

Kate Soper

The Understanding Of All Things

For amplified soprano and tape

2013, rev. 2015

Text by Franz Kafka (trans./adapted Soper)

The Understanding of All Things
Text

Once there was a philosopher who was always hanging around playgrounds. And whenever he saw a child with a spinning top, he would lie in wait. As soon as the top began to spin, the philosopher would pounce. Though the children shrieked, and tried to shield their toys, he paid no attention. As long as he managed to catch the top while it still spun, he was happy, but only for that moment, and then he would fling it down and walk away.

For it was his belief that the understanding of any small thing, such as a spinning top, was sufficient for the understanding of all things. It seemed, therefore, inefficient to him, to study complex problems. Once the smallest detail is truly known, are all things known, and so he focused only on the top. And whenever a top was readied to be spun, he hoped that this time he would succeed, and while he was breathlessly chasing after it, his hope would turn to certainty. But as soon as he held the dumb wooden thing in his hand, he felt disgusted, and all at once the howling of the children burst into his ears, battering him away, and he staggered like a top under a clumsy spin.

- *Franz Kafka, "The Top"*

The Understanding of All Things

soprano/tape part

Franz Kafka (trans./adapted Soper), from "The Top"

Kate Soper

0:19 0:25

Voice: Once [th] [fff] who hu- [ch ch ch ch]

Tape: *Once there was a philosopher who hung about where children played.*

5 0:32 0:38

Voice: - whenever he [ssss] [chhhhh] top, [l] [w]

Tape: *and - a child - with a spinning - he would*

8 0:41 0:45 0:49/50

Voice: - as the [t] began to [r-r-r-r-r-r]

Tape: *As soon - the philosopher pounce.*

13 0:52

Voice: - children shrieked Ah

Tape: *though the - and tried to - he paid no - as long as he managed to catch the top - it still spun - he was happy,*

non vib. sempre p

15 1:05 1:10-11

Voice: - moment. and walk

Tape: *but only for that - - and then [then then], he would fling it down, and walk away.*

p mf p

The Understanding of All Things - Voice/Tape

2

18 1:21-22 1:25 1:27

Voice *p* - such as a spinning inefficient to him, to
to[p]

Tape *his belief ... any small thing - - a spinning - was sufficient for the understanding of ... it [it] therefore*

22 1:36 1:45

Voice stu[dy] known - only...

Tape *-complex ... smallest ... truly know ... are all things and ... he focussed -*

25 1:54 1:59

Voice - this time - *repeat ad lib.* -cede [cede cede...] - chasing after it, his hope would turn

Tape *...whenever... he hoped that - - he would suc[cede] breathlessly -*

28 2:03 2:09

Voice - the dumb, wooden thing - he felllll- disgusted.

Tape *... but as soon as he held - in his hand, t-t-t and [and and]*

30 2:13-14 - all at once 2:25

Voice

Tape *howling ... into his ears ... and he staggered...* *[tape noises continue]*

32 2:30 2:37 2:42 2:47

Voice

Tape

36 3:00 - where children - 3:11 - whenever he - - with a spinning - - lie in wait.

Voice *Once there was a ... who hung about - played. And - a child - to [p] ... he would -*

Tape

38 3:24 - as the top began - 3:33 pounce. - children shhhhhhhhh[- sh]ield their toy,

Voice *As soon - ... the philosopher would - Though the - and tried to -*

Tape

(Tape chord continues)

The Understanding of All Things - Voice/Tape

4

40 3:37 3:40

Voice | - no attention. | - long - | - to catch the top - | - happy ... | - moment, -

Tape | *he paid -* | *as -* | *as he managed -* | *while it still spun, he was -* | *... but only for that [for that]* | *- and then,*

42 3:51 4:02

Voice | - he would fling it | | - the understanding of any | |

down | ... and walk away. | For it was his belief, that - | - such as a spinning top,

Tape | | *[Pre-existing pitches continue]* |

44 4:10

Voice | | - complex problems.

... was sufficient for the understanding of - | all | ... it seemed, therefore, inefficient ... to study -

Tape | |

45 4:20 4:26

Voice | - the smallest - | - is truly - | - are all things | |

Once - | - detail - | - known, - | known | ... and so [and so], he focussed only on the top.

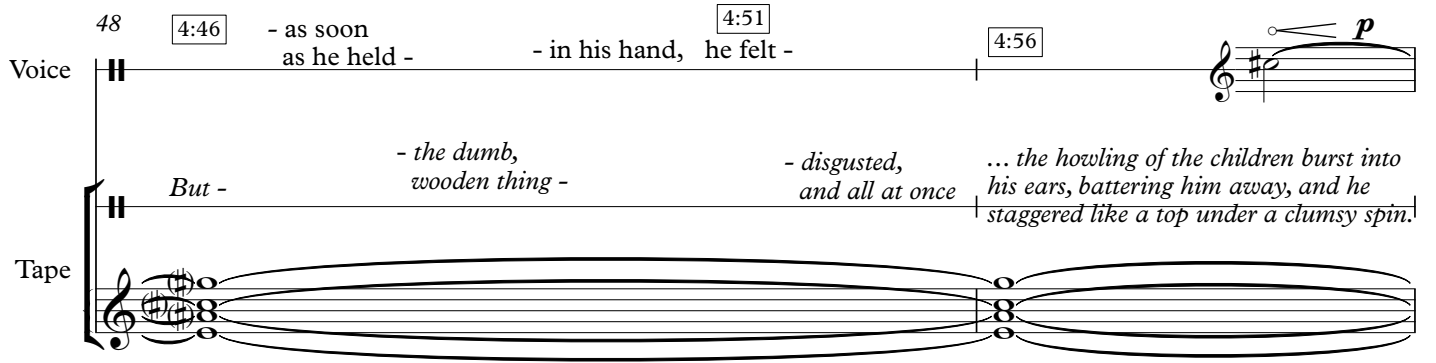
Tape | | | | |

46 4:32

Voice | | - this time, he would succeed. | - breathlessly (in unison with tape) chasing after it, | his hope would turn to certainty.

And whenever a top was readied ... he hoped that - | And while he was - | - his hope would turn to certainty.

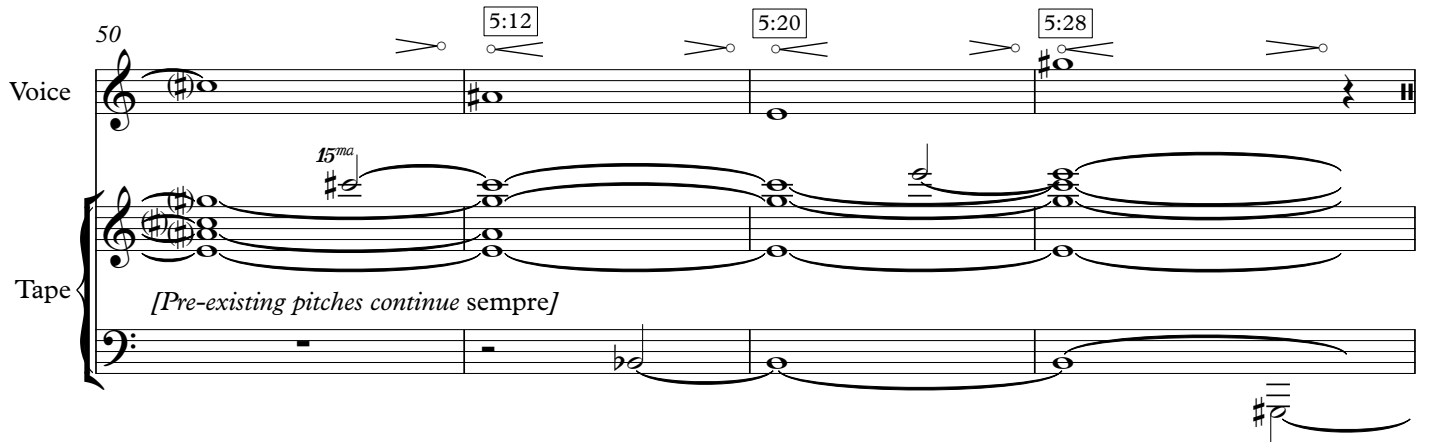
Tape | | |

48 4:46 - as soon as he held - 4:51 - in his hand, he felt - 4:56 

Voice

Tape

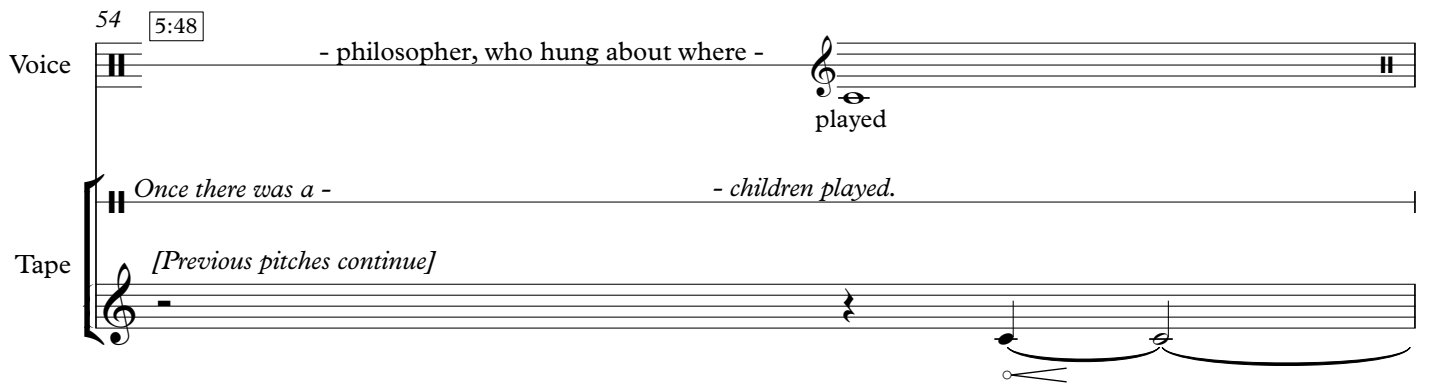
But - the dumb, wooden thing - disgusted, and all at once ... the howling of the children burst into his ears, battering him away, and he staggered like a top under a clumsy spin.

50 5:12 5:20 5:28 

Voice

Tape

[Pre-existing pitches continue sempre]

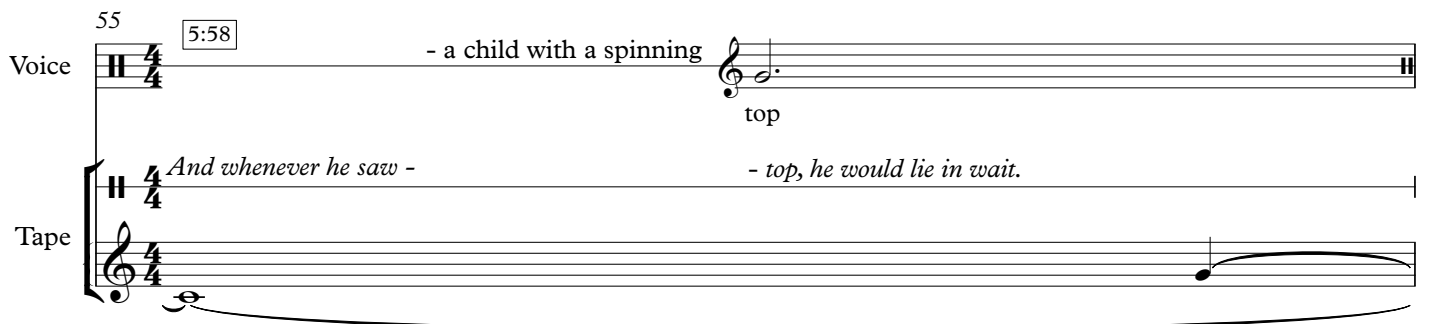
54 5:48 - philosopher, who hung about where - 

Voice

Tape

Once there was a - children played.

[Previous pitches continue]

55 5:58 - a child with a spinning 

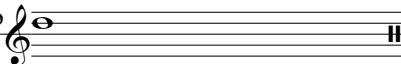
Voice

Tape


And whenever he saw - top, he would lie in wait.

The Understanding of All Things - Voice/Tape

6

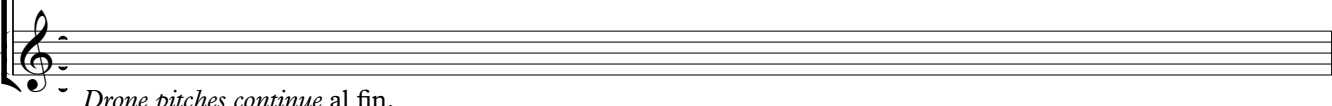
56 6:12 - as the top began to  6:21 - he paid no attention.

As soon - - spin, the philosopher would pounce. *Though the children shrieked, and tried to shield their toy, -*

Tape 

58 6:28 - as he managed - - while it still spun, he was happy, - for that moment, - - he would fling it down, - - walk away.

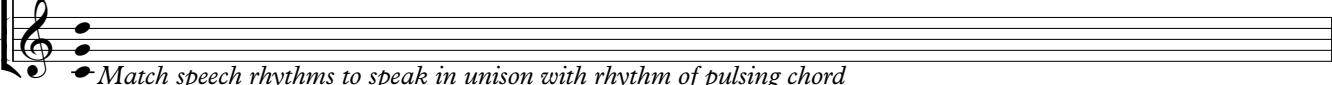
As long - - to catch the top, - - but only - - and then, - - and -

Tape 

Drone pitches continue al fin.

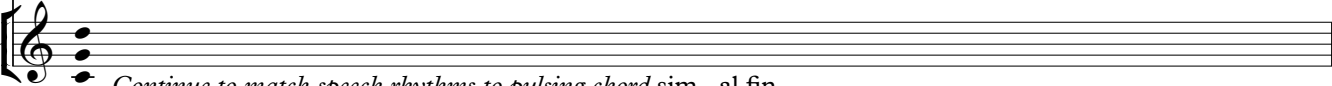
59 6:50 - it was his belief that the understanding of any small thing, such as as a spinning top, was sufficient for the understanding of all things.

For -

Tape 

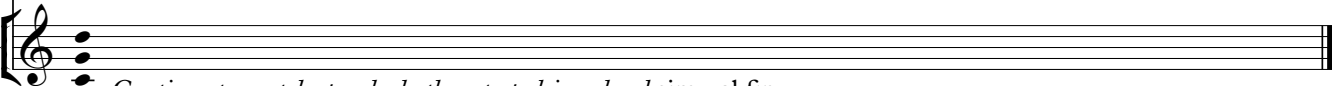
Match speech rhythms to speak in unison with rhythm of pulsing chord

60 7:02 It seemed, therefore, inefficient to him, to study complex problems.

Tape 

Continue to match speech rhythms to pulsing chord sim., al fin.

61 7:11 Once the smallest detail is truly known, are all things known.

Tape 

Continue to match speech rhythms to pulsing chord sim., al fin.