the corner, your breathing changes. The new vista sets up a different correspondence. The body and landscape write letters to each other.

In May I was in Turkey—quite close enough to the 'home country' I somehow fear setting my foot into. Traditionally, the Turks are the bloody so-and-so's the Hungarians kept in their pockets like a steam-ironed clipping from a wound. In Turkey, however, I felt reciprocal animosities. They have their own, perhaps more crumpled, summaries.

Yet the similarities! Their nationhood, their personhoods written in the pavements, rivers and walls. Where the museums become too cramped, history is tossed into the streets—feet, arms, half-faces chiselled in stone—and imbued in these antiquities is a similar pride in their longevity, the pride of a race which has fought, conquered, been conquered—and holds its grudges: *This limb comes from the ruins of Ephesus; the British have all the rest.* I knew I was in Europe when I tasted that spiced coffee-scented

grudge. We copped it, being tourists: fair game on the circuit of give and take and steal and give again. This land shored with its ancient battle-lines.



Column Medusa, Istanbul.
Photo: Tim Moore

And my own shoreline? Compressed in my ribs:
unspecified histories, bottled memories, the battles of
families and empires, brewed in a new country
bordered only by the sea, within the complacency of
treelined suburbs and starched pinafores . . .

A decade ago, I wrote a piece about a Russian
composer of this century, mainly sourced from his
music and a biography. I am astonished how much I
knew about his historical experience: the spilt blood
on the streets, the sound of marching boots, the
puffery of armies. How do I know this? How has my
skin absorbed a landscape in which I've never been,
unless landscape is carried through words, sounds,
paintings, gestures, and all the unspoken you share
with people as you climb (or fail) the same mountains
together. Unless history, memory themselves are
landscapes that draw the world like a pencil, adding
their own colours (perhaps more real than the
photograph) and remap, *prodding, provoking and
preventing* the remaking of the world?

PROD

The Shaman¹ dances.
Melbourne, 1993 Tokyo, 1995

She becomes peacock
baby lecher tree
newspaper-in-wind
cicada shell.
She teaches,
feeding the body
with images:
Light falling on a leaf. Photosynthesis.

The mountain
rises beside her, there is dust
in her tail;
the memory of animal
within her changing the
bite and heat of air.

This is
belonging, and
loss. She is
everything, and alone. It is
elationary,
evolutionary . . . and
frightening.

*to work as if you are a network of nerves
to work with uncertainty
to change internal speed, to walk through walls
to consider the condition of space around you as
substance,
affected by your transformation.*

Become vibration

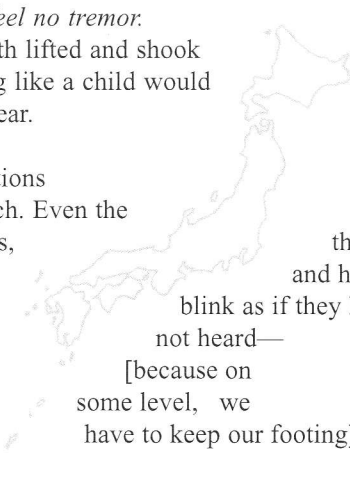
PROVOKE

Honshu, 1995. Another tremor.

They live on a fault line. The earth
shakes regularly, and on some days
with particular violence. *What
tremor? I feel no tremor.*
But the earth lifted and shook
the building like a child would
an errant bear.

Some questions
are too much. Even the
borderliners,

the artists
and hobos,
blink as if they have
not heard—
[because on
some level, we
have to keep our footing]



VATERLAND

The Wall trips itself up on the pavement; gets a bit too drunk to stand . . .

Timothy Garton Ash (1990) writes of being present in '89 at the fall of the Berlin Wall. Funny word, *fall*, to describe something pulled down by the collected and condensed will of so many people. Their shoulders are the ramparts, their bursting throats the arrows. What he remembers of the crowd moving from East to West was the simplicity of their actions: a walk, a look, a shop, perhaps for fruit, and their return. But what they called out for in the streets, what they wanted, was not just the untrammelled view, a glimpse of a wealthier world, but *reunification*: DEUTSCHLAND, EINIG VATERLAND. One Germany, one Fatherland.²

That's what we lose, in war: our men, our father-place, our god. Our sense of a largeness that contains us. This feeling, *Weltschmerz*, is the subject of huge pain.

I keep having dreams of a child who is vomiting. *She has been looking for her father*. In life, I spent many years being this child. I lost my father when I was twelve. About this, I still do not know my fury. But I too have lost my country: *she vomits*. *She has been looking for her father*. [It has taken many years to put down my heels.] Nothing in our history-books—the tales of battlegrounds drawn, possessed, and redrawn—teaches that *to be in place is to be humble*.

I can own a coffee-pot, silver, paintings, jewels; somewhere in Hungary we have a castle, rambling and rumbling, no doubt, down a sovereign hill. Useless. *In performance I own nothing*. My grandmother, a later immigrant, stuffed her horsehair chair with memories, hoarding her silvers and Chippendales in stories that she sat in, sat on, cloaked around herself like the Emperor's Clothes. She believed in her tailors, and the cobblers whose narrow shoes deformed her feet for ever; indeed her whole life, up until the war, had been the making concrete of those tailorings. The war was the child that laughed at her, decimating the fantastic silks in which she lived. In her migration, only the stories survived, packed in walnut shells. We had no

concrete inheritance, only the remnant pride. She never went exploring from the perch of her horsehair, and hated her adoptive land until the day she died.

My parents refused her nostalgia, quietly numbing their bones, deterring their own shadows. That effort was immense; yet they seemed to prefer it to remounting their own stories. We lived in a tug-of-war between negation and desire in a new land we hardly had the space to hear.

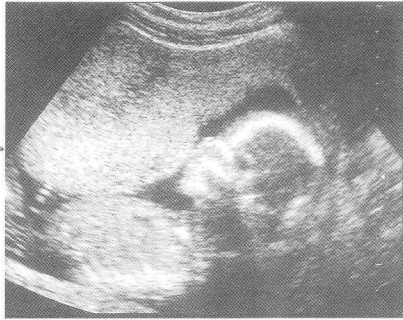
PREVENT

1985: I take my mother into the heart of ancient Western Sydney mangroves. We wanted to see the new park, commemorated for the Bicentennial [so young a celebration]. The mangroves' muscled arms dipped and drank the slimy waters of the billabong as if their thirst were insatiable. Hard, strong, dry-boned, this landscape made her cringe as she walked. *Call this beautiful?* she spat, clambering along the walkway as if those broad arms, at any step, might take her.

Compared to her Europe, this territory lacked the greenery, shrubbery, the ordered and elegant undulating folds of harvest patchworks stitched with chestnuts and elms. I think the root systems were too much — a threat, like the bare legs of a warrior advancing. But one which couldn't care less if we were there or not. The War, by contrast, must have been intimate: bombs shattering the sandstones they loved, and chandeliers, bodies bundled during air-raids against dank wine-cellar walls, contending with hunger and old men's snores. Could such a war make sense in a different landscape? Can you fight the same way for mangroves?—The fight is something different here: survival, defence, what is of value, are not on the same terms . . .



Photo: Tim Moore



Mimir, Melbourne Ultrasound for Women

*In performance,
there cannot be
an off-limits zone*

ZERO

1997: I see the Hamburg Schauspielhaus production of *Stunde Null*.³ A mayhem of guilt-ridden denials, recounting the point in German post-war history from which their historical world was supposedly new-born. There are eight suited men who sleep on camp-beds, recite the future, suckle at the teats of Matron Zero Hour as if this were the myth-making of a new Rome. Imagine: all these corpulent bodies saying this is their Day One. As if nothing has fed them to this corpulence. [You can feel the hiccough, the teetering, the imbalance, as the shadowed half of the world, sawn off, begins to fall.] So history, night, childhood, no longer come round to invade the day. Hard to feel a future then, if the world no longer turns....

THE BLACKBOARD SPEAKS:

And I will tell you a story about three men
whose heads lie in their graves
visited only by their wives . . .
peeled off from memory
like the quarter of an orange
a segment remembered, perhaps, where he liked
potatoes or was kind to the cat

And these quarter men with their ties
dividing the carapace between
left and right, bound and tied,
mouthing words without sound
[There is a half of your life left to live
Where is the the rest of it]
like the child playing hopscotch on the square
1, 2, buckle my shoe
3, 4, - forget the rest;
---all it can know
is its father's skull,
carried in its pocket,
its mother's heart written in the
stone it
throws on to the square
. . . Stop counting
[Awakenings, I (i)]



Awakenings. Photos: Paula Sammut

QUICKENING

[1] *Spring Awakening* is a play about children confused between their coming to awareness [blossoming, burgeoning, exploring, daring to show their hearts in the world] and the order of axemen who try to bring the saplings into line. This is Germany in 1892; a small town, the play an *agon* between repression and sensuality, civil and barbarian blood. In *Awakenings*, I reworked the spirit of the text from the perch of the daughter of immigrants who shared a similar *mythos* and cultural background. Someone who heard the music in their heads, felt the sacred buildings behind the unspoken wave of hands, the prejudices, the inheritances, a European sense of borderlines.

I called on shapings in the original playtext which matched more silent shapings of my own: landscapes of memory, devastation, silence, laughter, grape harvests, bulls'-blood wine

SCHOOLTEACHER (whilst BOY recites a lesson)

The brain of a monkey.
The soul of an ass.
The body of an angel.

Again!!

The smell of dust, and a rose, luscious
luscious at night.

Again, you dumkopf!!

--*Nein!*

Take him down!

I called forth the other dimension: the body's uncharted maps, the other parts crying in our sleep, winking in our dreams, that wake you slowly with their singing, 'after the Martians have been with you, waking and hearing them in your mind':

This is your heart.
I took it from you.
I took it so you would never get
the chance to feel it beating.
Your own blood, beating . . .

I stole it three

times: —the first: when you were a knight,
in the grand court that failed. Arthur's playpen: the king in
tatters like a baby who could not grow
—the second, when you were a squirming girl crying
in the reeds, looking for your brothers
—the third
when you went out buying peanuts for supper, because you thought I was
hungry. (laughs)

This is your
heart. Sit up in the
tree, waiting for me to throw it
high enough to touch you . . .

This is the body's tune, its rebellions, its own knowings. They perhaps are inarticulate, because they have never known their shape. But their potential to speak is waiting to be mined.

Silence holds power for the generals at the border-guard who own the frontiers of the world. Or, it holds the new mapping, the patchwork waiting to be rearranged

I have seen marsupials at a zoo paralysed by the memory of an electric fence from a distance of twenty yards. Their sensors, facing the fence, know not to feel in that direction.

This is perching, no-land. This is not-feeling, the coagulation of a scar. This is a place where under the surface, a thick coffee brews. This is the place trying not to explode. *Perhaps The Wall did 'fall', with the pressure of this in its stones*

But the place of renewal is not lamentation . . .

THE GINGER TREE [Finale]
(voice of an older woman)

The ginger tree has seen everything.
The ginger tree has seen it all.
The ginger tree has had its roots sat on by children.
Children have grown through the roots
and touched its navel as it climbed, relishing
the juice from the ground.
It let the children know its secrets
at the foot of the tree
the ginger house
no crumbs to lead them into the furnace
just letting them be there
at the ginger tree
with its roots swelling for the juices to come
from the ground up through its navel
and spread
and talk to the sun

a bit of shade
(she turns)
for the chocolate child
a bit of sharp edge
(she turns)
for the lemon child



Awakenings. Photos: Tim Moore

and they all come together in ginger root
with its circles
and its skin
and the bite of its taste
knowing sweetness and sour
their tongues knowing
the edge of the bite of its taste
how old it is
how long it has taken to grow
and how easily . . .

*She begins to recede and wither as he
proceeds, inching forward like a baby with its
arms open, hopeful, forehead aglow*

parts die
and come back
feeding the lips of something else
a worm perhaps which would crawl into a skull
and talk to Hamlet, or Ophelia.
Who knows who Ophelia talked to once she
was gone?

Hear the lullaby
the lullaby in the water
telling the ginger its
time was to give way

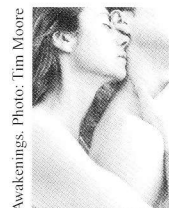
and the children had to find
another trunk to play with
maybe their own
grow their own roots
because the ginger with its knobles and
circles and skin
had gone

— became a story
that drew back

and whispered and wavered behind

and left them to go forward, and find
the pond where the reeds danced
because that was their age now:
to dance, letting the petals fall from their skirt
to dance, letting the shawl fall from their breasts
so that they would know each other
the curves of their skin
the pulse of the heart
the pomegranate seed, red rind,
the shape of the lip of pomegranate flesh around
the new thing to be born.

LIGHTS FADE.
THEY CONTINUE.



Awakenings. Photo: Tim Moore

[2] LANDSCAPE JAZZ

PROPOSAL: PARATAXES—DISCARDS. [DANCING THE CITY]
A proposition for 3 interactions in 3 sites:

- 1) Yelp, at the R.S.P.C.A. pound in Yagoona, Sydney
- 2) Burn, Sutherland National Park (recently burnt by bushfires)
- 3) Compendium, Studio Space (unrealized)

PARATAXES—SUBJECT:

The phenomenon of the discard, discarding, being lost or being thrown out (of place; memory; migration, forced exile; penal resettlement; abandonment [of childhood, puppies, youth, responsibility; coming of age]; —and the discard's residues (gestures towards Homebush Bay and the chemical-contaminated Olympic site)

Abandonment of old for new (old country for new; old architecture for new; old lover for new lover; memory vs. future);

Incarnation; re-incarnation and old bones

Arson (what is burnt; what is remembered, what returns; what heals itself and grows again);

Architecture: What hovers in memory; what is reconstructed out of incomplete desires.

Voices of the perpetrator and the perpetrated upon.

The urge to (re)build: a subset of a growth force?

STRUCTURES OF COLLABORATION:

oppositional (denial of history)
empathetic (individualized collusion)
unifying (construction of future)

Performers: Tess de Quincey, Stuart Lynch, Michael Askill, Zsuzsanna Soboslay.

In May, 1996, de Quincey/Lynch invited collaborations across Sydney to see if they could dance it. One hundred in a month: a compression, a topographing of diverse spaces and activities. I set up a framework to involve the three of us and Michael Askill, a percussionist with whom I'd workshoped six months before.

Sutherland National Park is a bushy footstep to Sydney's southern sprawl. Its aridity neither embraces nor comforts; its horizon offers scratchiness and sunburn. On this morning, gentle-whipping winds scrub our skins. Fire scorched its tracks five months before we arrive.

We drive to the firegates in borrowed Holden V8s, trolley a wheelbarrow full of instruments across the fire trail, until it sticks in sludge. We carry the drums, clackers and bells gingerly across an anteater's path.

Our set-up is slow. *How can you time the wind?* A television crew impatiently nose into armpit-crannies for close-ups. 'I haven't begun yet', Stuart hisses. They are admirable, this crew: they simply cannot be embarrassed. Tess hums on a rock; they traipse and talk, answer mobile phones.

My fingers tune Michael's body as he works, reminding sluggish elements of him to respond. Right ribcage; more warmth in the throat. Although his fingers drum, I can tell which other parts of him have become dead zones. Touch immediately opens up a slightly more...*infected* sound, as if reminding his body that our feet also dance through him. As if the inspiration for sound falls into flesh like a rock which ripples out through water.

Within an hour, the horizon sits in Michael's ribcage. He is working from the fullest sensing space. When this happens, something in the scrub itself is released and begins to walk. Heat from a rock; a bush's secret dancing. Something in the scrub asks my body to become part of the shapes changing. I am called to embrace a bush—or does it cradle me? We rock together, the rock coming from water sucked at its roots. Stuart seems to be croaking for a door to open; Tess is pacing. Our faces mesh with trees.

There is an acute dialectic between this more abstract state and that of being human. I expand into a different sense of time, altering vibrations. This is the place of landforms dividing. There is elation—at the earth's opening; reconciliation—that the human knows it, yet is different from it, more solid and more temporary. I feel my body, my legs, distinct, yet my belly expands like the earth's core. Something in me forgives—I can't quite say what. Perhaps the fear of my own breathing.

At the end of two hours, we all sense completion—the earth tucking under, rounding off, or in, closing the magic of its opening. Michael is beaming as his hand completes the drum; Tess is quiet somewhere to the side. No one has cued anyone else to stop; Stuart, who had slowed in before, sits smiling.

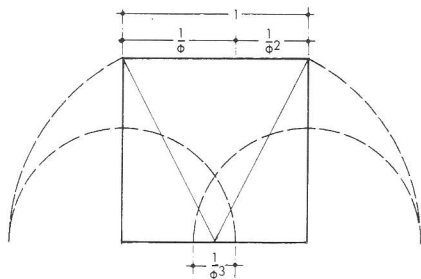
THERE IS a map of sensing, knowing, *and an awareness of the senses' partiality*. There is the third term: an awareness that, around the corner, is something beyond your knowing. There is something in the silence, in the quiet of the unspoken, the still numb.

Where the battalions have tied you down, *tickle their release* . . .

And in their release is . . . a placelessness; neither *Vaterland*, nor Zero, but a holding, hovering, which equals but does not annihilate our identities. This place is luminous: both magnificent and intimate, a god swinging through, by means of our sensors. *This god has tongues.*

Your speech forms in the cavities of my body. I listen to your substance, your winds, your resistances and your bones.

The work speaks of and from the land, catches the weeping of the mountains, the massacres in the trees. There is memory in the topography of the plains, the knowing a tree has of its neighbour, a document in its rings. Perhaps it shared water in these years, broke a path together with another, shared a loss. Traces of sabotage and love rubbed alongside the landscape's markings like animal spoor. Trees have an endless patience; their sensing exists whether or not we accompany them. *Sentience* is not just the discovery of hard-line scientists gone soft in old age.



The exterior of a form is produced from its interior: it comes from the centre.

The black produces the white, and vice versa.

A non-absolute edge; a line promising departure from it

[Kasimir Malevich, in praise of the Square]

The eye resides within the emanation

Is it too much to say *we* do this? That the greatest self-respect we could have is to be equal to this hearing, to know we *co-respond*? Mathematics is emotion and shape has speed and sound. This is our

ordinary madness, a place of knowing and not-knowing. Who's definitely on First Base, What's on Second *I Don't Know's on Third*. Not knowing is not chaos, but the place of remaking, hovering until we find the new pattern that coheres.

Thought speaks before it touches breath

The coming-into-being is contiguous with the state from which it comes

The minutest register 'on voice' can move a mountain.

This is how the mountain comes to speak, or dance.

We are all vibration.

[TO] DRAW [IN]

At the heart of landscape is geometry—the art of perceiving the underlying nature of proportions and relationship in the world. Interestingly, in ancient Greece, geometry was attributed to the feminine—an *intuitive synthesizing, a creative yet exact activity of mind* (Lawlor, 1982).



Sometimes, I do everything to avoid hearing what my body is trying to speak, as if it were some monster which disagrees with the order of the world. Whose order? *I am a traveller, a journeyman, a shapeshifter; none of my components fit on supermarket shelves.* Only the barest of landscapes force us to match and learn: that we are equal to the valley, to the hill, to the forces of renewal and decay which move and break and re-form the earth.

I contemplate the aspects in which numerous lives surround a human being Not only the living but also the dead surround him. I do not know if I dance . . . or deepen my understanding of 'living'. Neither is the case, or both are the case. I dance to cherish life. I practice dance in such a state inbetween.

(Kazuo Ohno, *Butoh Notation*, 1992)

Notes

1 Yoko Ashikawa, one of the original troupe to dance with Tatsumi Hijikata in Japan. At the times mentioned, she was the senior choreographer/teacher with Tomoe Shizune and Hakutobo Theatre Co., Japan.

2 Garton Ash 1990: 71.

3 Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Hamburg. Director: Christophe Marthaler; dramaturg: Stefanie Carp. London LIFT Festival, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Southbank, June 1997

Picture credits:

p.1, Albrecht Dürer, canon figure, in Lawlor 1982: 59.

p.3, 'The Arteries', from Diderot, *L'Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1765) in Feher 1989: 452.

pp.5,6, SHE: Zsuzsanna Soboslay; HE: Benjamin Howes.

p.8, 'The Holy Trinity': 1 = God; 1/pi = the Holy Spirit; 1/pi squared = the Son; in Lawlor 1982: 63.

p.8, G. Reich, 'Margarita Philosophica' (Basle, 1583), in Lawlor 1982: 17.

p.9, Robert Fludd, 'The Pythagorean Triad', *Philosophia sacra et vere Christiana Seu Meteorologia Cosmica*, (Frankfurt: Occicina Bryana, 1626), in Godwin 1979: 31.

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