

PROTOCOL OF THE THREE

OR

ACTION OF VOLUTION

The protocol reproduced here offers instructions for a formal practice of durational attention to a triadic configuration of artworks. Internal evidence and related archival materials strongly suggest that the protocol's sequence of partner-changes and "figures" (to use the folk-dance term) derives from the *Tretur Anglais*, a three-person dance recorded in rural Hordaland, western Norway. The classic *Tretur Anglais* features stylized flirtation and gestures of betrayal twined into interlocking rings of movement. Although the austere MOAC apparently made attempts to suppress these theatrical "courtship" elements, we believe that those wishing to experiment with this protocol would not be amiss in intuiting a certain playful atmosphere. A brief headnote on the manuscript reads: "For special use in relation to triadic groupings. Suitable for application to notably tripartite works or works that can be disaggregated into three parts. Particularly befitting arrays of three objects that wish to be attended in mutual relation." Phase durations are unknown.

I. TRIANGULATE

Locate the triad. Circulate freely. Tactfully prepare to take a position.

II. STEP IN TIME

At the bell, assemble before the first of the three objects.

Attend to it, with an intensity that sets it in motion.

III. CORIOLIS

At the bell, move to the next object, clockwise. Attend to this work until you begin to move — either within or without.

IV. THE REEL

At the bell, move to the third object, clockwise. Greet this partner, and speak to it of the other two works — silently, or in a low murmur. Begin the dance, to such music as arises.

✂ AT THE FINAL BELL

Take your leave (a bow or other gesture may be appropriate). It is traditional to sing, hum, croon, or otherwise make a valedictory sound or music as one departs.



PAS DE TROIS:

THE MUSIC OF ATTENTION AND THE FRYE TRUNK

Readers of the PROCEEDINGS OF ESTAR(SER) will already be aware of the considerable efforts made by various scholars, collectors, bibliophiles, and editors to sift the historicity of that peculiar body known as THE ORDER OF THE THIRD BIRD. Despite the labors of ESTAR(SER) researchers, a great deal of uncertainty (and even some genuine confusion) persists concerning the nature and workings of THE BIRDS — a self-sequestering community that seems to function, at least in its modern incarnation, as a private association of adepts who convene to perform public and private rites of sustained attention to made things (often works of art). New documents bearing on the genesis, evolution, and practices of THE ORDER are continually coming to light, and we are pleased here to offer a brief discussion of a recently surfaced source. Details follow.

TEXT AND CONTEXT

Among the underground communities of attentional adepts known to have contributed to the contents of the “Frye Trunk,” there existed an early-1920s, utopian-minded, Seattle-based collective, rooted in the “New Thought” movement and inspired by Renaissance love-philosophy.¹ Remembered as the Music of Attention Church (MOAC), this collective dedicated itself to musical practices of durational attention. ESTAR(SER) researchers discovered an extensive archive of MOAC-related correspondence, transcripts, recordings, music scores, and even dance cards in the Frye Trunk, and this material continues to exercise the historical imagination of our Working Groups. One such committee is now studying MOAC’s attempts to “translate” artworks into grids of colored squares that indicate musical pitch and timbre. Another committee is focused on an experimental practice that MOAC called “sing-sight”: an idiosyncratic system for channeling visual cues into a range of vocal sounds. In these and other propositions, MOAC showed a deep investment in triadic structures and in tripled modes of encounter — as evidenced most explicitly in the hymnlike choral text “Always in Threes,” shown in reproduction at the Frye. There is evidence that MOAC’s own modest exhibitions of artworks, accompanied by “sing-sight” performances, could also involve elaborate, folk-derived dances involving three partners, as well as more complex, gyre-like formations of several groups of three. An account of the full range of these practices and conceptual apparatuses will appear in a forthcoming issue of the *Proceedings*. For the time being, we wish to bring to light one of the most significant of these discoveries: the text of a “protocol” of durational attention, reproduced on the back cover of this card, which appears to have been in use among members of MOAC in connection with triadic groupings of artworks. This protocol was evidently informed by theories of “sing-sight” and a related practice known as “sight-dancing.” Although further research is required, we believe that the dance-like, musically modulated sequence of the protocol represents the crystallized essence of an intricate body of thought and attentional practice fostered by this community.

1. For a recent discussion, consider: “The Frye Trunk: Opening a ‘Pandora’s Box’ in the Archives of Attention,” *Proceedings of ESTAR(SER)*, New Series VIII, Supplement (2022); a monograph published in conjunction with *THE THIRD, MEANING*, an exhibition at the Frye Art Museum (Seattle), October 2022 – October 2023.



FIGURE: One of a series of undated “dancing bird” cards, recently come to light in connection with the “Frye Trunk,” and thought to date to the 1920s. Each depicts a bird, screen-printed over the footwork diagram (and melodic strain) of a late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century minuet. Almost certainly the work of the Music of Attention Church (MOAC), these cards reveal a concern with attentional choreographies conceived in explicitly musical terms. The “Protocol of the Three” (reproduced overleaf), was discovered in holograph on the verso of this striking image.