Exploring the boundaries of Improvisation and Composition

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Volume 1: Written Commentary

Abstract

This practice based research degree addresses the question of when it is appropriate to compose in the traditional format of Western music (using pen or computer and paper) and when it is better to use alternative techniques which include relying on the developed vocabulary of the performer, alternative forms of construction (such as graphics or text instructions), collaboration with other art forms and use of alternative performance space to generate work. The core of the research is a series of works that I prepared for performance, both with large ensemble, scratch ensemble and in collaboration with other art forms, and which explored all available methods of construction.

The works created showed that for my practice the employment of technique is entirely dependent on context. The use of graphic or simple scoring or opportunities for free improvisation can be gauged according to the requirements of a piece and be utilised in parallel with traditional staff notation. The effect of this flexibility increases the variety and interest of a piece of music and engages performers and audience alike.

The implications of this are that composition should be treated as the creation of the finished work through a dialogue between composer and performers in relation to the performance space. To effect this dialogue the composer needs to be able to understand the creative potential and vocabulary of the performers and harness this. Composition should be seen as encompassing all skills of construction of sound in all possible performance environments and in all possible collaborative situations. Of course composers may choose to specialise in particular methods of construction but to privilege any method of construction over another is mistaken – just as we now generally accept that to privilege any one genre of music over another is fallacious.

Preface

This research has been the focus of my creative output for six years and has influenced all my performance and composition over this time. Because it focuses on how we create work and the advantages and disadvantages of using different methods of inception it inevitably includes a great deal of material: some carefully crafted using traditional techniques of staff notation; some created quickly using improvisation that relies on the prior learning and experience of performers; some developed through experimentation and exploration with performers or collaborators from other art forms. This explains the quantity of the material discussed and the range of examples used as part of the core submission.

I would like to thank Paul Whitty for his invaluable insights and critiques of my work; Pat Thomas for the same; Howard Skempton, Michael Finnissy, Diana Burrell, Paola Esposito, Paul Mackilligan and Ana Barbour for agreeing to be interviewed; Helen Edwards, Barry Reeves, Ana Barbour, Jeannie Donald Mckim, Miles Doubleday and Pat Thomas and all members of the Oxford Improvisers and Café Reason Butoh Dance Theatre for their dynamism and creativity in collaboration; Peter Green, Dariusz Dziala, Chris Atkins and Peter Jones for editing video material which I have used in evidence in the paper; Chris Percival, Peter Green and Tim Hand for recording audio material; Gorwel Owen, Ana Barbour, Paolo Esposito and Clifford Atkins for their discussion of the document.

Contents

This contents section includes:

- details of the written commentary.
- details of examples, figures and tables in the document.
- a listing of core and example submissions of recorded material and scores which are part of the research.

All CDs and DVDs as well as all scores are held in a separately bound volume. This material is split into core and example submissions. Core submissions are the part of my work submitted for assessment. Example submissions are there to support the text. Some of the audio in the example submissions consists of extracts from the core submissions which have been created to demonstrate specific points. Other recorded examples validate points raised. None of this example material (including the example scores) is for assessment and for this reason it is held separately to the core material.

Within the written commentary, where a recording relates to the material in the research it will be referenced in brackets. For example (Core CD 01:02) would refer to Estonia – track 2 on the first core CD). For example CDs this might be (Example CD 01:02) which would refer to track 2 on first example CD.

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Core Submissions

Sound Recordings:

Core CD 01
Core Audio Submission 01 *Accession* Part 1

Track No	Section No	Name	
01	1	Fanfares, Warnings, Promises	5.28 mins
02	2	Estonia (or Threshold)	7.45
03	3	Torture Chamber	6.48
04	4	A Fantastic edifice	3.49
05	5	A moment of doubt	2.50
06	6	Armoury	7.33
07	7	Between War and Wealth (or Got anything nice ?)	4.27
08	8	Treasury	7.09
09	9	Entrance to the Garden	5.00
09	10	(Garden from 2.06 s)	
10	11	Death of Europe	7.42
11	12	Requiem	3.33
12	13	The Extent of my Domains	6.18
		Total	**68.22 mins**

Core CD 02 (CD as released by Oxford Improvisers)
Core Audio Submission 02 *Accession* Part 2

Track No	Section No	Name	
01	14	Bulgaria (or Do I recall that melody?)	
02	15	Lake of Tears	
03	16	Springtime behind the Slaughterhouse	
04	17	Accession	
05	18	Doubt	
06	19	Summit	
07	20	On Parting	
		Total	**36.44**

Core CD 03
Core Audio Submissions 03 and 04

Track No	Name	
01	Do Geese See God	17.41
02	Paradise Purgatory and Pandemonium	9.45
	Total	**27.26**

Total core audio time **132.32** ms

Other referenced recordings are included the example submissions

Video Recordings

Core DVD 01

Core Video Submission 01 October in Oxford	7.28
Core Video Submission 02 Reconstruction 3	7.26
Core Video Submission 03 Because I Love You	7.23

Core DVD 02

Core Video Submission 04 A Moonbeam Locked Up (Pierrot) film from performance at Chipping Norton theatre	41.28

Total video time: **63.45** ms

Example video recordings are listed in the appendices

Scores

Core Scores 01 Accession Scores
Core Scores 02 Do Geese See God
Core Scores 03 Paradise, Purgatory and Pandemonium

Other referenced scores are included the example submissions

Example Submissions

(timings are not included for these submissions as they are not for assessment).

Sound Recordings

Example CD 01 – extracts and alternative versions of core works

01 'Treasury' from *Accession June 2005*
02 Opening of 'Estonia' showing use of fragment conducted in and played by Bruno Guastalla.
03 Pat Thomas playing the opening of the 'Bulgaria' arranged
04 'Death of Europe' from June performance of Accession
05 Disintegration of the Garden melody
06 first two minutes of 'The Extent of my domains'
07 *Do Geese See God* opening
08 *Do Geese See God* ending
09 *Do Geese See God* start of middle section
10 *Do Geese See God* middle section showing improvising choir
11 'Mondestrunken' studio recording
12 'Bohemian Crystal' studio recording

13 'Red Mass' from *Pierrot* performance May 2009
14 'Red Mass' studio recording
15 'Night' – Studio recording

Example CD 02 – other referenced performances

01 *Theremin Concerto*
02 AMV 'Pange Lingua'
03 Oxford Improvisers quintet in concert
04 Oxford Improvisers plus Vahni Capildeo
05 Nonstop Tango 'Sneer'
06 Malcolm Atkins improvisation with Smith Quartet 01
07 Malcolm Atkins improvisation with Smith Quartet 02
08 Malcolm Atkins improvisation with Smith Quartet 03
09 Malcolm Atkins, Pete McPhail, Miles Doubleday at Cohesion Festival

Example CD 03 – other referenced performances

01 *Winterlight*
02 'The Horse'
03 Nonstop Tango ' The Alphabet Song'

Video Recordings

Example DVD 01

01 *Identity* (extracts from performance at OVADA gallery)
02 'Night' (recorded for Dispatx web site)
03 'Rousham' (improvisation in a cave in Rousham Gardens)
04 *Winterlight* (Café Reason street performance)

Example DVD 02

01 *Onomatomania* last performance

Scores

Example Scores

01 Autumn Thoughts
02 Do Geese See God (original short score- full score submission is in Core Scores)

1 Introduction

1.1 Context

The key research questions that I will investigate in this doctoral study are:

1. *What are the compositional limitations imposed by alternative methods of scoring (flexible and mixed ability scoring ; graphic scores; text based scores)?*
2. *What are the advantages and disadvantages of using traditional forms of notation compared to experimental techniques for generating new music (as outlined above)?*
3. *How far can a composer leave space for performer interpretation and improvisation within a piece of music and still retain control and ownership of the work?*
4. *How does multidisciplinary collaboration influence the creative process and the outcome of a work?*
5. *Does the utilisation and exploitation of alternative performance space for the development and staging of new work significantly alter the content of work produced?*

I intend to address questions 1, 2 and 3 together as the main part of my research as they relate to fundamental questions regarding the activity of the composer within the context of Western art music. The division of composer and performer and the primacy of the score are key to this debate.

The other two questions both relate to how environmental considerations can affect the process of composition. With 4 this can be related to the traditional creation of a score although I intend to look at the collaborative development of work between a group of performers – often dancers I have worked with. With 5 I will assess the relative importance of the performance environment for fashioning a work. I will discuss these two questions together because they relate to the creative context of a work – the relationships of collaborators, the process of development and the performance space.

I have chosen the title 'Exploring the boundaries of Composition and Improvisation' for this study because it is directly related to the first three research questions and is a focus for the last two in terms of the way I have developed work in collaborative and alternative performance contexts.

1.2 Background – why I chose these questions.

These questions had become important to me in my practice during the MA course in composition I completed between 2002 and 2003.[1]

The questions regarding notation arose because of my increasing interest in improvisation through my work with the Oxford Improvisers and the issues this raised for me about the creation of work. I began to find that the expression of my vocabulary or the exploitation of the vocabulary of others was often far more effective in performance than the use of notation alone, where the performer tends to discard their own vocabulary for the indications of the score. [2] The initial appeal was that work could be created that engaged an audience because it enabled the performer to communicate with his or her own voice from within the structures that I imposed to give meaning to the work. Even where I did rehearse notated work extensively it often lacked the vibrancy of improvised or semi-improvised music. I began to find that I was drawn to a tradition of the composer working as performer that seems to be prevalent in most music outside of art music of Western Europe and that has existed within Western music far more than is sometimes acknowledged. [3] Although the greater the degree of notation in a work, the more repeatable the work is, I started to find there is often something lost

[1] MA Contemporary Arts and Music (composition option) Oxford Brookes University 2002-2003.
[2] This issue probably arose for me because I had learned music from outside of any formal training. Music was not an option at the grammar school I attended. As a result I had pursued an interest in music through playing in bands where collaboration and the development of vocabulary was crucial.
[3] This tradition was integral to Baroque and classical music as is evidenced by the careers of Vivaldi, Bach and Mozart and it seems that the division of the roles only really took place gradually, mainly in the nineteenth century. Even here performers such as Chopin and Liszt continued a tradition of creating new work in performance (or at least substantially embellishing work). This tradition has been seen to revive more recently in experimental music. Cage often performed his own work – especially in collaborations with Cunningham. The minimalists La Monte Young, Riley, Reich and Glass all performed their own works and this does not seem to be just when they needed to establish themselves (Potter,2000 discusses the careers of each of them and how they established their own ensembles). I have found the way these composers created work has been influential for me because they created the environments for the development and dissemination of their work.

in this development which is not focused on the specific performance environment and conditions.

The questions regarding collaboration arose directly from the MA because this paired visual artists and musicians in creative work which I found extremely beneficial to my practice. Again, my interest in this work is the outcome of a shift in compositional practice that dates back to the importance of collaborative work in generating new music. This shift was affirmed most recently with Cage and his followers from the 1950's onwards [4] although there are previous occurrences that could be seen as seminal (the collaborative atmosphere of Ballet Russes [5]; the artistic interests of Schoenberg and his correspondence with Kandinsky)**.**[6]

1.3 Notational issues

For my practice, questions 1, 2 and 3 all relate to the issue of how far to use staff notation which has become a question of fundamental importance to me in writing music.[7] I started to question how far to use notation in my work with a range of performers in the context of writing work for CoMA.[8] I had begun to find that the notation of complex rhythm or extended harmony was often difficult for performers to express with conviction and invariably performed badly in COMA groups. In contrast, the setting up of a framework which allowed for complexity through each performer expressing their own ideas through the interplay of devised systems would often be performed with conviction and consequent interest to an audience. This could well be based on verbal or graphical notation or a combination of staff and other forms of notation. I was introduced to some ideas of extending notation in this way when I spent

[4] Nyman (1999,p 51 ff) documents the importance of the influence of the visual arts on Cage and his followers.
[5] Garafola, 1998.
[6] Schoenberg et al, 1984.
[7] I have used the term 'staff notation' because notation is now generally accepted as encompassing a range of methods of instructing performers. The Grove online definition of notation is 'A visual analogue of musical sound, either as a record of sound heard or imagined, or as a set of visual instructions for performers' (under Notation).
[8] CoMA (Contemporary Music for Amateurs) is a charity that promotes the dissemination of new music amongst amateur players. In 2004 it professed its aims as follows: CoMA promotes participation in contemporary music for musicians of all abilities. We commission works from leading UK and international composers - music which is artistically challenging and suited to the technical abilities of amateur ensembles'(CoMA,2010).

a weekend working on a semi-scored piece *Set of 5* by Daryl Runswick in a workshop that led to a performance of this work by a scratch ensemble of eight people. I developed the ideas I had seen working in this piece by an exploration of Cardew's *Treatise* [9] in which I engaged thirty people in a six hour performance of the entire work projected page by page onto a large screen.[10] The more I worked with developing my own vocabulary I realised that the expression of my own voice (metaphorical in terms of instrumental playing, as well as physical) was of particular interest to an audience (as were the voices of musicians I collaborated with). The danger of improvisation could be the babel of voices that can appear if common ground for expression of disparate voices cannot be found. In contrast a compositional structure could enable the unified expression of a number of voices but something of the integrity and personal communication of each can be lost.

What I decided to explore was the territory between improvisation and composition. I would seek to find a framework for the expression of individual voices that enabled them to communicate effectively and with their own strengths but allow this to happen within the structural coherence that notated or alternatively organised composition can achieve. This was the main focus of *Accession* (2005) which was crafted to use the voices of the participating performers. *Do Geese See God* (2006) extending this by setting up a framework for a range of different groups and abilities. Both these works are assessed in Section 3. *A Moonbeam Locked Up* (2007) was a further development of this idea but as a solo performance in the context of dance collaboration and is documented in Section 4**.** This piece was based around an exploration of the image of Pierrot Lunaire through dance and music referencing the original poems of Giraud as well as Schoenberg's settings of Hartleben's translations. For brevity I will refer to this piece as *Pierrot* reserving the name *Pierrot Lunaire* for the existing versions of the work.

I saw all these works as an opportunity to develop my own voice both in planned composition(using a range of compositional strategies) and spontaneous composition -

[9] Treatise, written by Cardew between 1963 and 1967 is a 193 page graphic score (Cardew, 1970). A useful discusson of the score is in Nyman. 1999, p 117 ff

[10] This was organised in October 2004 at Harcourt Hill Theatre, Harcourt Hill Campus Brookes University

i.e. improvisation**.** Although I have been heavily influenced by Cage's work in much of my own practice I was here heavily indebted to the insights offered by Pat Thomas, a founder member of the Oxford Improvisers and an internationally renowned improviser and jazz performer, who also pointed me in the direction of the theoretical works of George Lewis who has shown the importance of the African American tradition and its huge significance in setting up boundaries to control improvisation and create meaningful and exploratory dialogue between performers.

Lewis in *Improvised Music since 1950* argues that an interest in improvisation in 'Eurological' music (i.e. composed art music) stems from a recognition of the validity of 'Afrological' music (i.e. jazz) music.[11] He documents how from the fifties 'composers began to experiment with open forms and with more personally expressive systems of notation' [12] and how this corresponds to the recognition of jazz as a valid art form.

He challenges the rejection of improvisation and the jazz tradition by white American composers such as John Cage [13] and Alvin Lucier on the grounds that they did not understand the basis of it. In an *Afterword to Improvised Music after 1950* he argues that contrary to the composer's protestations Lucier's piece *Vespers* with its 'emphasis on analysis, exploration, discovery and response to conditions… becomes the purest, most utterly human form of improvisation, expressive of its fundamental nature as a human birthright' [14]. He argues that Cage and subsequent composers reject improvisation because they fail to appreciate its heuristic and exploratory potential and view it as a continuation of the traditions of 'European romanticism'.

If we see improvisation in terms of the heuristic role that Lewis ascribes to it, then it can supplement the ability of notation to release ideas, enable invention and function as a fulcrum for a discourse of ideas. It can operate as a means of beginning a dialogue with

[11] Lewis, 2004A, p 131 ff
[12] ibid
[13] Cage (2004, p 72) describes jazz in relation to art music as follows: 'Jazz per se derives from serious music. And when serious music derives from it the situation becomes rather silly'. Lewis (2004A, p 138) discusses these pronouncements from Silence and goes on to discuss Cage's response to an interview with the jazz critic Michael Zwerin: ' I don't think about jazz, but I love to talk, so by all means come on up' (ibid p 143). I
[14] Lewis, 2004B, p 170

a performer rather than operating simply as a means of rigidly controlling and dictating what the performer does.[15] Where a composer really has something to say and the expansion of this message and its exploration will detract from the clarity of the message, then it is reasonable to control the performer and his or her attempts to explore. However, in any position where the composer trusts the performer to explore the ideas they have put forward and use their vocabulary to do this, strict and inflexible notation can inhibit this process. The Western tradition of the composer being arbiter of all that takes place in a musical performance is unusual in that the skills of a performer and the desire of the performer to use their skills to enhance a piece are not trusted.

This is not to say that there have not been close creative relationships between composers and performers in recent years (perhaps, as Lewis would argue as a result of a recognition of jazz) – Berio in writing his *Sequenzas* tended to work with the capabilities and sound world of performers such as vocalist Cathy Berberian and oboist Heinz Holliger.[16] David Tudor seems to have been decisive in the way he realised Cage's work. [17] However, even here, the ultimate arbiter and owner of the work will be the composer. In most music traditions the performer is not viewed as completing a two stage process in the creation of a live performance, as the creation of live music is seen as the only process.[18] This does not invalidate the western model but it does raise the issue of whether this model is right for every composer or in fact is valid for more than an elite few who can be financially supported to write music for heavily subsidised performers**.** My approach is to attempt to use the positive aspects of notation in terms of accurately recording and expressing those ideas I would like to remain constant in a piece whilst freeing the performer to embellish and add personal expression to them wherever this is appropriate.

The ideas developed in jazz are particularly important here because jazz composers

[15] Of course there could be a fundamental shift in attitude toward staff notation that allows it to be used in a more playful and even irreverent manner or allows the performer to re-interpret. My experience of organisations like CoMA with their emphasis on traditional hierarchy of composer/conductor implies that this is a long way off

[16] Berio 1968, and 1969

[17] This is evidenced by the way 4'33" has been taken as synonymous with Tudor's performance when it was created for any instrumentation (Nyman,1999, p 11).

[18] This argument is complicated by the fact that the norm in most societies is that the composer is the performer. As examples here I would give jazz, South Asian art music (khyal, dhrupad and thumri), Baroque music (as exemplified by the extemporization of Correlli, Vivaldi or even Bach). This could be seen as a core argument of Small's *Musicking (*Small,1998).

were the first in the twentieth century to experiment with more open forms and with collaboration between performers and composers and to realise the potential of shifting between notation and learned systems of improvisation as appropriate to a work. [19] Ellington was the first jazz composer to use the tradition of working with his ensemble in a way that exploited their musical potential and their individual voices within the scope of larger scale composition.[20] In fact I would see this as a reaffirmation of earlier performance practice and I would cite as evidence for this the way most composers prior to Beethoven were far more concerned to exploit the vocabulary of the performers they used. Christopher Small in *Musicking* sees the shift from collaboration between composer and performer as arising in the eighteenth century and emphasises that this marked a change from previous musical practice in the Baroque where he describes the earliest orchestras as 'improvising orchestras'.[21] He also sees the rise of the conductor and a growing dependence on notation as parallel developments to the rise of the composer. [22] This is evidenced by the work of performers such as Corelli or Vivaldi who were similar to Ellington in the way they published pieces that they had already used extensively and developed in live performance with their own ensembles.[23]

However, the way Ellington exploited the varying and developed vocabulary of his performers within a full ensemble seems to be a significant shift to make the most of varying timbres and textures that were available to him. The idea of using the ensemble in this way was further developed by Mingus who 'obliterated the standard distinctions between improvisation and composition and brought the spontaneity of improvised jazz to complex structures'.[24] Further to this Sun Ra developed hand signals for controlling

[19] There were some composers such as Grainger who experimented with open form – a point made by Finnissy in my interview with him. However he operated as an outsider to the art music tradition of the time in this experimentation.
[20] Ellington's use of his orchestra is described as follows in The New Grove 'Ellington developed an extraordinary symbiotic relationship with his orchestra – it was his 'instrument' even more than the piano – enabling him to experiment with the timbral colourings, tonal effects and unusual voicings that became the hallmark of his style; the 'Ellington effect' (Strayhorn's term) was virtually inimitable because it depended in large part on the particular timbre and style of each player' (Hodeir et al, Grove Music Online, on Ellington Style and Musical Language).
[21] Ibid p. 82
[22] Small, 1998, p. 83
[23] The status of these composers as performers is attested by the Grove Music Online comment on Vivaldi as 'praised more readily by his contemporaries as a violinist than as a composer'. The original score for Corelli's *Sonata Op 5 No 3* demonstrates how much was left to the performer. The editor Estienne Roger wrote out two versions of the violin line for the opening slow movement one of which was simple, the other the line in the way he had heard Corelli embellish it.
[24] New Grove entry on Mingus

his ensemble and this work was continued by Butch Morris.[25] The use of hand signals is important because it appears to be an extension of the traditional conducting role as developed in Western music but has been adapted by practitioners such as Morris to construct a dialogue with the performer who can be stopped and started and encouraged to operate in a particular manner but still retain their own voice. In fact, the techniques developed by Morris have become a standard vocabulary for the control of large improvising ensembles and have been adapted in Britain by groups in Oxford, London and Glasgow amongst others. They demonstrate the expansion and formalisation of techniques for communication between composer/conductor and performers that has become integral to much experimental as well as jazz composition.

Although graphic scoring had been developed by Earle Brown in 1952 and exhaustively explored by Cardew in the sixties,[26] most of the innovations in organisation and democratization of sound which were adopted by experimental musicians from Cage onwards were developed in the jazz world. It is interesting that Brown and Cardew were influenced by jazz practices. The New Grove entry on Brown states: 'Brown's early musical background was in jazz') and all Cardew's associates in the band AMM were jazz players.[27]

Jazz musicians can also be credited with using a given melody as a starting point for invention – for treating notation as a springboard rather than a straitjacket. This was also part of previous art music tradition as exemplified in the way the singer was always expected to embellish the melody within opera in the Western tradition. [28] The tradition starting with Armstrong also links back to the generally discarded traditions within

[25] Due to the lack of authoritative accounts of Sun Ra's work in academia (Grove Music is lamentably brief on his work) I have relied on the wikipedia site (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun_Ra) for this point. This lack of proper academic referencing is a validation of the bias of musicological study that Lewis identifies (see notes above). Butch Morris' development of ideas is best shown on his website (Morris,2009).

[26] Jazz performers were also experimenting with graphics In the late 60's Tony Oxley began to experiment with graphic scores. Oxley's interest in graphic scores is alluded to in The Rough Guide To Jazz (Carr et al, 2004) - as with Sun Ra I cannot locate an academic text that attempts to place his use of technique within a historical context.

[27] Nyman, 1999, p 126.

[28] The gradual removal of the singer from this role can be seen to have begun with Monteverdi . In 'Possente Spirto' in *Orfeo*(Monteverdi,1615, p. 52 ff) he notated the unembellished line for the singer confident to embellish along with an alternative line which included embellishments. By the nineteenth century there is a definite split between the new found traditions of composer and the traditions of singer as exemplified by Saint-Saens description of Rossini's fury at the way a contemporary singer embellished his arias at a private soiree (Saint-Saens,1913, p 265).

Western art music which related far more to the working of composer performers. [29] Examples I would give would include the way Chopin varied performance of his work, following a practice of improvisation and embellishment that was core to the Western tradition of solo keyboard performance even in the nineteenth century.[30]

A key context for the development of my practice through techniques of improvisation is the Oxford Improvisers.[31] Works that I created for the collective enabled me to resolve how to create pieces with performance integrity and assess the range of expression that can be achieved through planned notation. I found myself drawn to techniques of conducted improvisation and minimal scoring that many improvisers were beginning to use and realised that this could be a way of combining the advantages of improvisation and composition. Examples of the work of the improvisers are included in Section 2. Because so many of the improvisers were from jazz and other experimental music backgrounds there was always an open attitude towards using personal vocabulary as well as notation in all its possible forms.

As part of my own learning process I helped develop the collective into a vibrant and prominent local group and created work that combined my interest in structural development which allowed performers the freedom to express their own vocabulary with conviction and integrity. This will be exemplified in the discussion of work in Section 3 where the range of techniques that I used is detailed fully. These techniques include conducted improvisation; notation of key motifs, melodies and chord structures where appropriate; graphic scores; text scores; dance led improvisation; improvisation led dance.

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[29] Armstrong's ability to play with established commercial melody is attested to in New Grove 'His performance of *Dinah* in 1933 (in the film *København, Kalundborg og?*) captures a performance in which the vocal and trumpet choruses are clearly of equal artistic weight. His singing, from its initial phrase, radically transforms the Tin Pan Alley melody, and his second chorus is saturated with scat singing of gleeful abandon. After a brief saxophone solo (which gives Armstrong time to pick up his trumpet) he concludes the performance with two trumpet choruses marked by luxurious tone, extended range, and prodigious use of quotation'.

[30] Hipkins (1937, p 7) 'Chopin never played his own compositions twice alike, but varied each according to the mood of the moment…'.

[31] The Oxford Improvisers website (Atkins et al, 2003) can give some indication of the vibrancy of this organisation which includes leading and up and coming jazz improvisers - Pete McPhail, Pat Thomas, Dom Lash, Alex Hawkins; established contemporary music performers – Julian Faultless, Nick Benda; experienced school and community music teachers – Jill Elliott, Camilla Cancantata; dancers – Ana Barbour, Helen Edwards

In Section 2 I have documented how my aesthetic development has moved towards improvisation.

1.4 Collaboration and Performance Environment

I see collaboration and exploration of performance environment as complementary because they both open up new ideas and approaches and in my practice it has been the engagement with other art forms that has enabled me to engage with the use of specific performance space (and its physical and psychological resonance). The influence that location and its performance possibilities can give is in the modification of behaviour that a space can encourage provided the music is improvised or at least has sufficient space to be affected by the resonance of the space. *Onomatomania* (2007), a piece that I developed with dancer Ana Barbour for Modern Art Oxford, showed how a direct relation with the audience could be established in a daytime art gallery space where the audience was invited to volunteer words for us to improvise on and the time duration for those improvisations. The picture below shows the audience gathering during a performance given in March 2008.

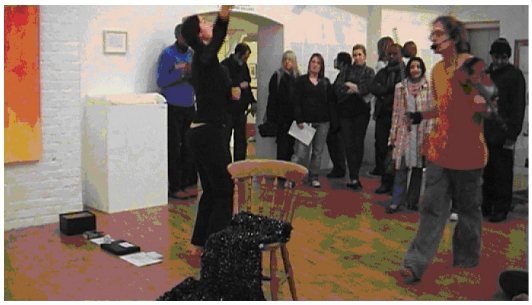


Figure 1.1 Onomatomania – performance at Modern Art Oxford 2008

The influence of other art forms is often in the shared concern to explore and provided there is space for mutual development there can be extensive transference of behaviour from one discipline to another. This can be in terms of material used, overall structure and gesture as well as through each art form enhancing and deepening the message of the other whether by agreement or contradiction. In preparation for *Onomatomania* and *Pierrot* (*A Moonbeam Locked Up)* Ana and I practiced leading and following and rapid

changes between each; both operating independently; attempting to internalise image and use that as a creative basis (a butoh technique discussed extensively in Section 4). The question of collaboration or orientation towards performing space is also important in art music practice in a culture that has such an antipathy to experimental sound but such an engagement (whether positive or negative) with experiment in most other art forms – especially the visual arts. Of particular interest is the fact that in any collaboration the level of dissonance and experimentation that will be tolerated by the audience can be far greater than in a music only event where audiences will be far fewer.[32]

This may well be the result of our visually oriented culture or because a visual narrative, or one expounded by physical movement, is far easier to follow than a sonic unfolding.

So, from a pragmatic point of view, I am interested in the possibility of opening up audiences for my work through the exploration of alternative spaces to the concert hall where the audience may be attracted initially by other art forms, or the appropriation of the concert hall for mixed media events – such as *Accession* in the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building.[33]

In terms of context for collaborative work I see my practice as following the experimental tradition as defined most clearly in Nyman's *Experimental Music Cage and Beyond* in terms of chronology and intention but broadened to include a wider range of composers and the experimental traditions of African American music (which Lewis argues slightly precede Cage). Nyman effectively documents a tradition that starts with Cage – mentioning precursors but detailing Cage's work from the 1950's as seminal. He sees a huge shift in Cage's work because it allows for different outcomes and sets up process as determinant of outcome more than set instruction. He documents

[32] I have seen this most clearly in dance collaboration with Café Reason Butoh Dance Theatre. At theatre performances to a packed house I have accompanied them on numerous occasions either solo or as part of an improvising ensemble. The effusive praise for the music from audience members is in contrast to the far more subdued appreciation of improvised music at the far less well attended improvisers concerts where the same ensembles have played.

[33] This is Oxford's main new music venue and is based at St Hilda's College.

the way this tradition continued into the 1960's with the minimalists and with Cardew and followers in Britain. His argument is flawed by his lack of certain key composers in his account (notably Meredith Monk and Pauline Oliveros) as well as his failure to include black music. I see myself linked to this experimental tradition because I am often interested in the range of outcomes that establishing a set of open parameters can give. The issues of collaboration and performance space have been critical to the experimental tradition since the work of Cage and his followers who were heavily influenced by dance and the visual arts. This was not just because Cage was so influenced by his collaboration with Cunningham in his creative practice (they worked together for fifty years and much of Cage's work was commissioned by Cunningham). Nyman documents Feldman's professions of the importance of the visual arts on Cage's circle. [34] For this reason I will start my discussion of collaboration and environmental issues in composition with a discussion of the Cage/Cunningham legacy, which will also include the links between Cage and followers and the visual arts.

I would suggest that traditionally much innovation in music has been achieved through the influence of extra-musical ideas even when those ideas are a rejection of previous ones. For Cage this was linked to the development of work in which he would let 'sounds be themselves' which led to a rejection of teleological development and the ego in performance which created a huge shift in performance practice.[35] 4'33" [36] of 1952 exemplifies this shift most dramatically, but Brown's December 1952 [37] is another good example and one that I have performed in various contexts (including with dance).

I have documented my approach to collaborative work and exploration of alternative space for performance in section 4 of this document.

1.5 Conclusion and Summary of technique

I have detailed the conclusions I have reached with regard to the key questions for the research in Section 5 of this paper. I have also incorporated in the appendices an account of the range of techniques I have used for organising improvisation or that have evolved

[34] Nyman, 1999, p 51 ff
[35] Nyman, 1999, p 50 ff
[36] The score and a useful description of this piece is contained in Nyman, 1999, p 3.
[37] This piece (Brown, 1961, p.1)is also discussed in Nyman, 1999, p 57 .

within the organisations which I have helped establish. This is also published on the Oxford Improvisers web site (Atkins, 2007).

2 Development of my aesthetic

2.1 Introduction

I have attempted to document my aesthetic development in this section and have tried to trace how my attitude to using notation and improvisation has changed. As I will refer to how my aesthetic has developed in relation to the key research questions for the doctorate I will refer to them as 1-5 as they occur.

2.2 Initial Approaches

Coincidental with my interest in developing my practice through undertaking this research CoMA began an initiative to create new music called Open Score. This initiative was designed to encourage the creation of works for amateur players without compromising artistic standard. Works were to be written in a flexible format – this could be in terms of general pitch ranges of instruments and hence in four parts – or in graphic or text notation. Some works would be commissioned from established composers whilst others would be requested from anyone interested in submission. The pieces submitted would be assessed by a panel of composers and a few selected for inclusion along with the commissioned works. Requests for work would be encouraged in educational establishments as well as through the CoMA network. Because of my interest in all these aspects of composition which relate particularly to the first three research questions, I decided to tie in some aspects of my research with the Open Score project by organising performances of work and by interviewing some of the composers CoMA commissioned to create works in Open Score and seeing if their techniques were relevant to my practice.

I initiated a large scale event at Harcourt Hill in February 2005 for which I obtained the Open Score works commissioned by CoMA that year and managed to get the participation of Brookes Orchestra and of Oxford Contemporary Music. It was well

advertised throughout CoMA and well attended by the public and by students.

The scores included works by Diana Burrell and Michael Finnissy both of whom I went on to interview. I contrasted the performance of these new works with performances by the Oxford Improvising Orchestra and members of the Oxford Improvisers – often working with dancers. A recording of a Theremin Concerto – featuring Ray Lee and conducted by Pat Thomas is attached as Example CD 02:01 (it is also held on the improvisers web site (Thomas, 2005)). I was one of twelve musicians performing in this work.

The piece shows how an experienced improvising group with a confident conductor can create rapid transition in texture and dynamics that are as effective as scored work. The constant exploration of new sounds, textures and rhythms to accompany the theremin is what holds the interest of the piece which was structured to allow Ray Lee to improvise freely on the theremin while Pat Thomas conducted the improvising orchestra in response to Ray's playing.

A traditional large group improvisation would be constrained by the need for the group to find a common language to communicate. Here, Pat is able to create rapid responses from the performers by setting up pulses, instructing players to imitate one another, rapidly bringing in alternative combinations of instruments or allowing sudden breaks in the sound. Where some improvising ensembles can fill all the available sonic space the group here is encouraged to leave frequent gaps and just about every potential instrumental combination is explored as well as the extreme ranges of many instruments (through instructions to play very high or low).

This piece shows the dynamism of the improvisers group at this time and demonstrates how leaving a group of musicians to develop their own vocabulary but structuring it within a larger framework can spontaneously create an effective piece. This had a huge influence on my practice.

2.3 Problems with notated works

The two pieces I submitted for the Open Score calls for pieces were *Autumn Thoughts* and *Easter*. Both pieces were written around the briefs given in the call for the works which was to write to accommodate a flexible range of instruments and to allow for the participation of amateur players.

The subject matter for *Autumn Thoughts* was also prescribed as it was to be based on the four temperaments. For both works I set myself a series of compositional challenges to achieve in structuring the works. The reason for this was that I believed that the realization of a system throughout would encourage me to find new ways of expressing my ideas in creating a piece that had to be flexible and comparatively simple to perform.

With both pieces I explored serial ideas. At this time I was interested in more rigid structuring techniques for my music and I felt that given that the pieces could be played by any range of instruments (including just four instruments) there would have to be an emphasis on using pitch organisation rather than timbre and texture. I chose serial techniques because they do give a very rigid constraint on the development of lyrical melody and I wanted to explore this dichotomy.

With *Autumn Thoughts* I attempted to combine two series and use them in the exposition of a series of sections that would explore each temperament in turn as I felt this would add a further level of constraint and control which I would have to work against. With the second piece I used one series but merged this with the use of a plain song Pange Lingua which I have used before and since in a number of different contexts. This was also to provide a further level of difficulty.

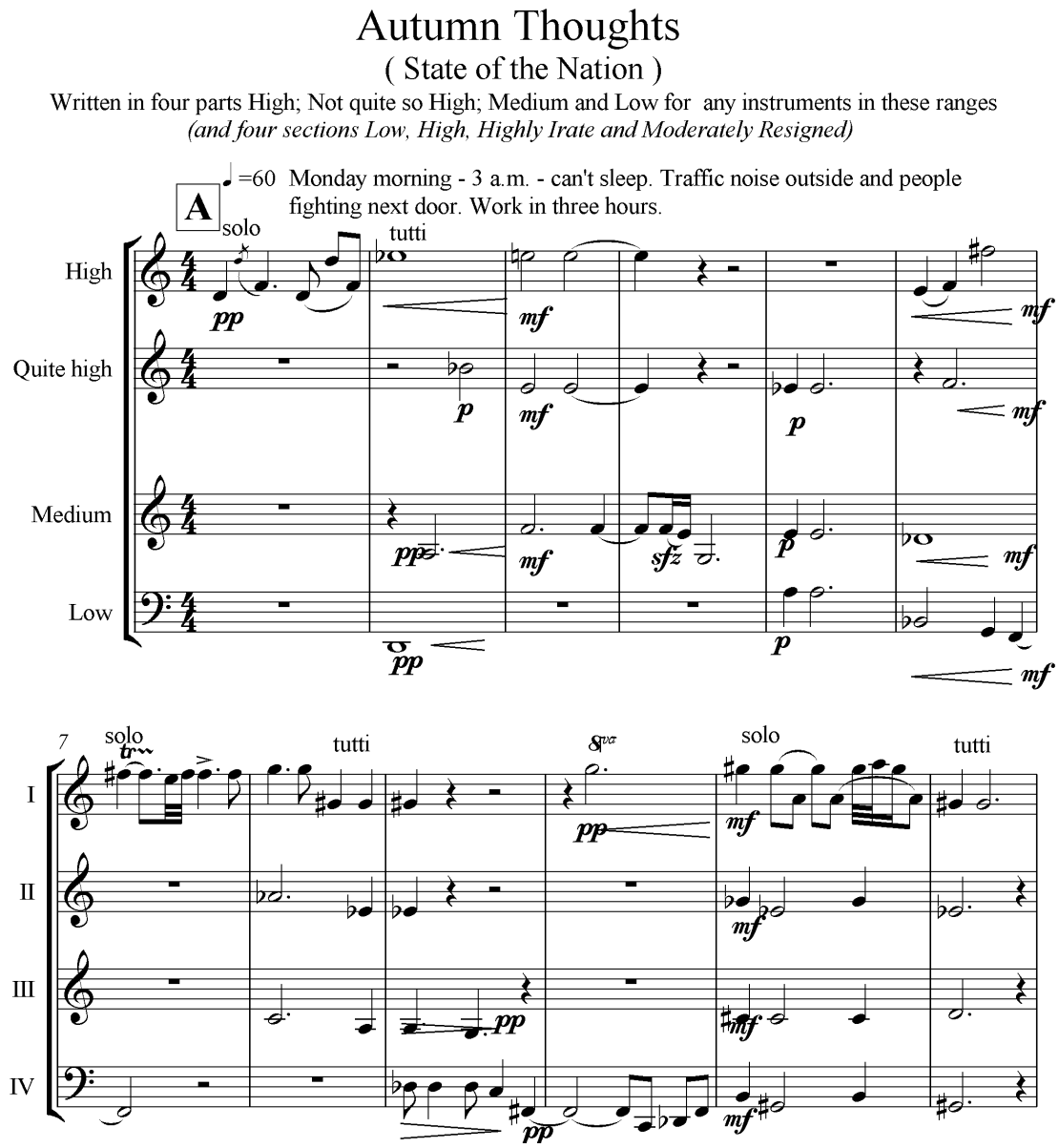
I was, at this time exploring the resonance of using a series as a basis for improvisation so I was keen to see how this compared with the rigid structuring of the use of a series within a piece. I was also interested in seeing how far the unity of a piece based around a series could be stretched by the use of a different harmonic organisation – either

another series or a melody which contrasted.
For improvisation I would create a series chart and use that as a basis for an improvisation asking the players to play through one row at a time from any direction (vertical, horizontal or reverse of each of these) in much the same way that I would write a piece based on this technique.

The way these two techniques compare can be demonstrated by comparing the effect of improvisation on a series and the way I fashioned the use of the two series in *Autumn Thoughts*. The two interleaved series for *Autumn Thoughts* were DFEbEGbGAbABCBbDb and EGFGbAbABbBDbDCEb and the way they created an effect can be seen in example 2.1 below.

This example shows the conventions of this kind of scoring where instrumental timbre cannot be specified. Instead contrast is achieved by dynamics and varying of instrumental forces – most often tutti to solo.

The use of the series is not strict but rather reflects the way I was trying to explore the conflict between the potential rigidity of using this structural method and the desire to create a personalised voice. Hence this opening is very much solo voice plus accompaniment. The use of a second series also creates a pull away from the rigid harmonic world of using just one but the notes are often produced in parallel from both series. This was linked to my exploration of how the individual voice and vocabulary can be created within a rigid system of structuring which is central to my interest in improvisation. Many of the lines I used in this piece were derived spontaneously from improvisation or lyrical expression. They were constrained by the use of a series so that I would not create a spontaneous expression that reflected my intuitive harmonic development. I was also interested at this time at how many of the atonal and serial works of Webern and Schoenberg were derived from the setting of words and felt this was an indication of this conflict between individual voice and method of organisation. However, I was not worried when I checked and found that I had accidentally broken with using the series strictly as I saw this as a method of initiating work rather than an end in itself.



Example 2.1 Opening of Autumn Thoughts

The overall structure of the piece was simple in that I used a slow opening to express melancholy, included a faster rhythmic middle section that moved from the positive to angry (sanguine to choleric) and ended with a reflective (phlegmatic) section. I included quotes and observations to set the mood of each section more enigmatically than by traditional musicological terms. The impetus for this came from my work with butoh dance (which had begun at this time) where the use of enigmatic instruction (often

contradictory) is used to encourage dancers to think outside of the conventions of expression of the genre.[38]

In this I was also influenced partly by Satie in his creation of bizarre performance indications[39] as well as by the practice of adding quotes at the start of chapters in a novel.

Overall, I was dissatisfied with this piece as I came to realise that I could explore the tension between lyric line and a formal structure by a simpler technique of harnessing the creativity of performers I knew who could extemporise on simple melodies or even create solos over given rhythmic or harmonic structures. My task would then be to create the structures that would create the appropriate tension and contrast. This was borne out by the works I went on to develop.

The same issues also apply to the piece *Easter*. As an example of where my practice has moved to I have included a recording I made of the band AMV for which I used the song Pange Lingua as a core melody but merged in a series of different songs over this one. This includes two Indian songs as well as the traditional Hymn to St Magnus. Although I structured and recorded this work I let the different musicians explore their vocabulary, whether from jazz, Indian music or traditional, and successfully merged the different voices. I wrote bass lines and harmonies to pull the piece together as well as choosing a range of starting notes for each performer and arranging where they would contribute. My guiding principle here was to create a series of interlocking modes and tonalities that would transform the effect of each simple melody used. So, I used Pange Lingua in Phrygian mode on E; Hymn to St Magnus on Lydian mode on F; a Hymn to Shiva in C; a drone on C; a bandeesh around A. Rather than using the constraints of a series I attempted to use a series of conflicting modes to create a tension between all the voices.

Example CD 01:02 is the AMV recording of Pange Lingua (this is also available at

[38] In 'the Words of Butoh' Nanako discusses the deliberate ambiguity of Hijikata's verbal expressions to initiate dance – along with his interest in using words (Nanako, 2008).
[39] These were included as a section compiled in A Mammal's Notebook - (Satie, 1996, p 46 ff)

AMV myspace site (Atkins, 2006B)).
The score for Autumn Thoughts is included as Example Score 01

2.4 My current aesthetic

By 2005 I had started to feel that the rigid crafting of work for unknown players was never a satisfactory way of realising new work for me because ultimately I wanted to develop work for specific performance environments and players. The practice of writing open pieces for any ensemble is useful in developing the craft of composition but was something I was beginning to find problematic. This was partly because of the variables involved but more importantly it played into the tradition of attempting to control the performer's voice. I could see from working with improvising musicians that the liberation of their voices and the creation of a structure that achieved this was far more satisfactory than the eradication or strict limitation of what the performer could do. This also reflects the way music has moved in the past fifty years. Automatic replication of a harmonic, rhythmic or melodic ideas is technologically easy through overlaying recording at home or even *midi,* and achievable by ensembles as the techniques of practicing and following instruction are developed. However this seems to create a sterile performance environment and improvised musical performances often highlight how vibrant the player's involvement can make a work. The danger with improvisation can be that the performer's voice becomes tedious because the performer says the same thing over and over again or uses an accepted vocabulary for the genre which can in itself become predictably atonal and anti-diatonic. A recording such as the quintet on the Oxford Improvisers tagged below conforms to the expected world of dissonance that free improvisation leads people to expect. That said this is still an interesting exploration and to some extent shows how much more effective a musician's development of extended technique often is than the kind of prescription of extended technique that is such a mainstay of late twentieth century composition. Example CD 02:03 is of an improvising group comprising Otto Fischer (guitar), Tim Hill (alto sax), Dominic Lash (double bass), Evan Thomas (guitar) and Alex Ward (clarinet). It is also held on the improvisers web site (Fischer et al, 2002).

I began to see the potential of creating infrastructures for personal expression by musicians which would liberate and extend their vocabulary. This should ideally include the atonal and diatonic as well as the rhythmic and arrhythmic. I did not want to be constrained to use only the gestures associated with one genre.

I was also, through improvised performance, engaging more directly with creation of work in performance in which I attempted to create a macro structure within which individual performers could play to their strengths.

As a result of this shift in my practice I was having increasing doubts about the relevance of projects like CoMA's Open Score in engaging public participation in new music whether composition or performance. The basis of my concern was that the method of developing work was not based on experimentation and participation but on the dictates and control of appointed 'experts'. I realised that my method of working was far more based on a democratic model. A composer does institute the infrastructure within which performers will work. But where this is a partnership of equals I found the result to be far more satisfactory than where performers were expected to follow rigid instruction.

My involvement in the Oxford Improvisers showed that a democratically based approach of mutual interest in creating and exploring new work was far more productive than the 'expert' led approach of CoMA that conformed to the traditions of Western art music. One important aspect of the collective is that many of the performers are also composers, so there is continual debate about both structuring of work and realizing it in performance. The collective also comprises musicians from a range of backgrounds: professional jazz performers and professional improvisers, professional contemporary music performers, as well as a host of other performers, teachers, academics and composers.[40]

The weekly rehearsals of the improvisers collective were open to anyone to attend and

[40] Recent events such as The Cohesion Festival 2007 featured some of Britain's top contemporary jazz performers and the group is now recognised in magazines such as The Wire and in The Guardian.

all techniques for organising sound were open for discussion and trial whether this was traditional notation, graphics, text instruction, dance or film led. In addition, we set up a range of performances in which different people could try out large and small scale works.

Example CD 02:09 is a trio by Miles Doubleday,Pete Mcphail and me recorded in the 2008 Cohesion Festival (held at the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building in November). Despite the fact that we were working together as a trio for the first time the sensitive interaction is a testament to the way our practice and flexibility has developed through our continual engagement with creating new work in weekly practice and regular performance.[41] In comparison to this small group exploration, the example of the *Theremin Concerto* mentioned above shows how a large ensemble can explore a piece using their own ideas as mixed in and out and guided by a conductor.

Accession (documented in the next section) was one work where I was able to combine a whole range of techniques and experiment with the benefits of different approaches. I found in this piece that the use of notation was far more effective in the creation of simple harmonic and rhythmic ideas and that alternative approaches, including encouraging experienced improvisers to express themselves freely, was far more effective in the creation of complexity – especially of multiple ideas running in parallel or conflicting and interrupting. The idea of scoring this kind of complexity became unnecessary for me when the use of the potential of improvising musicians could supply a far more interesting interaction of participants and one that would be difficult to create from notation alone.

I found the interviews with Michael Finnissy, Howard Skempton and Diana Burrell particularly useful here.[42]

Finnissy was determined to capture the vibrancy of a live extemporization in the way he scored melody line, referring to comments I made as follows: ‘Your supposition about

[41] This performance was part of an evening of solos, duos and trios curated by Phil Wachsmann. The quality of everything that evening was such that he hopes to release it all on CD.
[42] Listed in full in Appendix 1

“lyrical expression and a-rhythmic complexity” is entirely correct – I was, still am, looking to convey SPONTANEITY of utterance (as distinct from contrivance)’ . This gives his music a particular depth and communication. This is exemplified in his use of folk song elements in *Plain Harmony* section 3 as well as the solo parts in *Red Earth*, as well as many pieces that explicitly reference folk music. He is acutely aware of how convention fashions expression: ‘Of course folk-music exists “in terms of/within the confines of / is often rigidly proscribed by “convention (limited patterns)… even if the impression (illusion?) we have is that the singer is improvising (qv. !) on the spur of the moment’. But he still feels that use of folk music is more valid in his search for ‘authenticity’ of expression rather than the contrivance and artifice that for him is exemplified by the art music tradition. He was particularly critical in the interview of the techniques of Cecil Sharp in transcribing folk music by reducing ornamentation and individual expression in order to fit the music to Western harmonic ideals.

In contrast, Howard Skempton’s approach was to intuitively create the most condensed and simple expression of his ideas with the minimum of embellishment. The craft of his composition is in its reduction to the simplest elements that still express his ideas. In the interview I highlighted how the *Two Highland Dances* in the collected piano pieces extracted the essence of a functional dance form and rhythm to create an abstraction while in other works such as September Song he created an abstraction by highlighting a particular set of tones with no predefined template or structure. Skempton described his approach as follows: ‘I concede that I'm still attracted to a pared down style. That comes from Webern and Feldman, and even Britten as I see him. Cardew was infuriated, he told me, by my fastidiousness, which is what it is. The fact is, that what I put on paper is what I want to listen to. The lack of complication must be due to a need to reveal shape or structure.’

In contrast to both Skempton and Finnissy, Diana Burrell’s approach seems far less radical in that she attempts to build on past Western traditions of composition (and believes there are new directions to find within this as exemplified by Lachenmann). Her practical eclecticism in using all available resources and her commitment to involving all who are interested in performing was also useful. She seemed confident to use a range of technique for differing abilities in ‘The Four Temperaments’ and I

particularly related to her observation: ‘I don't really believe in 'amateur' musicians; I just believe in musicians, some of which can get their fingers round the notes more easily than others and ALL of which should be challenging the status quo in a way that we haven't even begun to do yet.’ To some extent I share her eclectic approach to composition although I tend to see my eclecticism as extending to different traditions of constructing music – most notably experimental and improvisatory approaches. I would agree with her observation that with regard to Cardew ‘the world of professional music should be considering his pre-occupations and learning from his work to invigorate the mainstream now’ and I would see my approach as attempting to do this.

My interest in creating work for improvising musicians – or groups that include improvising musicians has incorporated ideas from all three composers I interviewed.

Because I was working with so many skilled improvisers I found that I could give them guidance – or even a melodic line – and allow them to create the lyrical communication that would enhance a melodic line, without needing to document the intricacies of its embellishment. I felt that my imposition of intricacies of embellishment of a line was no more valid than that of a performing musician who knew the potential of his or her instrument. This was partly due to working with skilled improvisers such as Pat Thomas and Pete McPhail but what was interesting was the way the whole group developed under the influence of these established professionals who showed a political commitment to the development of the collective. So, I was able to mix scored music and general instruction in *Accession* in order to play to the strengths of the musicians involved. This was exemplified by the technique of notating simple melodies and anthems and simply pointing to them when players were supposed to use them as a starting point.

I found Skempton’s pared down approach to scoring invaluable in much that I have prepared for improvising ensembles in the way it operated in contrast to the embellishment of line that improvisers could give. I also found that I could create the outline of a section of a work or a contrasting section of a work to those created with

alternative scoring techniques. An example here would be in the piece *Do Geese See God*. The whole piece was derived, in terms of notation from a simple cell which was explored in all possible contexts. This can work as an extremely simple piece in its own right (in fact it was written for CoMA in this way). When I expanded this two minute miniature to be a much longer work for up to a hundred performers I kept the basic infrastructure but left scope for improvisation and embellishment to enable the piece to remain interesting to an audience for twenty minutes (this piece is documented fully in the next section).

Skempton, Finnissy and Burrell all share a political commitment to opening out music to amateur participation and perhaps this is why I have been drawn to develop their ideas. I see the development of my vocabulary in music (whether it be for composition or improvisation) as part of a broadening of the vocabulary of Western art music to incorporate elements of improvisation and experimentation that began in the 1950s with Cage and followers – exemplified by Brown's *December 1952* [43] as discussed above.

2.5 *Conclusions*

In summary I would say that much of my initiation of new music has been a result of being part of a vibrant new music collective which has been completely open to new ideas in experimentation and cross art collaboration as well as traditional ideas of notation. This has enabled me to assess where and when different forms of notation are appropriate through continual trial with different techniques and this has enabled me to deal with each of the key questions of this research.

It is difficult to say whether my involvement with the collective helped move me away from just developing notation to attempting to realise more of my own work in collaboration with other players. I can definitely say that I have found the tradition of creating work for others to realise of little interest to me because I now see myself as a composer/performer and see the development of my personal vocabulary and expression as integral to my practice. I feel that I was at a stage where I had to find an alternative

[43] Brown, 1961

model for creating new work to the traditional art music specialization and that I was lucky that I was able to help develop a group which could achieve this. This does not preclude using traditional staff notation where it is appropriate but it would not necessarily be my first choice.

My discussions with radical contemporary composers such as Finnissy and Skempton helped me to discover how I wanted to use my own vocabulary and the vocabulary of others within my work by creating structures that facilitated rather than inhibited personal expression. My involvement with CoMA helped me to realise how inappropriate a traditional model for developing work, with specialised roles for composer and performer, had become for me.

I will detail two key works from my practice in the next section.

3 Notation Issues

3.1 Introduction

I will address the question of the efficacy of notation within my practice by looking in detail at one work – *Accession*. This piece was created in 2005 to meet a specific requirement of exploring the music of the states that had recently joined the EU (predominantly Baltic and Balkan and all former Eastern Block countries – Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Rumania, Slovakia, Slovenia). The requirement was agreed as part of funding for Oxford Improvisers through the Evolving City programme.[44] I felt that the performances of the work exemplified what could be achieved by a large improvising ensemble who were willing to accept some notational and other structuring constraints.

I will supplement my account with a brief discussion of a work I produced for a mixture of performers - some oriented to score reading**;** some to improvising - called *Do Geese See God*. This piece was performed by 80 people (many of them music students) in February 2006 after approximately 60 minutes of combined rehearsal.

In looking at these works I will be addressing the questions posed as follows:

1. *What are the compositional limitations imposed by alternative methods of scoring (flexible and mixed ability scoring ; graphic scores; text based score)?* In *Accession* I used minimal scoring such as notation of key motifs for free interpretation by performers or conductor; and alternative structuring methods (response to dance and specific rules); conducted improvisation as well as free improvisation. In *Do Geese See God* I used all these devices for controlling sound as well as graphic scoring.

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[44] The organization Oxford Inspires described Evolving City on their web site as follows:'Evolving City explored and celebrated the changing nature of Oxford throughout 2005. The year saw hundreds of events, designed to encourage people to explore the city, its future, its scientific activity, its local culture, its festivals and its European partnerships.

Evolving City was funded by lottery money from the Millennium Commission and Arts Council England through the Urban Cultural Programme. Additional contributions came from Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Arts Council England South East and SEEDA. ' (Oxford Inspires,2009)

2. *What are the advantages and disadvantages of using traditional forms of notation compared to experimental techniques for generating new music (as outlined above) ?*

   In both works I used staff notation in parallel with other techniques for organising sound so I was able to continually compare the effectiveness of different techniques

3. *How far can a composer leave space for performer interpretation and improvisation within a piece of music and still retain control and ownership of the work?*

   In both works I left space for free improvisation throughout and often contrasted improvised solos with notated work

4. *How does multidisciplinary collaboration influence the creative process and the outcome of a work ?*

   The dance collaboration aspect of the second performance of *Accession* enabled me to asses this as well as the use of image in the first performance.

5. *Does the utilisation and exploitation of alternative performance space for the development and staging of new work significantly alter the content of work produced ?*

   In planning the second performance of *Accession* Ana Barbour (choreographer) and I attempted to make use of the full potential of the performance – mainly for the dance. *Do Geese see God* was created for an exceptionally large performing group and as such explored surrounding the audience with performers and seating the audience to face in different directions in order to appreciate different sonic possibilities.

What I have sought to explore is how effective notation is compared to other methods of creating a work, both in terms of structuring and the detail created within that structure and to do this I have used staff notation amongst a range of techniques. As a result much that I detail is the range of techniques that I used and the result of using each technique in the place it was employed. A key issue in this is how far the performing ensemble are

at ease with expressing their own ideas and vocabulary within a given framework. I will attempt to look at particular sections of each work and evaluate how far the different techniques I used influenced the way the work was performed.

Before embarking on that analysis I will set up some basis for comparison and expectation of improvisation and composition by reference to existing view points which can be revisited in the analysis.

3.2 Conventional comparisons of improvisation and notated composition.

One useful method of categorizing the gradations between improvised and pre-planned and notated musics is in the work of Bruno Nettl who suggests that we should look at music in terms of the number of fixed elements[45] and that it is the density of fixed elements that determines how much 'improvisation' there is within a piece of music or even a genre. This approach would allow us to categorise the fixed elements in terms of any composer prescription but also in terms of the range of choices within a genre i.e. what are the fixed patterns that have to be followed and limit performer choice (this could be jazz harmony; a rejection of diatonic melody (frequent in improvisation circles); prescribed chordal structures (blues or some jazz); or even formal structure and allowable range of notes (rag)).[46]

This approach is useful in placing staff notation[47] as one approach - perhaps the most extreme of prescription - amongst a number which can have a similar effect on

[45] Nettl, 1974 pp 12-13

[46] A corollary to this point is how far a composer can break out of the confines of the genre that he or she is in. This could apply to early minimalism as radical because it broke the modernist mold of always seeking new combinations within a defined framework and demanded re-appraisal of well known patterns and cadences, as much as to radical extensions of existing vocabulary such as serialism. The early controversy over Schoenberg's technique and how far he was extending an existing system shows how linked even the most radical seeming departures are to existing practice. R.S. Hill in the debate on Schoenberg's method (Hill, 1936 pp 16) argues that the twelve tone system as a logical and natural development even though he later criticises Schoenberg for not following through the consequences of serialism in his music. Schoenberg in his response to Hill (Schoenberg,1974,p 214) emphasises his approach is governed by artistic principles and hence allies himself to the Western art music tradition

[47] I take staff notation to refer to the conventions of the Western system of clef indication of the pitch, duration, instrumentation, dynamics and timbre of what is to be performed.

performance. I have attempted in my practice to use a full range of techniques for developing work so that I can compare the effect of each – whether it is allowing total freedom to a performer to use their own voice, simple textual instruction or fully notated score.

3.3 History and development of Accession

3.3.1 Overview

Accession was a large work (over sixty minutes in performance) that I prepared for the Oxford Improvising Orchestra.[48] It was structured as a series of episodes that related to the myth of Bluebeard but incorporated within this a range of musical styles: scored and improvised music, samples and electronica as well as anthems and tunes from the new and recent accession states. Further structuring was achieved through a constant variety in performing forces varying from the full orchestra to soloists and small ensembles from within it. The initial impetus for the work was a request from the Evolving City Programme to create a work that explored the accession state process.[49]

The work was first performed in a trial version in June 2005 at the Brookes Drama Studio and revised for an extended performance in November 2005 at the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building where Café Reason Butoh Dance Theatre added a physical commentary on the work as well as helping structure some of the musical material.

The November performance is included as two CDs in my core submission of material. The second half of this concert has been released on CD [50] which is included as Core CD 02. Scores and plans for the work are included as Core Scores 01.

3.3.2 Initiation

[48] The Oxford Improvising Orchestra is a group of musicians formed from the Oxford Improvisers who specialise in large group improvisation.
[49] This was an initiative funded to promote awareness of the Accession process taking place that year
[50] *Accession* 2006

In February 2005 I began working towards the trial performance in the Oxford Brookes Drama Studio[51] which was to last for about sixty minutes and involve all who were available from the Oxford Improvising Orchestra.

My criteria for the first version of the work were

- To construct a piece that related to the accession states and could be used as a basis for a concert that related to the accession state programme later in the year
- To explore the full sonic potential of the Oxford Improvising Orchestra throughout this piece that could combine work that I had scored, found material, images as a basis for performance, free improvisation and conducted improvisation. In doing this I could assess approaches to notation, collaboration, improvisation and the use of performance space.
- To use a core of musicians who were skilled at a range of techniques and competent in different genres and attempt to find ways they could communicate within a large work.

The overall framework within which I would create the work would be to use the narrative of Bartok's version of the Bluebeard myth – Bluebeard's Castle [52] - a realisation from an accession state (Hungary) of the myth of an old patriarch taking a naïve young wife whose desire to know Bluebeard's soul (expressed as the actual rooms of his castle) leads to her ultimate downfall and addition to a collection of previous (dead) wives. I intended this to be interpreted symbolically as a comment on the accession process as the patriarchal civilization of Europe subsuming Eastern European cultures and exploiting them. This would be balanced by a more positive view of the potential unification - expressed by the idea of real and open union and communication, as between musicians (and dancers) and the integration rather than obliteration of the various cultures in the anthems and tunes referenced. In addition, I wanted the work to

[51] a small venue regularly used by the Oxford Improvisers to try out new work

[52] Grove Music Online on this opera: 'the one-act opera *A Kékszakállú herceg vára* ('Bluebeard's Castle') (1911) is … a masterful Hungarian emulation of the realism of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Written to an expressionistic libretto by Béla Balázs about the 'mystery of the soul', the action of *Bluebeard's Castle* is negligible, involving just two singing protagonists, Bluebeard and his new wife Judith, who progress through the opening of the eponymous castle's seven doors, drawn by the woman's curiosity. The opera's climactic turning-point comes at the fifth door, to Bluebeard's kingdom, after which Judith's jealousy becomes obsessive, leading to her eventual entombment, along with all Bluebeard's previous wives, and eternal darkness.'.

express an honesty and apology about the bloodthirsty and imperialist past of Europe - and an attempt to come to terms with this - in contrast to the nihilistic view of Bartok's opera that ultimately laments the impossibility of human communication.

Although the work would be episodic in reflecting the Bluebeard Castle myth I saw it as a collage in the way different elements were to be run in parallel. This collage idea was appropriate as it would reflect the multiplicity and uncertainty of the subject of accession with the possibility of concurrent conflicting interpretations.

It also reflected my own compositional interests at this time:

- Through my interest in the experimental tradition of music I wanted to explore a range of outcomes in a piece rather than a traditional flow to a prescribed conclusion – as exemplified by many of the experimental works I have studied and performed since 2003 (Wolff's process based scores[53]; Feldman's reflective and ateleological works – which I had discussed with Skempton in the interview with him; Cardew's Treatise[54]). Further to this I was also interested in the exploration of how an expected narrative outcome can be subverted within a work.[55]
- Although I have been interested in the experimental tradition of juxtaposing a number of sound sources[56] I tend to see this as a way of making sense of living in a multicultural urban environment where we have to make sense of a range of sounds and influences and process them in our work. This is not about sounds being themselves but reflecting an urban sound world in all its complexity – just as the collage of pop art could be seen as reflecting this. For this reason I see my interest in collage as derived from the use of experimental techniques by DJs and sound producers which has developed through my interest in recording and using electronics in performance – especially in playing dub.[57] This has crossed back into art music as exemplified by Finnissy's comments about using

[53] Nyman, 1999,66 ff discusses the principles of construction of these works.
[54] Cardew,1970.
[55] These ideas of subverting narrative (particularly prevalent in film and literature) are discussed at length in Section 4.
[56] as with Cage and his experiments with multiple sound sources – for example Variations IV
[57] Although this use of collage as developed by George Martin parallels the visual art experiments of Peter Blake, I would see Lee Perry's experiments in for example Cow Thief Skank as a far more interesting comment from an outsider and one that subsequent DJs have built on.

references to other musics in order to explore them.[58]

3.3.3 Construction

The piece was constructed in a number of sections that could contrast large and small group work as well as different instrumental groupings and styles of generating music (free or prescribed).

I would summarise the key elements as:

- References to the Accession states through national anthems and found folk music, some of which was planned to occur at key points and others to be brought in at will by the conductor.
- Scored pieces that were designed to give expression to the voices of individual performers in relating to part of the Bluebeard narrative. These could have improvised accompaniment by one or two players and include sections of free improvisation.
- Full ensemble pieces that would allow the full timbral power and contrast of the whole group to be explored. These would be conducted and could include the cultural references. Like the scored pieces they would be related to some aspect of the Bluebeard narrative but could have extensive space for improvisation by the ensemble.
- Smaller ensemble pieces also linked to the narrative. These would not be conducted but might link to a scored solo or some minimal scoring or be freely improvised.

I saw the use of this range of techniques as exemplifying a creative partnership between me and the performing musicians. I had created a series of references to the music of various countries and various composed melodies which would give coherence to an extended performance by a large group of improvising musicians. The infrastructure was built on using the techniques of conducted improvisation extended to include this

[58] I've more recently alluded to Beethoven's folk-song arrangements (the largest strand of his vocal music !) as a way of suggesting a 'tradition' WITHIN European art music of "composing WITH " folk / popular /banal elements … and critically exploring them

scored material, to facilitate the expression of individual musicians within the unfolding of a narrative.

This initial structuring device gave a clear political commentary to the work but also opened up the possibility of a range of expressive responses to the very powerful images that the seven rooms of Bartok's version of the myth employ. I extended out the structure Bartok used into sixteen sections which are detailed in Table 3.1 below. The expansion to use this many sections was to incorporate a wider range of contrasts between the musical forces of the group (solos and small group improvisations as well as improvising orchestra work).

	Players	Name	Instructions
1	ALL	Fanfares, Warnings and Promises	A processional based on the name given. Two players (horns) start on each end of a crescent which moves inward. At the middle all players join in moving from centre back to each end of crescent. CONDUCTOR MAY END OR INTERVENE. Players can communicate with a fanfare (announcement), a promise or a warning. Make sure you interrupt one another AND DON'T WAIT YOUR TURN. Use the tunes or anthems allocated you where you can.
2	Clair recorder Percussion (Chris Stubbs, Roger, Chris Hills) + European Radio (Dom)	Threshold	Clair will play a haunting and fragmented piece on recorder(s) Percussion and radio should work independently in fits and starts – must not drown out the recorder and must start after it.
3	ALL	Torture Chamber	Conducted improvisation only use extremes (low or high loud or soft) build everything from fragments (i.e. don't start or finish any phrase – start in the middle or end suddenly).
4	Strings and woodwind	A fantastic edifice	String Improvisation over a tagged woodwind solo (i.e. each woodwind player plays then passes

	soloist		to another – as they want – use title in your improvisation)
5	ALL	Armoury	Conducted improvisation drums and percussion prominent and loud as well as electronica. Melody instruments play repetitive motifs, unpitched sounds.
6	Nick (scored) Pat, Miles – electronica	Between War and Wealth (Got anything nice ?)	
7	ALL	Treasury	GRAPHIC SCORE THAT ALLUDES TO THE CULTURAL WEALTH OF EUROPE'S PAST (AND ITS CULTURAL IMPERIALISM)
8	Nick, Pete, Clair, Jill	Entrance to the Garden	Lithuanian folk tune Can improvise from this – at some point the next section will start with entry of rest of orchestra (conducted)
9	ALL	Garden	a) Antiphonal 4 musicians (unconducted) represent the garden (Nick's quartet continuing with previous piece) the rest (conducted) represent the subversion and destruction of it – b) GRAPHIC OF TORTUOUS FLOWER SHAPES CAN TAKE OVER FOR NICK'S QUARTET
10	ALL VOICES EXCEPT Pat (melodica).	Death of Europe	Poem – Death of Europe is read/sung sporadically by Sarah and Bruno rest use voice sounds apart from Pat on melodica. All are conducted except for Pat who solos as he wants. Sarah and Bruno are a unit as are the rest of the singers.
11	ALL	Empire	Brash and loud. Use anthem allocated to you when you want (or sign is given – A for anthem).
12	ALL	Lake of Tears	Play extremely soft throughout – conducted

			improvisation. Set level by either singing bowl or synthesiser – do not exceed this
13	Julian (scored) – Dom –improvise as you like. Joined by Bruno.	Springtime behind the Slaughterhouse	Julian start off with scored piece. Dom then Bruno improvise separately. All three improvise. At end Julian restates scored melody.
14	ALL	Accession	a) Conducted improvisation. All use separate tune allocated. Bruno start slow, then Nick. Players will join in at speed of one or the other. Leave gaps. Play a phrase then leave equal space before next one. Electronica and percusion will bring in drones and blocks of sound. This will lead into b) b) GRAPHIC BUILT FROM FLAGS ALL MOVE TO BLOCKS OF SOUND BUT AS INDICATED BY CONDUCTOR
15	ALL	Summit	Try and use anything that you have liked from before in the conducted improvisation. The following nos will mean return to this section (and what you did in it) they will function like the memory command: 1 Torture Chamber 2 Armoury 3 Treasury 4 Lake of Tears
16	Pete (scored) – flute Clair. Jill and Nick – join in as appropriate	On Parting	Pete to start and end with scored piece – in between all four improvise together. Lyrical and melancholy (for a change).

Performers:

Clair Aldington (recorders), Nick Benda (oboe), Sarah Vierney Caird (flute and voice), Miles Doubleday (synth and voice), Jill Eliot (violin), Julian Faultless (horn), Bruno Guastalla (cello and bandoneon), Chris Hills (tabla), Dominic Lash (bass and radio) ,

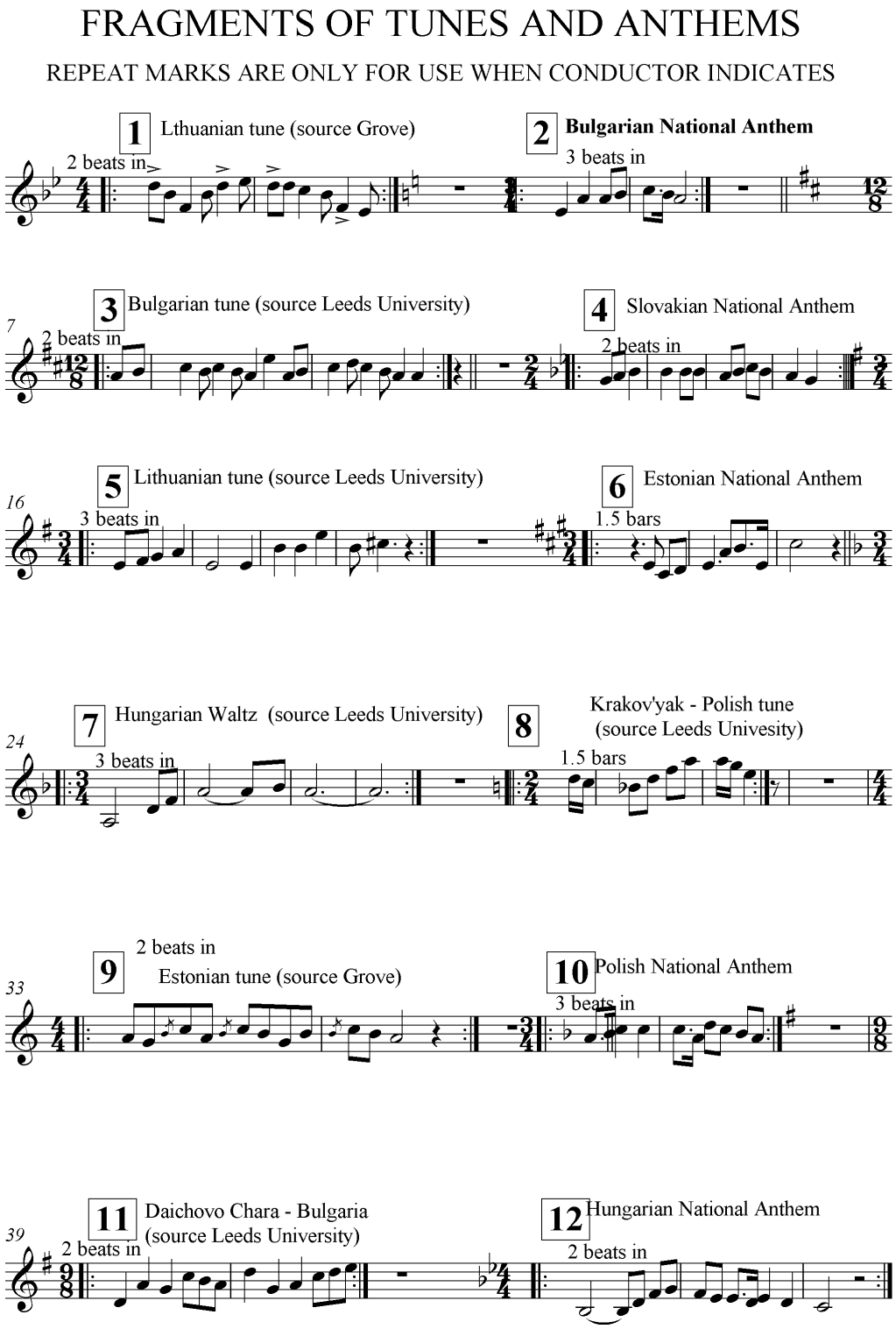
Pete McPhail (sax and flute), Paul Medley (clarinet), Chris Stubbs (percussion), Roger Telford (drums), Pat Thomas (melodica and electronica), Dave Trussler (clarinet).

Table 3.1 List of sections and performers for first performance of Accession – June 2005 followed by a list of performers.

3.3.3.1 Material used

I gathered material to use as a basis for the piece. This included the anthems of every accession state; folk melodies from each state; modes particular to particular cultures; poems from the accession states that I felt had some resonance with the subject (see below); flags from each state. An example of some of the material used is in Example 3.1. This is a collection of key fragments of tunes and anthems which I used throughout the work. Apart from being referenced in fuller scores that occurred in the work these fragments could be called up by a conductor who could give a number and point to a performer and group of performers to play. My main focus was folk music and in this I was influenced by Finnissy's comments about attempting to get to the authentic voice of people through this genre (see Section 2.4), even though the music I was using had been mediated through notation**.** Although I was looking for a multiplicity of references I did not want to appear to be engaging in a pastiche but wanted to create a tapestry of reference where the parallel threads could be discernible to the listener. I wanted the references to be a genuine attempt at assimilating diverse cultural influences and contrasting them. [59]

[59] The one exception to this was the use in the second performance of a 78 rpm recording of Beethoven's Ninth at the start of a section exploring artefacts of European imperialism in the second performance as I felt this was a canonical work that qualified it for this purpose.



Example 3.1 Key fragments of anthems and folk tunes used in Accession. [60].

3.3.3.2 Extent of scoring

[60] *Leeds University refers to the internet site (details below) which contains transcriptions of folk songs arranged by country. Grove refers to Grove online which contains melodic fragments exampled and discussed in the section on the relevant country. I have not put sources for national anthems as these are obtainable from numerous sites.*

Most of the scoring involved the creation of specific works for solo performers which would exploit their particular voices in a manner that could be compared to a solo improvisation. These solos would often lead into or out of ensemble improvisation and would be a contrast to full ensemble conducted improvisation. They would allow a clear delineation of melody in contrast to the full ensemble sound which would often have a range of melodic fragments and references within it. The solos written included: one based on using a Hungarian mode (for oboe); two based on poem texts (see below) ; one that I had written before (for recorder) which I included as an experiment in inserting found material but dropped from the second performance; and one an arrangement of a Lithuanian tune for two performers. The scores created for the first performance are included in Key Scores 01 and a more detailed analysis of how they worked is included in Section 3.4 below where I discuss them in relation to my core submissions of the recording of the November performance.

In addition I gave nine of the players a different national anthem and a folk tune each. These were for them to use as they felt appropriate but also in specific sections where I wanted a plethora of anthems and tunes to suggest a range of different cultures. Again, they were not to be played as a joke or pastiche, although the use of a range of anthems in conflict can have a comic militaristic element.

3.3.3.3 Other structuring devices

The main structuring method was the clear delineation of mood and context by section structure where each section was a separate piece exploring a different stage in the unfolding narrative of the work – most closely corresponding to a scene change in an operatic setting (sometimes enhanced by visual image or text). The use of particular styles and ranges of instruments was particularly important here. For example in the second performance the second half began with ‘Bulgaria’ (a scored piece for piano) with some conducted intervention from woodwind players; this was followed by ‘Lake of Tears’ for all players but improvised at a low volume – set by the level of a singing bowl that had to remain audible throughout the piece; this was then followed by

‘Springtime behind the Slaughterhouse’ which began with a solo and then led into a trio improvisation. So, there was a continual contrast in instrumental forces and use of controlling procedures. In both versions of the piece the opening contrasted a loud beginning with a more subtle second section. In the first performance a full orchestra procession was followed by a recorder piece with electronic accompaniment. I developed this further in the second performance by the use of scoring. I asked for an energetic conduction for the first section that would incorporate a range of tunes and anthems that would be used throughout the piece. In contrast the second section was built around a succession of sustained chords on the piano that were treated by electronic effects. My approach to writing the piano music for this section was to create a static and timeless response to the far more driven and frenetic opening and for this purpose the scored piano piece created space and a subtle sound world that is far more difficult to achieve within free improvisation. The aim was to explore the full potential sound of the improvising orchestra in both notated and improvised work.
Mood was delineated for performers (and audience) by the display of text which would often be the title of a section such as ‘Treasury’ or ‘Armoury’ and this would be up to the group to interpret within the context of the conduction which would attempt to bring out the resonance of this word within the narrative (which was inevitably more familiar to me than some of the performers). I did not see the variation in interpretation as a problem here. Images supplied were also left to the interpretation of performers (details of these images are below) and either a prescribed group of players or a conductor when the full orchestra was playing or a simple structuring method (tagged solos for example). In this performance I conducted throughout. I used the full range of conduction signals that were developed by Butch Morris and enhanced by various improvising groups (including our own). These are indicated in Appendix 3 Annex A.

For much of the first performance of the work a core of four musicians operated independently of the remainder of the orchestra working together like a concertino group with the others as a ripieno. I chose this group because they had operated in a recent concert for which I had written an extended solo for the oboe player. In notating the solo I tried to create a style that was initially loose and exploratory but gradually revealed a structure and delineation from a simple opening. This meant it could be

brought in and take the focus during the performance acting as a cue to the other performers to leave the soloist to take over. This solo was brought in in the middle of an extended improvisation and fused seamlessly into the performance. This technique can be heard in practice in the solo 'Between War and Wealth' as discussed below in relation to the November performance.

The use of a small group as core to this performance was not in order to signify a greater importance to these musicians. It was simply to create a greater range of contrasts. Although there is a notion of hierarchy implicit in this kind of division I was only interested in exploiting the sonic contrast it gave. In the further development of the piece I used all the players in small and large group roles to gain more contrast between small and large group sounds.

3.3.3.4 Visual stimulus and control

Dawn Scarfe, an artist who also improvised music, helped prepare visual stimuli on the subject of some of the sections following my suggestions of some starting ideas for images that related to each: Treasury (to be a reaction to Europe's cultural, intellectual and imperial legacy); Garden (to reference an underlying corruption or threat within controlled nature); Accession (to relate to the national identities). She was free to come up with any images that related to these ideas.

The use of images in these three sections was to allow for an alternative stimulus for the performers (and audience) at these three points of the performance which I felt could each benefit from a visual stimulus in a different way. I used only three sections in order to create a contrast with the other sections as I was interested to see how much difference to the performance a visual stimulus could make.

As an example of the way the collage of images was reflected in the sound I have included as Example CD 01:01 the performance of 'Treasury' which can be compared to the image created by Dawn Scarfe. In order to sustain the section I conducted in the performers so that the full sound as represented in the image was only realised at a

conventional climactic point where many of the performers were using allocated tunes.

Figure 3.1 Dawn Scarfe – image for Treasury

The images were displayed using a large projection. On a suggestion from one of the participants I put all the section details and poem texts in the display as well so that the audience could make senses of the work through a visual indication.

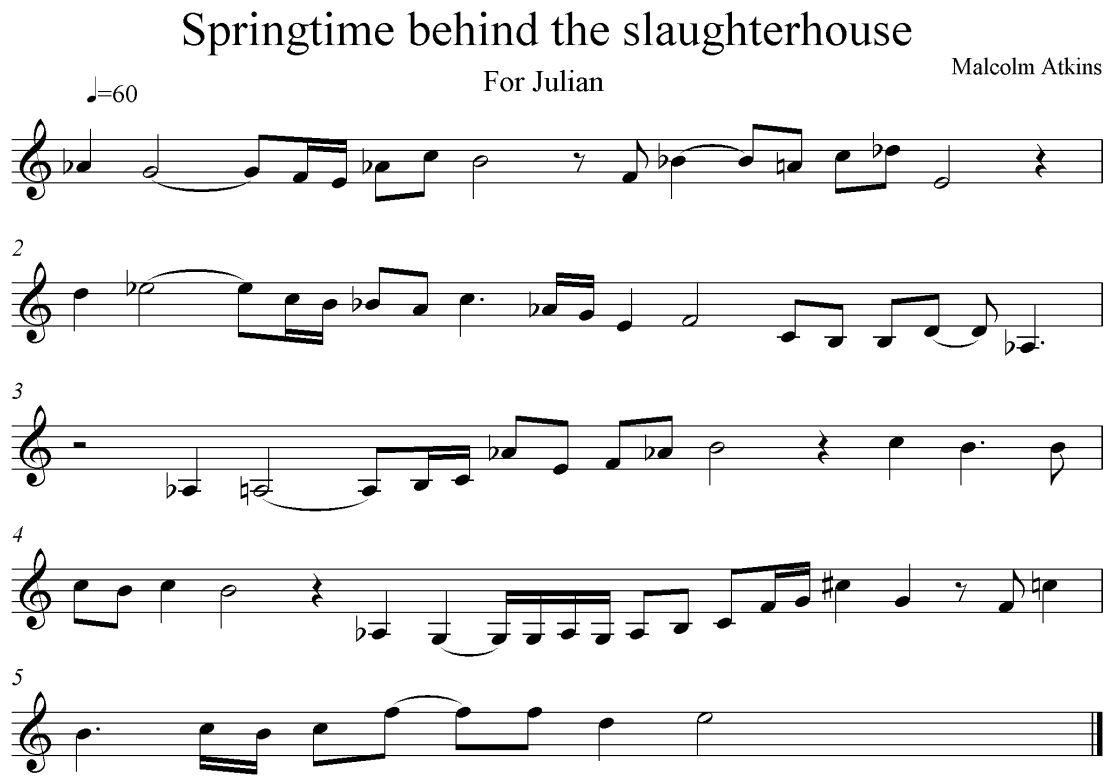
3.3.3.5 Poetry

I sought out texts which would extend the underlying myth and its resonance. Rather than using contemporary and journalistic 'realist' comment (especially the Daily Express migrant worker scapegoating - which I feel is a very relevant contemporary issue for the accession states) I decided to stay in an abstracted approach and use poetry which could give a symbolic or emotional message and one which would yield a wider range of interpretations. This was linked to my desire to create an abstracted and archetypal comment onto which contemporary observation could be applied by the audience if they chose. This was achieved symbolically by the way folk and anthem melody was subsumed into larger musical structure – often losing its identity in the process. It was achieved by choosing poetry which had a range of references and allusions. After surveying a range of poetry from the accession states, I chose three poems to enhance the work and give alternative perceptions. These texts each highlighted different aspects of the work.

'Death of Europe' by the Rumanian poet Nicolae Sirius[61] is a complex poem that incorporates elements of European history in a surreal rambling account where Europe is described as a relentless warmonger as well as personified as a female figure (perhaps the mythological Europa) who is described as a tragic inspiration for European artists. The wealth of contrasting imagery led me to use this poem for a vocal exploration which would be led by three singers from the improvising group each interpreting separate sections of the poem in contrasting styles. The text of this poem is included in Core Scores 01 along with performance instructions for its delivery in the November performance of *Accession.*

'Springtime behind the Slaughterhouse' by the Estonian poet Andres Ehin combines the disturbing image of a slaughterhouse and of springtime which I interpreted as a metaphor for a re-birth of hope in Europe after the horrors of Hitler and Stalin (especially for Estonians). This interpretation was perhaps one I found in the context of the requirements of the music at this stage of the piece and the effect I was trying to create in the music.[62]

[61] Sirius, 2003.
[62] The poet's daughter, who I met by chance a year later, assured me that this poem was based on a real scenario and she was unaware of the interpretation I had imposed.



Example 3.2 Melody for Springtime behind the Slaughterhouse

The ambivalence of these images and their relevance to post-war Europe made this poem key to the work. I did not quote the lyric of the poem directly but instead wrote a melody around the lyric that was to be interpreted by a soloist and then used as a basis for improvisation by a trio. In the first performance Julian Faultless (French Horn) interpreted the melody, in the second Paul Medley (alto clarinet). I displayed the text of the poem in the first performance but decided this distracted from the music and dropped this approach for the second one. I believe that the melody I had created captured my emotional response to the poem and I felt that this gave sufficient meaning to the work at this time. I felt that the style of the melody along with the displayed title would be sufficient to give the message I wanted of a post traumatic Europe and the text would take too much focus. The text is printed below:

Springtime behind the slaughterhouse

Silence in the slaughterhouse.
No killing going on.
The cleaned-up hooks and rails without

A single joint thereon.

Behind the silent slaughterhouse
I hear the nightingales sing.
Alone, the only meathead
By the birdcherries in spring.

Andres Ehin [63]

As is apparent from the recording (Core CD 02:03) after the melody is stated the trio improvise until the melody is restated in order to bring this section to an end.

On Parting by the Bulgarian poet Nikola Vaptsarov is a poignant expression of farewell from the poet to his wife as she sleeps. I used this to mark the end of the piece as I felt it emphasised the migrant worker status that has been imposed on the accession states. I wrote a melody for the lyric of this poem to be played on solo flute (Pete McPhail first performance; Sarah Caird second). The melody was then improvised on by a quartet whilst the remaining players gradually joined in with very quiet, high notes. Eventually the four improvisers would join in with the remaining players and all would be faded out to signify the end of the work.

Core CD 02:07 is a recording of the melody from the second performance which demonstrates how a scored melody could be used to structure a section because the improvising musicians could be sensitive to the line played and effectively enhance it through their own vocabulary. I did prearrange for the orchestra to move to playing high notes as quietly as possible on my signal.

Again I felt that the title of the poem and the style of melody would be sufficient to give the message I wanted at this point of the piece.

On Parting

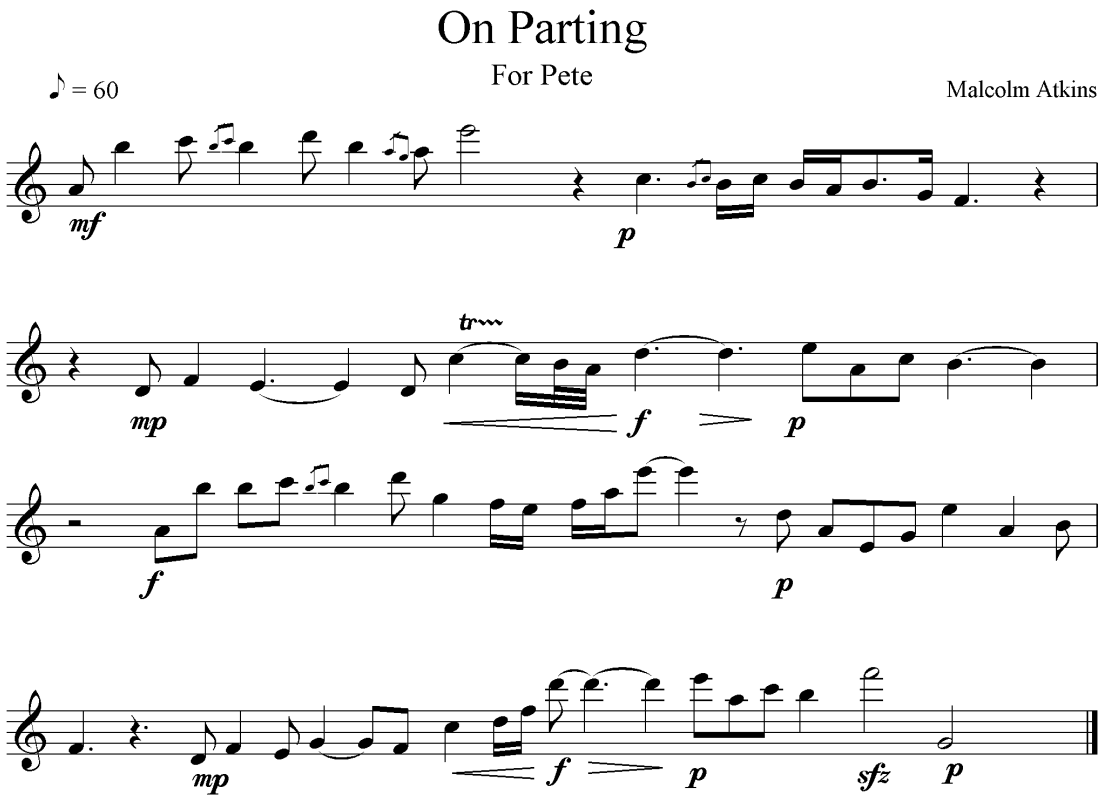
Sometimes I'll come when you're asleep,
An unexpected visitor.
Don't leave me outside in the street.

[63] Ehin, 2003

Don't bar the door!

I'll enter quietly, softly sit.
And gaze upon you in the dark.
Then when my eyes have gazed their fill,
I'll kiss you and depart.

Nikola Vaptsarov [64]

Death of Europe and the way it was transformed for the second performance is discussed at 3.4.2 below.

Example 3.3 Melody for On Parting

3.3.3.6 Organisation of accession state material

[64] Vaptsarov, 2003.

In addition to the historical perspectives on Europe provided by the first two poems I looked to give a positive and alternative viewpoint of the potentially positive sides of European integration (as opposed to the Bluebeard's castle interpretation) through the use and sympathetic development of melodies and anthems from the accession states (as well as melodies I had written especially). I also felt that the natural co-operation and empathy of the musicians to one another throughout would give this message with minimal structuring or melodic support (as in the conventionally plaintive melody for 'On Parting' that ends the performance). This was further developed by collaboration with dance in the second performance – for example at the end of the first half where I allocated different melodies to the ensemble to play but each melody was to be played only when a specific dancer was moving. This is discussed and exampled in 3.4.3 below.

I deliberately made no attempt to set up any overall tonal scheme for the melodies chosen or written, leaving them in the key they were written and treating them as found material. As evidenced from the key fragments in Example 3.1 the keys tended to be close - mainly one or two sharps or flats, which perhaps reflects simple disseminated scores. This still created simple clashes but the fact that they tended to be close in key range meant that I could write material in order to create greater dissonance at key points as well as allowing the orchestra to do this through instruction. As examples the way I harmonised the Estonian anthem for ‘Estonia’ (see Example 3.5 below) deliberately subverted any key centre; the use of a very specific controlling instruction on dynamics for ‘Lake of Tears’ created a framework for exploring a range of tonality.

3.3.4 First performance

The first performance took place in the Oxford Brookes Drama Studio on the 19th June at 9 p.m. It was preceded by two solo works. There were 15 performers.

Appendix 3.01 contains comments and my reflections on the piece immediately after the performance and I have summarised these below.

Overall performers and audience felt this performance was a success as it held together as a coherent work as it moved through the 16 sections that defined the structure of the work.

I felt that the factors that enabled this were the clear contrasts between sections by the use of distinct techniques of organisation and size and instrumentation of performing forces. In an improvised performance where the vocabulary of the performer will decide the direction of the music, the decision of who plays when is an extremely significant compositional device.

Some of the players felt that the piece needed more rehearsal. Others felt that the instructions should have been clearer. I was keen to tighten up some of the work but I did feel that the lack of rehearsal did encourage people to use their own improvising strategies – which was an aim of the piece. For future development I needed to work out ways of shifting players between an improvising mode of working where they could create their own sound world and a more formal approach to using scores and instructions. I realised that I needed to carefully boundary these two aspects and rehearse sufficiently for people to be confident to make the transition between them without making them stale. In fact it needed extremely careful planning to achieve as much rehearsal as possible in as short a time frame as possible so that the players were still fully engaged creatively whilst responding to instruction. An example of where the shift between notation and improvisation worked particularly well was in the way the scored melody for On Parting was developed by the improvising ensemble in both performances – as is shown by the recording (Core CD 02:07).

I did attempt to create a far clearer plan for the next performance but was careful to leave space for personal interpretation and improvisation by the performers as this was a key aim of my research. I did not feel that this compromised the work because I had never denied that it was experimental in the sense of discovering the potential of the group to explore new ideas. I was keen to develop methods of rehearsal that left space for performer interpretation but that allowed careful consideration of the notated and more structured sections. In this way I was using the piece to trial mixing improvisation

and notated composition as well as other forms of organisation and thus effectively exploring the aims of my research but simultaneously establishing the parameters of what the group could do well.

One person felt that the display of the structure and sections for the audience was a distraction, as well as the display of the poem texts. He felt that the music should speak for itself.

However, the display of sections and structure information was generally well received and I did feel that the audience needed this kind of support in making sense of a piece of this length and one with so many diverse elements. I felt that this would be supported by a further visual element and decided to approach Café Reason Butoh Dance Theatre for the next performance and see if they would add a layer of visual commentary to the piece which would supplement the text and images used in the first performance. This would also enable me to explore the fourth aim of my research.

3.3.5 Development of work for November

I agreed to prepare a ninety minute version of the work for November, expanding and improving on the June performance. Given the lack of time for a work of this scope I worked intensively over the period June to November. Most of my improvements were made on the basis of the concerns listed (above) that I had documented immediately after the first performance.

I expanded the structure, keeping the same core sections but adding in others which I felt would enable me to explore the full possibilities of the improvising ensemble. In addition I decided not to use a core group of musicians within the orchestra but open out the piece so that all players were involved in small group playing at some time. In this sense the piece moved from a concerto grosso idea to one of a Concerto for Orchestra (which is perhaps the norm with improvising orchestra work). This was based on the principle that as a piece based partly on improvisation the voices of the musicians and their developed vocabulary needed to be highlighted throughout the piece. As a result

my role as a composer was to ensure these voices were highlighted through the variety of situations in which they would be heard and the contrast between hearing them within large and small group settings (see 3.5 below).

I have detailed a number of aspects of the development below.

Dance

I decided to include dance within the next performance and focused on this rather than visual imagery. I had collaborated with Café Reason Butoh Dance Theatre on a number of projects and had helped set up links between that experimental dance group and Oxford Improvisers. I particularly liked the way Café Reason were able to find ways of exploring archetypal themes and abstracted images which paralleled in movement the open ended nature of much that the improvisers did sonically. I set up discussions with the dance group and Ana Barbour agreed to work with me on choreographing a response to the music.

I was keen to explore the idea of dance led improvisation – for example where the actions of a dancer (or dancers) dictate when and how musicians play. This experimental method of structuring had proved highly effective in creating unexpected musical results on previous collaborations and is documented in section 4.3.

I felt that this method of leading the music could give new ideas to the musicians involved through enabling them to create new structural responses that would relate to the phrasing and narrative expression of dance rather than their own patterns of structuring. Many musicians respond to the physical movement of dancers in ways that liberate their performance from tried and tested patterns because the dance acts as a form of physiographic conduction. Further to this the emotional response of a dancer in movement to a musical stimulus can feed back to the musician and enhance or intensify their playing.[65]

[65] This issue is demonstrated in Section 4 where a number of dance collaborations are discussed and exampled.

So, by the introduction of dance I was hoping to develop new structuring methods for the work as well as impacting on the way the musicians performed – hopefully liberating their personal expression within the piece.[66]

Following discussion with Ana Barbour I ensured that the revised structure of the piece (see below) would give scope for commentary from the dancers on the narrative ideas and the musical exploration by leaving spaces for different styles of dance interaction – both following and leading the music.

I subsequently asked Ana to explain how she worked within this collaboration in terms of adapting to a preset structure and using the available space. The interview is included in Appendix 3.01.

She summarised her approach as using three strategies (quoted from the interview):

- meetings with Malcolm to talk through the structure and get a sense of intended mood/feeling/atmosphere/length of the sections in which the dancers would be involved'.
- discussions about how to involve the dancers with musicians more interactively.
- visits to the space to decide which areas of the building I would like to use and for which sections. '

She organised rehearsing the sections where there was direct interaction with musicians but outside of this she 'attempted to prepare a basis for spontaneous response in performance through using key words for each section to inform our movement [67] and specified routes and positions for all dancers for each section whether they were active or static'.

In addition she was concerned to create variety much as I was in the music by using 'as

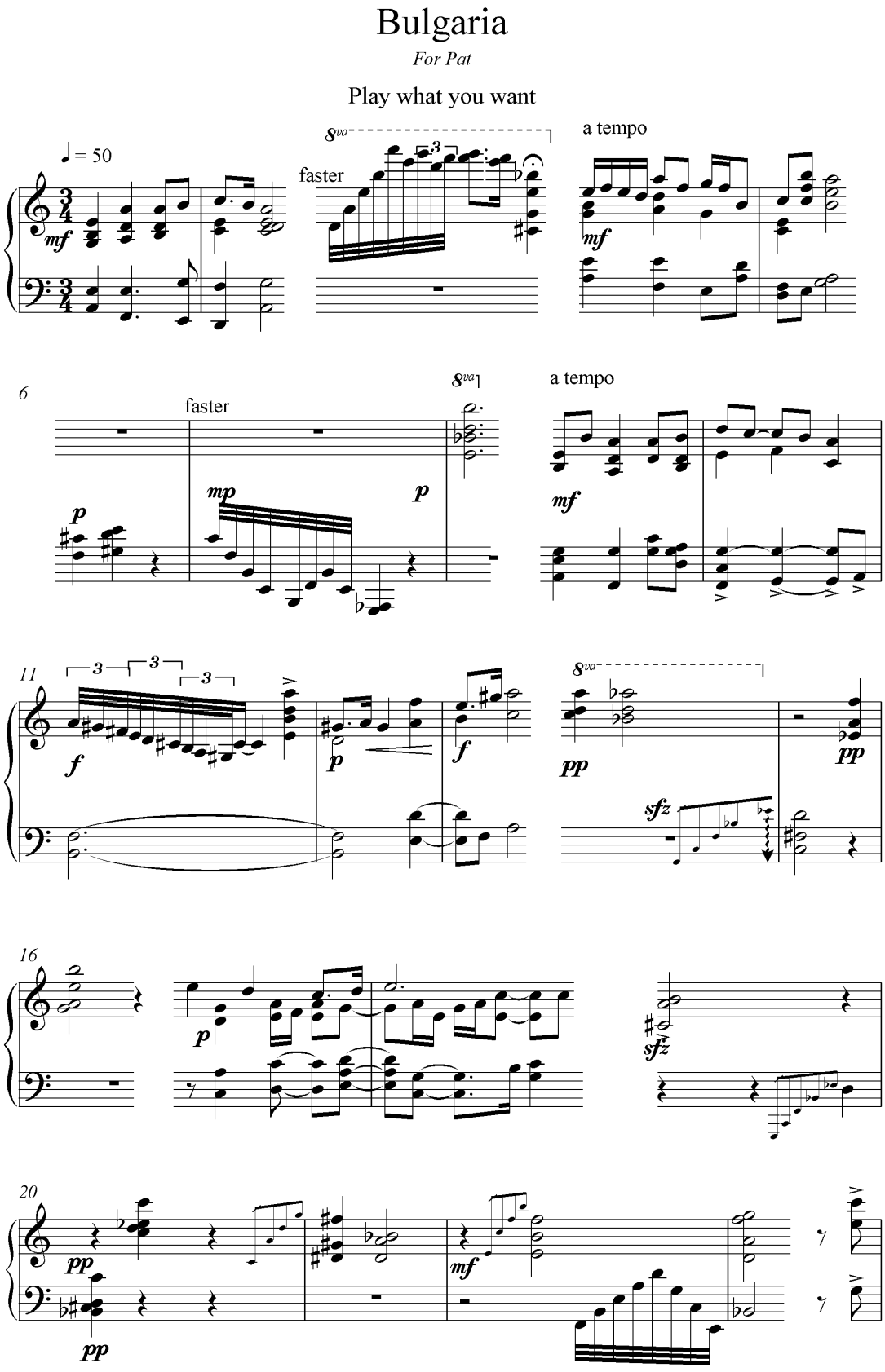
[66] By personal expression I mean the expression of the personalized vocabulary that an improvising musician has built up. For an improviser, the development of vocabulary is part of the identity of the musician and it is this that a composer is using when he or she chooses to use an improviser in a piece. In fact composition could just be seen as the decision of who plays when.

[67] This technique of holding images in mind, butoh-fu is discussed by Paul Mackilligin in Section 4.2.4

much variety in the number of interacting dancers as I could, using solos duos and trios as well as quartet interaction'.

Ana's approach to creating the choreography seemed to mirror all the approaches I used to organise performers. She worked with a minimum of instruction; with an awareness of the performance space; with the maximum level of variety that could be achieved through changing performance forces.

Piano music

Because I was determined to use the potential of the performance space to its full (as well as the potential of the musicians), and given the quality of the piano at the Jacqueline du Pré I decided to prepare some piano pieces for Pat Thomas - as an outstanding performer and improviser. One piece in particular would highlight his phenomenal ability to shift between moods and styles - contrasting a chorale style interpretation of an anthem with a frenetic semi-improvised answer every few bars. This approach within the scope of single piano piece exemplifies the approach of the whole work which was to combine notation and improvising and to seek the most interesting aspects of each in performance. I see these as the spontaneity and excitement of the dynamic creation of material that a good improvisation can give and the creation of a controlled sonic world that reflects the aims of a work (not necessarily complex but engineered in a way that makes sense to an audience) that a composition can give. It also addresses the first three aims of the doctorate. I notated some ideas for the contrasts but encouraged Pat to develop this in any way he felt appropriate. A more extended discussion of this piece is included in 3.4.2 below.

Example 3.4 Opening page of setting of Bulgarian anthem for Pat Thomas

Conducting

I realised that in conducted improvisation the individual styles of 'conduction' create a huge variety of responses from the performers. Given that the work would be longer than the first performance I decided to try and encourage different members of the group to conduct different sections, as far as possible matching the potential of the individual to the section they were allocated. I would discuss the method of enhancing the conduction with each conductor to get the desired result within each section - as far as possible leaving them free to develop ideas provided they did not contradict the overall structure.

I would still conduct some sections but would tend to concentrate on those where there was more notation or alternative structuring. I would retain the power to move the piece on by signalling a change of section with the powerpoint display.

Melodies

I used the same store of melodies and anthems throughout - sometimes harmonising and extending them to support sections of the work but also allocating tunes to particular players who could use them as appropriate. The guiding principle was once again the achievement of the maximum variety and contrast within the piece and the exploitation of the sounds of instruments and the particular styles and vocabulary of players. I also distributed rehearsal sheets of fragments of melodies and anthems (see Example 3.1 above). These would be available for a conductor to bring in at will by indicating the fragment and who was to play it during performance.

Structure of performance

The performance on November 17th was structured as detailed in the table below.

What this structure shows is the continued use of contrast through:

- performance forces – often alternating contrast between large and small group

work

- use of dance on selected pieces
- use of scored solos to create a specific atmosphere (for example on ‘Estonia’, ‘Between War and Wealth’, ‘Bulgaria’).
- use of guiding instructions – such as the extremely quiet playing of ‘Lake of Tears’ as against the brash sound required for ‘Armoury’

This use of contrast was subservient to the unfolding narrative of the myth but is comparable to the way opera or more appropriately oratorio has always developed narrative by a range of contrasting expressive techniques – most notable aria, recitative and chorus.

Section	Performed by
1 Fanfares, Warnings, Promises	Orchestra led by Dominic Lash (originally to be Pete McPhail)
2 Estonia (or Threshold)	Pat Thomas (scored piano piece) ; Miles Doubleday (electronic alteration of piano sounds); Orchestra - occasional fragments of accession tunes and anthems Café Reason - arrival of dancers from rear of auditorium
3 Torture Chamber	Orchestra led by Chris Brown Café Reason static watching
4 A Fantastic edifice	Strings play continually and woodwind play a tagged solo
5 A moment of doubt	Chris Stubbs - percussion, Roger Telford - drums , Miles Doubleday - samples,

	Chris Brown - guitar (originally planned to be Pete McPhail)
6 Armoury	Orchestra led by Pat Thomas
7 Between War and Wealth (Got anything nice ?)	Clair Aldington (scored recorder solo) Miles Doubleday and Chris Brown electronic commentary Café Reason
8 Treasury	Orchestra led by Café Reason - Helen Edwards picks up various articles that relate to European imperialism. Each article is associated with a section of the orchestra who play when their object is in use
9 Entrance to the Garden	Orchestra - an arrangement of a Lithuanian tune is played by members of the orchestra Café Reason
10 Garden	Orchestra - continuing from previous section the Lithuanian tune is fragmented by the remainder of the orchestra (started by Pat Thomas) Café Reason
11 Death of Europe	Orchestra led by Miles Doubleday, Bruno Guastalla and Sarah Caird who each sing scored or structured arrangements of a poem by Nicolae Sirius
12	Chris Brown - guitar, Sarah Caird - flute,

Requiem	Jill Elliott - violin improvise on an arrangement of a Lithuanian ??? tune Café Reason
13 The Extent of my Domains	Orchestra led by Café Reason - each of four dancers is allocated a tune. Whenever they move a musician plays their tune. They begin in turn leaving extensive gaps. Ultimately two drop out and two compete and the whole orchestra is divided between the two themes.
INTERVAL	
14 Bulgaria (or Do I recall that melody ?)	Pat Thomas extemporises on a scored piece derived from the Bulgarian national anthem Woodwind (mouthpieces only)
15 Lake of Tears	Orchestra led by Bruno Guastalla Café Reason
16 Springtime behind the Slaughterhouse	Paul Medley plays a melody based on the poem scored for alto clarinet , Bruno Guastalla, Dominic Lash improvise with Paul on the melody Café Reason
17 Accession	Orchestra led by Malcolm Atkins Café Reason
18 Doubt	David Stent - guitar, Clair Aldington - recorders and Chris Hills (tabla) improvise freely

19 Summit	Orchestra conducted by all who have conducted so far - usually two at a time. Café Reason
20 On Parting	Orchestra featuring Pat Thomas - piano, Sarah Verney Caird - flute (originally to be Pete McPhail), Clair Aldington - recorders, Jill Elliot - violin Café Reason -dance

Table 3.2 Structure of November 17th performance – a fuller structure including performance instructions is included with the core scores

3.4 Detailed Analysis of November performance

3.4.1 Introduction

This section contains a more detailed analysis of this performance, as this was the culmination of much of my research work. I have attempted to structure this analysis around key issues that the performance raised - both positive and negative - which have had a profound effect on my practice, rather than a blow by blow account of the event.

I start with the role of notation as this is the core issue for most of my research as it relates to questions 1-3 of the research. I then look at dance which relates specifically to the fourth question and go on to look at how different aspects of the construction and performance of the piece relate to the first three key questions.

3.4.2 Role of notation

As I was working with a group who were experienced in improvisation (both large and small group) I attempted to add in the minimum of extra instruction needed to enable the group to create an appropriate sound base for the different episodes of the narrative. Where in a traditional modernist work there is a body of core material that defines the scope of the work – even if it is substantially transformed, in a large scale improvising work the core is often the style of the participating musicians and the transformation that their styles undergo when placed in different situations and playing combinations. In *Accession* I was using core material as well as a body of techniques for transforming the way individuals used their established vocabulary.

The notation I used comprised a number of elements each with a different function:

Key motifs - anthems and folk tunes.

These were simply the melody lines transcribed for the players in whatever key I first found them in. They could be referenced within improvisation but certain melodies were prescribed within particular sections - notably ‘The Extent of my Domains’ and ‘Accession’.

In ‘The Extent of my Domains’ four melodies were assigned to four different players. The four dancers were designated as controlling the melodies (one for each) and each time a dancer moved the player was to p**l**ay their melody - stopping and starting again with the dancer. The dancers were asked to start in turn with brief periods of movement followed by stasis. This would make the entry of the parallel themes gradual and the dancers would extend their periods of movement as the piece progressed. Eventually two dancers would remain moving and half of the orchestra would join in with each, creating a dialectic as the melodies chosen used complex rhythms (2223 & 33222 – these are no 11 and 3 on Example 3.1 respectively) . Finally one melody would 'triumph' and engage all performers. The opening of this section can be heard on Example CD 01:06.

In ‘Accession’ (Core CD 02:04) the anthem of each accession state was assigned to each

of nine players. The players were brought in playing their melody at a signal from the conductor but told to leave gaps between statements of the phrases of their anthem. At the same time a gradual wall of noise using sustained notes and sustained electronic sound was built up from the remaining players which gradually subsumed each anthem player.

As discussed above (see Example 3.1), a chart of fragments of anthems and tunes was prepared for the piece and I decided to make this available for any conductor to use within the standard conduction. A sign was held up to the player(s) to indicate which fragment to play and the conductor would then cue this in. This was open to any conductor in any section to use and could enable the repetition of the key motifs in different speeds and on different combinations of instruments (the conductor could cue in tempo). It was agreed that these fragments would be particularly important in helping set the scene in the first two sections of the work. Example CD 01:02 is the opening of the second section 'Estonia' where the cello is brought in after a minute to play a melody that was associated throughout the piece with this performer (Bruno Guastalla).

Developed melodies

The tunes used were developed out into semi-composed pieces on a number of occasions whereby a part would be notated for one or more players but other players could respond to that melody freely. This applied to 'On Parting' and 'Springtime behind the Slaughterhouse' where a melody was scored for the flute and clarinet (respectively) but other players were free to improvise in collaboration with this statement of melody. This would provide a controlled contrast to the freely improvised sections.

This contrast was often achieved by the use of simple and diatonic or modal harmony which could contrast with the atonal exploration and extended technique that epitomized the large scale free improvisations.

In fact even where I had notated solo performance I would often create experimental

and electronic sound simultaneously in order to contrast with melodic line. Clair Aldington's solo recorder piece was contrasted with freely improvised electronics (Core CD 01:07); Pat Thomas' use of extended and sustained chords for 'Estonia' was mediated through Miles Doubleday sampling and modifying the sound through using an effects unit (Core CD 01:02); Pat Thomas' performance of 'Bulgaria' was answered by a group I conducted playing woodwind mouthpieces (Core CD 02:01).

Piano melodies

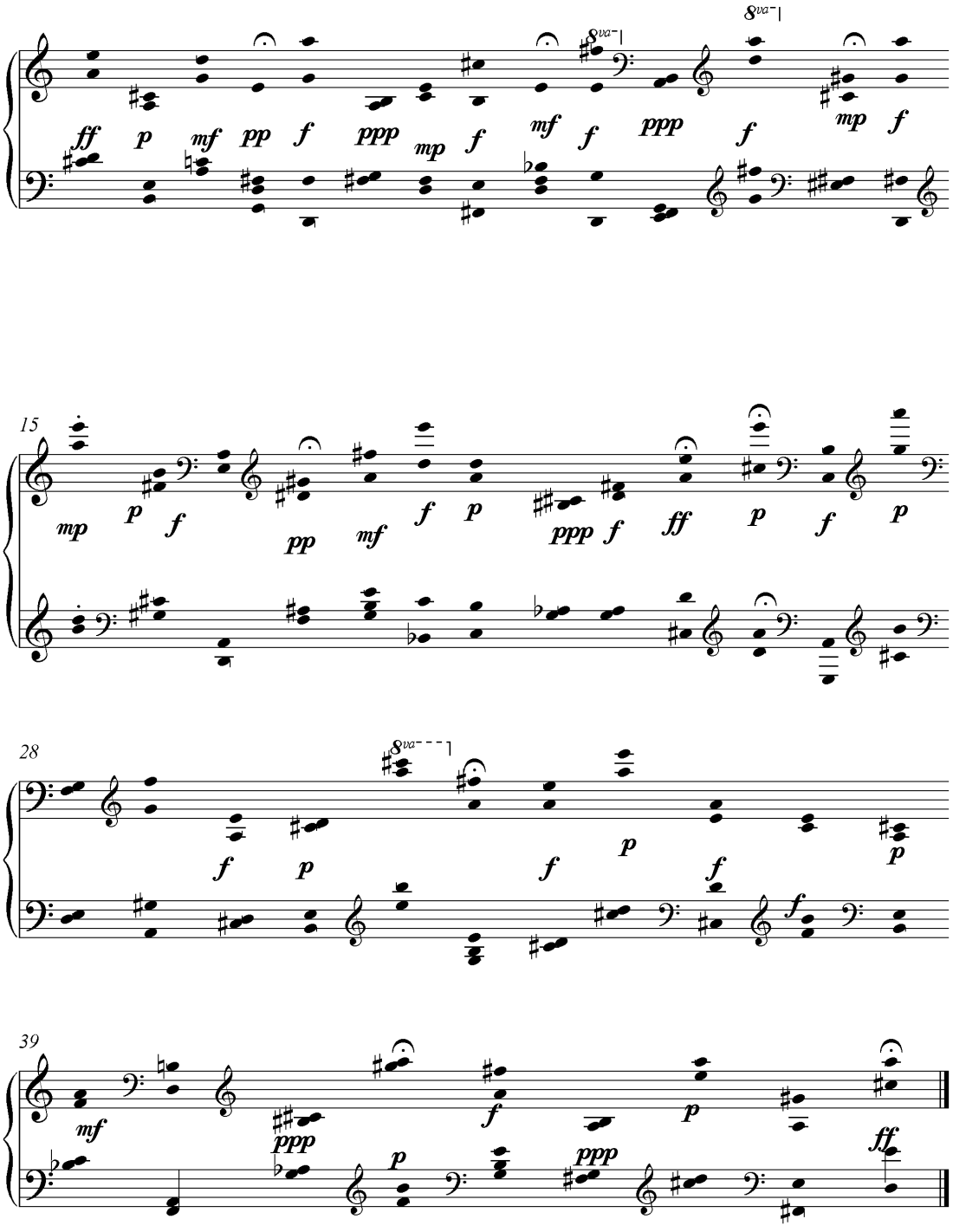
To contrast with a frenetic opening section I prepared a piano score for 'Estonia'. This score was based entirely on the Estonian National Anthem. However, each melody note was harmonised separately and the harmony (plus melody as top note) was allowed to ring for an extended time in the manner of some of Feldman's slower piano works (such as the Last Pieces for Piano [68]). This was to exploit the resonance of the piano in the Jacqueline du Pré building and Pat's ability at controlled playing. Extreme varieties of dynamic and pitch range (some distributed; some clustered; some very low; some very high) further removed the melodic line from a recognisable context. While the chords rang out Miles Doubleday, using a microphone on the piano, processed the signal received and added subtle echo variations whilst I occasionally conducted in the melodic fragments - leaving plenty of space between each.

[68] Feldman, 1998, p. 24 ff. I had become particularly interested in Feldman through my reading of Nyman and through the interview with Skempton – both of which highlighted his radical status as someone who intuitively explored sound rather than using process or defining structure. Although I used the Estonian anthem as a starting point for the creation of this piece the harmonies created were entirely based on experimentation on the piano.

Estonia

For Pat

Malcolm Atkins

EXTREMELY SLOW

Copyright © 2005 by Malcolm Atkins.

Example 3.5 Estonian Anthem score as used for section 2.

For the start of the second half of the piece I constructed a piece ‘Bulgaria’ from the Bulgarian National Anthem. For this I notated an extended harmony for the melody but split the melody into roughly two bar sections. This use of extended harmony was both to recontextualise the melody and disguise its origin as a national anthem but it was also to use a style that would be natural to Pat as a jazz player to exploit. I was seeking to find a starting point from which his particular strengths as an improviser could be developed. Between these sections I notated totally contrasting rhythmic and harmonic sections - often contrasting with the steady pulse of the Bulgarian anthem by a relentless freneticism or a subdued extension. Pat was free to use this material as he wanted but the guiding influence of the scored contrasts was to fashion his structural response. The technique was demonstrated by Pat in a performance of transcriptions of Derek Bailey’s work performed at the Holywell Music Room in October 2005 where he used sections of scored music and improvised from them to create extreme contrasts in dynamics. [69] During ‘Bulgaria;’ I conducted the entire woodwind section using mouthpieces only, punctuating Pat's extemporization with occasional comments based on the rhythms of the national anthem. This was to create a sound world as far removed as possible from the full harmonic world that Pat was exploring through the score as well as contrasting in timbre. The score is included as Example 3.4 above.

The opening of this piece as actually performed shows how he used the approach of the score but embellished it with his own style and imagination. He worked on the principle of extreme contrast that the score used but exaggerated this in his interpretation, this ability to take the guiding principle of the score and extend an aspect of it was a particularly impressive demonstration of what improvisation can add to a piece. But it does assume the composer is willing to trust the performer to create what is needed and for the composer to let go of aspects of the work as he or she has written it.

Example CD 01:03 is Pat Thomas playing the opening of ‘Bulgaria’

Poem melodies

[69] Thomas, 2009

For the first performance I had notated melodic interpretations of the poems ‘On Parting’ and ‘Springtime behind the Slaughterhouse’ for Pete McPhail (flute) and Julian Faultless (French Horn) respectively.

These melodies were performed in November by Sarah Caird (flute) and Paul Medley (alto clarinet).

With both these melodies I asked other musicians to support the statement of the melody and an improvisation based upon it. In each case the initial performer could restate the melody to bring it to an end. I felt this would constrain the improvisation by setting the sonic parameters for its beginning and ending – although this would depend on the opening soloist taking control of the improvisation.

In the November performance I decided not to display the poem lyrics for these poems during the statement of their melodies. I felt it was sufficient that the atmosphere of each poem was expressed by the performer exploiting the style of the melody, dissonant and angular for the ‘Springtime behind the Slaughterhouse’ and poignant for ‘On Parting’.

I felt that the words had a very strong influence on the way I put together the melodies and that this came through in the performance. Performers were also aware of the texts that their melodies were based on as I explained how I had set them.

The development of these melodies was an entirely intuitive process for me and itself akin to improvisation as I sang the words as a basis for developing melody and used no mediating system – mode, diatonic scale, rhythm, chordal basis or constructing system. It was interesting that ‘Springtime behind the Slaughterhouse’ became atonal whereas ‘On Parting’ became modal – neither of which were conscious decisions but both of which determined the style of the melody. I felt that this approach of total engagement with the words that the intuitive approach gave was appropriate for both these settings. This was an unusual approach for me as I would normally look for unifying systems in

a large scale work such as this. However, I felt my role was to bring out the strengths of the ensemble and allow their collective interaction to be the core sound world of the piece. My additions to this were to add varieties and contrasts through notation and any other systems of organisation that I could devise. In many cases I saw my role as composer to be a facilitator.

In addition I was keen to encourage a vocalised response for the poem 'Death of Europe' as one point in the performance where I could explore the use of voice and contrast improvised and scored music for voice. I had felt that the improvised vocals were too busy in the June performance to get over the meaning of the poem. This was one part of the performance where I felt the need for more prescription where in many places I had felt it was better to remove the scoring. This perhaps reflects the problem of using improvising on text as performers focus on delivering a text can lead to an insensitivity to the overall sound.

Example CD 01:04 is the recording of 'Death of Europe' from the June performance of *Accession*. The frenetic nature of the performance gave an interesting contrast in the context of the piece but it highlighted the need for more control of the voices because there was a tendency to repeat the same frenetic style throughout. There was not sufficient dynamic and timbral range because the singers appeared to be competing.

In order to exploit the different potential of each singer and contrast what they were doing I divided up the poem into separate sections for the November performance and included substantially more notation. Although Bruno Guastalla and Miles Doubleday were left to improvise their stanzas I scored fully the response of Sarah Caird and included a piano part for Alex Hawkins to accompany her. In addition whilst each individual sang the other two singers could lead the remainder of the orchestra in vocal responses - leading by the example of giving the performers vocal ideas to copy.

This technique of dividing up the poem between three contrasting performers brought out the text and the changes in emphasis within it far more effectively.

The recording of ‘Death of Europe’ from the November performance (Core CD 01:10) shows the contrasting sections. I much preferred the way the contrasts worked in this re-arrangement but to some extent this highlighted to me the potential of using voice which I had not fully exploited in the whole of *Accession*. This was an area that I would develop substantially from 2006 by my own use of vocal technique.

Garden Section

Two linked sections which I scored extensively were ‘Entrance to the Garden’ and ‘Garden’ - based loosely on the idea of Bluebeard's wife seeing his garden and although at first awed by its beauty, realising that there was blood on the flowers. I sought to give a more environmental reading of this within the context of Europe (the destruction of the environment for a consumer lifestyle; GM crops) just as I had attempted to use the myth as an analogy for Europe but preserved the basic idea of a simple melody (if anything too nice) disintegrating and fragmenting. This message was to be enhanced by the dancers who would effectively spread onto the stage and grow into deformed shapes as a single unit.

For the first performance I had scored a Lithuanian melody which was stated by two players and the disintegration had occurred by the interpretation of visual images of an increasingly thorny garden with musicians being encouraged to interpret the angular shapes of thorns projected - and their increasing density.

For the November performance I reworked the piece for a string and woodwind ensemble - with scored solos to introduce the piece and break up the statement of the melody. This was to supply a fuller sound prior to its disintegration.

From a point indicated by me the remaining musicians would enter and play fast fragments that would dislocate and disturb the original melody which the starting ensemble would try to maintain. Eventually a full scale conflict between the ensemble and the remainder of the orchestra would result in the triumph of the remainder of the orchestra who would fully outnumber the initial ensemble. Although the idea of

disintegration had worked well in response to visual stimuli, after we had realised the potential of this the visual stimulus was no longer needed and the use of fast fragments developed through purely sonic interaction of the performers.

Example CD 01:05 is the disintegration of the Garden melody

Other melodies

Because the resonance of the recorder and its unique tone is so often lost in performance when combined with other instruments I reworked the piece that I had prepared for 'Between War and Wealth' for the first performance for the oboe for Clair Aldington (an experienced sight reading musician) to play in this performance. I had based this work on exploiting a scale used frequently by Bartok and usually identified as Hungarian. This is like a Lydian mode (raised 4th) but with a flattened seventh as well. The piece was structured to move from a rhythmically slow and loose beginning to a rhythmically faster and tighter second half (in the manner of many folk song settings - particularly Bartok's [70]). During the performance two other musicians were asked to improvise freely using electronics to comment on Clair's performance. They were positioned on the other half of the stage so a sense of dialogue (or commentary) was obtained.

Core CD 01:07 is Clair Aldington's performance of the fully notated recorder piece 'Between War and Wealth'.

3.4.3 Role of dance

I have already touched on the role of dance in supporting the Garden sections. The dancers added a visual commentary throughout much of the work which helped the musicians create the atmosphere of the work and the audience to interpret the narrative unfolding of it.

[70] lassù/friss (slow/fast) is the term used for Czardas that influenced Bartok's Violin Rhapsodies amongst other works

The commentary was especially effective in the ‘Lake of Tears’ where the dancers dropped white flakes from the balcony and ‘Accession’ where they used a technique of shoaling [71] to gradually join together and move in unison to enhance the effect of the music in moving form individually stated anthems to a uniform wall of noise through the use of sustained notes and continuous percussion and electronic sound.

In ‘Treasury’ we devised a method for the dancer to control the parameters of sound produced. The idea here (Bluebeard's treasury) was to pick various items that represented Europe's cultural past and hegemony. These items were distributed around the stage and each section of the orchestra was associated with one item. When Helen Edwards (the dancer) related to an item the group associated with it could play. Otherwise they were silent. This was a particularly effective method of creating variety which I had trialled in previous small group performances with Helen. This is discussed and exampled in the discussion of dance under section 4.2.3.

The control of contrasting melodies in ‘The Extent of my Domains’ is discussed in 3.4.2 above and proved a simple and effective technique in creating an interplay between four contrasting melodies.

All these examples demonstrate how dance could be used to control the development of musical ideas and how interchangeable the role of dancer and musician can be when both roles are open to using personal vocabulary within a range of prescribed structures. The swapping of ideas between Ana as choreographer and me as musical organiser was extended to include the exchange of ideas between performing dancers and musicians. This was possible because we had created a structure flexible enough to achieve this.

3.4.4 Role of tonality

The genre of free improvisation is based on the communication of musicians outside of

[71] This technique involves the dancers moving together in imitating the dancer at the front of the group. When that dancer turns all turn and a new leader emerges at the new front

the constraints of pulse and tonality and the exploration of ideas. That said there is an acceptance that these factors can be used where appropriate although they should not be used in a prescriptive way.

Given that much of the base material I was using (anthems and folk tunes) was based on simple tonal exploration I felt that the overall feel of the piece should be a real polytonality. That is, in addition to the panchromaticism of much of the improvisation - and the use of extended technique to create a wider range of sounds from each instrument - there could be a range of keys operating in parallel. I deliberately avoided planning key structures as I felt it was far more interesting to leave the melodies in the original keys they had been created for – even though there was not a huge range of keys- and see how the group reacted to playing in different keys simultaneously or being free to improvise whilst multiple keyed material was presented.

This multi-layering was most pronounced in the sections that explored multiple simultaneous tunes in parallel ('The Extent of my Domains' – Core CD 01:12 'Accession' – Core CD 02:4 and 'Summit' Core CD 02:6). In 'The Extent of my Domains' the section did resolve into a tonal area as one tune eventually dominated and a repeating bass line from the melody was held for soloists to improvise over. With 'Accession' the resolution was to a wall of sustained sound which resolved the clashing melodies in a climax reminiscent of the early method of resolving atonality in Schoenberg's *Erwartung*[72] by filling up the sonic space.

The effect of this multi-layering and the methods of resolution has to be considered in relation to the whole piece. These particular sections were part of a whole work and meant to contrast with the freer improvisation throughout.

In addition the 'Entrance to the Garden' and 'Garden' (Core CD 01:09) were scored throughout for some of the ensemble. But in this case, half the group played a conventionally and 'quaintly' harmonised folk tune while the other half gradually disrupted, fragmented and destroyed it.

[72] Rosen,1975, p 66 discusses the powerful effect of Schoenberg's approach here

As with the use of fragments of melodies throughout, this all pointed to the use of tonality as one technique amongst others. The group responded particularly well to this approach and did not allow the use of scored material to inhibit their other and often more individual modes of expression.

In effect, the fact that the piece was developed in a collage style did facilitate the use of a range of scored and improvised material in a way that would not have been so easy in a more traditionally focused work. However, the use of a limited set of motifs was explored effectively in *Do Geese See God* which relied equally on a mixture of improvisation and notation.

3.4.5 Role of rhythm

The rhythms of many of the tune and anthems were simple but when layered this could produce some interesting results (as it did tonally). In addition I chose two Bulgarian melodies for their interesting polyrhythmic bar divisions. I made these the basis for the end of 'The Extent of my Domains' where the two melodies held by half the orchestra competed as they were led by a dancer each. The resulting rhythmic complexity was extremely effective - especially as within each group soloists were improvising over each melody. In fact this degree of complexity in scoring would have taken weeks of rehearsing to get accurate and be felt by the performers - especially in terms of solo lines.

With a piece of this length I felt it was important to explore some pulsed sections - especially against the background of arhythmic improvisation (which is often the starting point for an improvising group communicating).

This was most prescribed in some of the scored sections - such as 'The Extent of my Domains' and 'Garden' where I made sure a strong and simple bass line held together the group exploration of the scored Lithuanian melody.

However, I also suggested that some sections be rhythmically led. I suggested that

‘Armoury’, which was to be conducted by Pat Thomas, should be based mainly on percussion and electronics and this along with Pat's dynamic conduction gave this section a strongly pulsed feel. Core CD 01:06 is of this conduction by Pat which shows the energy and dynamism that can be engineered by a conductor of his ability.

3.4.6 Role of electronics

As the ensemble included a number of performers using electronics I attempted to contrast electronically processed sound with natural instrument sound in order to highlight the transitions from folk traditions to urban industrialised culture. I positioned all those using electronics on the side of the stage opposite the conventional orchestral instruments (mainly strings and woodwind). I placed most of the percussion next to the electronics with the exception of the drums which I positioned in a corner behind the strings. The reason for this was that the percussion sounds could get lost within the sound of the kit when it was played fully.

In general I set up a dialectic between electronic and natural instrument based sound. In ‘Between War and Wealth’ I provided a scored piece for recorder but throughout this two performers were encouraged to make a commentary using electronics. They were encouraged to use pure sound rather than tonal echoes of the recorder piece and the effect - especially as spatially separated from the recorder was of occasional disturbance and questioning.

Similarly the sustained piano chords of ‘Estonia’ were transmuted subtly by electronic filtering (the piano was in the centre of the stage as this was the only place I could fit it).

The contrast of electronic and acoustic instrument sound was most pronounced in ‘Accession’ where the wall of sound which gradually subsumed the anthems played on the orchestral instruments was begun by a low electronic drone and amplified throughout the electronic instruments first.

3.4.7 Role of free improvisation and minimal guidance

As the basis of the group is free improvisation one of the most important compositional requirements was to establish structures and methods of control that would not inhibit the performers from using the extensive vocabulary of free improvisation that they had built up - both individually and within the group - over a number of years. It was particularly important not to notate so much that the performers were overloaded and not able to engage in developing their own ideas. So, much of the structuring of the piece employed ideas which had proved successful within the improvising group over the previous years and which had enabled the group to collectively respond to a performance requirement.

In general, the group would relate to one another well and build a collective response from an agreed starting point and relating to an agreed subject. However, inevitably there would always tend to be an open-ended nature to an improvisation which might ultimately distract from the aims of the work. Where I felt a section was not successfully contributing to the overall development of the work I could always intervene and either start conducting or end the section. However I felt it was useful to clearly parameterise certain sections so that an overriding style would dominate - especially when dealing with a large group section.

This was confirmed by a Brookes' music student who was on placement at the time of the November performance and actually helped record it. His comments on the work which were included in his final report for the placement included the following:

'The *Accession* concert benefits from tight structuring, each section being almost an individual composition in its own right with its own unique 'feel' and sound-world. This structuring means that the piece as whole sounds quite 'composed' and that the improvising does not become 'samey' or repetitive, as can happen all too easily in a less organised session.' Chris Percival, 2006 Working with the Oxford Improvisers: Observations and Experiences

For ‘Lake of Tears’ the guiding parameter was quiet. No musician was allowed to play beyond the volume of a singing bowl that was played from the beginning to the end of the section. The conductor of this section Bruno Guastalla did try initially and impose some further conduction ideas - that he could request that people played 'warm' or 'cold'. This became difficult to interpret for the performers so he used the standard conduction vocabulary encouraging frenetic, aggressive and fast playing within the parameter of quiet performance to create an effective tension. Core CD 02:02 is a recording of this section of the piece.

For the Torture Chamber the controlling parameter was extremes - this could be high or low volume, fast or slow duration. The idea was to exploit rapid and unpredictable change. Core CD 01:03 is a recording of Chris B**r**own’s conduction of the torture chamber section of the piece.

I tried to exploit the range of conduction styles within the piece in the penultimate section of the work – ‘Summit’. For this I selected two conductors to work with the orchestra in parallel. Each conductor could pass on their role to another person who had conducted earlier in the piece. The players were encouraged to use material they had played earlier – so there was a sense of summarizing sound and approach that had been used up to this time. Core CD 02:06 is a recording of ‘Summit’.

3.5 Final reflections on Accession

In terms of the first three research questions *Accession* explored all techniques of structuring work from free improvisation to staff notation. It showed that the techniques can be used in parallel or interchangeably and that there is no inherent advantage of using notation over improvisation (or vice versa) in constructing a work provided the improvisers involved have developed their vocabulary and technique.

This improvising group employed all the techniques for small and large group

improvisation that we had evolved over the last few years, and without that groundwork and the agreed conduction symbols the piece would not have been constructed so easily. The scored and structured sections did impose a variety that is not easily obtained within an improvising group of this size in free improvisation, although it may be possible to achieve this through intensive rehearsal.

The judicious use of scored material, and minimum instructions to gain effect did enable diversity without inhibiting the group.

The frequent contrasts between solo and small group performance and large ensemble performance were important in creating a work of this size because the power of the large group sound was impressive but would be overpowering if used continually. Because improvisation is often interesting because of the developed vocabulary of performers, this vocabulary needs to be highlighted by small group interaction and solo work.

Because the voices of the musicians are so integral to a collaborative performance I felt that my role was to exploit the maximum contrast between different sections and to allow the full potential sound range of all the musicians to be achieved whether as accompanied soloists, small improvising units or as the full improvising orchestra. This variety of expression is something I will always try and achieve within any large improvising group where the power of a large ensemble sound can only be effectively established by contrast with a much more limited sound.

The large number of sections each with their own pre-defined mood (and players) were run as a continuum with a single break in the middle of the piece (after about 60 minutes of performance). This was achieved by the posting of a new section heading on the powerpoint display which audience and performers could see. This was a vital structuring device for the performers as it enabled them to know exactly where they were (or should be) at each change of section. I wanted to be free to extend sections if they seemed to be working well or finish them if not, and this dynamic control was in the spirit of a semi-improvised piece. As in the first performance one audience member

disliked this indication of change within the piece arguing that the music should establish its mood to the audience without a verbal queue. However most of the audience appreciated the visual prompts and felt they added to the effectiveness of the performance. I would be inclined to use visual prompts and explanations for an audience in this way in future for a performance where a group of musicians are exploring material within parameters. I believe the interest for an audience is partly in seeing the unfolding of the heuristic process. This is often achieved in a conventional concert by the use of a programme note anyway.

The interpretation of the dance group - all wearing wedding dresses and standard butoh white face paint - did give an extra dimension to the work, but this group had frequently worked with the improvisers over the previous few years and had developed techniques for working in parallel. In addition, the approach of butoh is very similar, within the confines of movement, to the approach of free improvisers in using sound. Butoh dancers often use unnatural or dysfunctional movement in their exploration of all the possibilities for human movement. They are keen to explore extended techniques and minimal movement over a long period of time and challenge the basis of what is accepted as performance (these issues are discussed at length in Section 4 of this research).

3.6 Do Geese See God

3.6.1 Introduction

Do Geese See God was written to include a range of musicians as part of a day of new music in February 2006. The idea of the day was to combine ensembles that used conventional composition, electronics and improvisation and encourage local people and students to write and arrange pieces for the different ensembles. To this end I prepared a piece that could be performed by an orchestra (using four sections – high, high, mid and low); chamber group; electronic ensemble (using a mixture of graphics and conventional notation); improvising orchestra; improvising singers and soloists

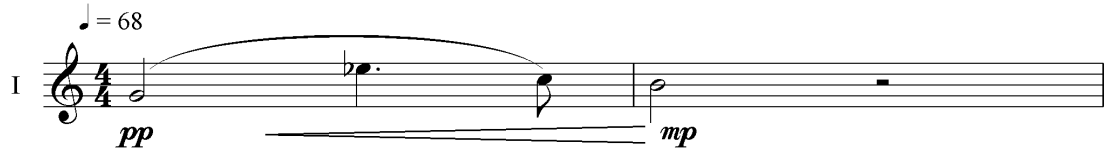
(improvising and notated).

The participating groups would be Brookes Orchestra, Isis Ensemble, [rout], Oxford Improvising Orchestra, Brookes choir, and soloists from Isis Ensemble and Oxford Improvisers.

3.6.2 Structure

In planning the piece I decided that a very rigid formal structure for the notation would give far more scope for the improvisation and so decided to re-use a simple piece I had written for CoMA as a starting point. This work was originally two and a half minutes long and was written as a palindrome. It was flexibly scored in four parts – beginning with a solo and gradually introducing each section of the scratch orchestra gathered to play it. The original work as notated and published by CoMA is included as Example Score 01:02. The score demonstrates the simplicity of the original structure which was an opening section; a short middle section which used a chanted rhythm and reversed half way through; the opening section in reverse.

The work was mainly derived from an opening cell which was continually referenced in all parts (in normal and retrograde form):



Example 3.6 Cell from *Do Geese See God*

Because of the very rigid structure and simple scoring this provided a basis for an extended work where most of the original material could be used for simple orchestral sections (in the standard flexible scoring method that CoMA encourages). More complex music could be written for the Isis Ensemble and their soloists and members of Oxford Improvisers could be relied on to add in varied and complex solos as appropriate. The three sections of the original were simply extended out with a far

longer scored first section with space for improvisation and for graphic scores and a far longer middle section which had a series of rhythmic cells that the participating groups could play forwards then backwards. The third section was again just a reverse of the first although this was less apparent because the improvisational responses to the material tended to disguise this.

I was interested in exploring how far the simple palindromic structure when extended out would become less predictable to the audience when the improvising musicians added their ideas – especially the improvising orchestra. I was keen that it should give a definite form to the piece and a consistent sound world without it being too obviously structured in this simple manner.

3.6.3 Exploration of extended performance space

Because the piece was designed to involve all participating musicians on a day when we were hoping to have at least a hundred attendees I saw much of the work in preparing the piece as a challenge in terms of how I could use the performance space and explore the fifth research question. This space was the main hall at Magdalen College School. I decided to attempt to contrast the different performing groups and performers by surrounding the audience with them. Much of my preparation for the piece was a matter of assessing the performance space and drawing up plans that would enable the piece to work in an extended area.

Figure 3.2 is the layout for the piece as performed. In this an orchestra is at each side of the hall – Isis Ensemble are on the stage, [rout] are on one balcony along with a soloist, improvising soloists and choir in another and some improvising soloists are at the back. The audience is surrounded in the middle and was sat in a diamond shape facing outwards from the centre.

		ISIS ENSEMBLE ***(on stage)***		

[r o u t] I S I S S O L O I S T	**I M P R O V I S I N G O R C H E S T R A**	**A U D I E N C E**	**S C R A T C H O R C H E S T R A**	**S O L O I S T S C H O I R**
	ALEX (ORGAN)	**DOM PAT MALCOLM JULIAN PETE (when not conducting)**		

Figure 3.2 Layout for performance of Do Geese See God Magdalen College School Hall Feb 18th 2006.

Core to this plan was the fact that there was no one focus for the audience. The audience was set up in a diamond shape where four blocks were established back to back. This meant that different performing groups were the focus for the audience but that they would be continually surprised by sounds emanating from groups who were not in their

immediate visual focus.

Each participating group had a separate conductor and I coordinated these five conductors from a central podium – where necessary communicating directly with a conductor.

Because the middle section relied on a steady rhythm that each group could join in with I set up a rhythm section at the end of the improvising orchestra (next to the Isis Ensemble) which would hold a pulse through this section (conducted by Julian Faultless).

3.6.4 Assessment of the performance

Despite the fact that the required performance forces were unknown to me and despite the fact that there was only one hour of concerted rehearsal by all eighty participants, the piece as evidenced by the recording (Core Audio Submission 3.3 (Core CD 03:01)) was successfully performed and well appreciated by a substantial audience. In addition a large number of people of different musical backgrounds including students, local and amateur and professional musicians participated in the creation of a new work.

By scoring for different abilities (more complicated for soloists and the Isis Ensemble, simpler for the scratch orchestra) I utilized the different potentials of the participating musicians. Where people have developed their own vocabulary in improvisation I left scope for that within the piece. This was something that *Accession* demonstrated but which was extended in this work to include a vast range of different participants all at different levels of musical ability. The way that the participation of each group was achieved was by carefully planning where each group or soloist would operate from as well as the parameters within which they would play. So, I saw the planning of where sound would emanate from as of equal significance to what would be created.

Example CD 01:07 is the opening of the piece which shows how sensitively the improvising soloist (Pete McPhail on flute), the improvising orchestra (conducted by

Pat Thomas) and [rout] using graphic scoring were able to respond to the scored sections of the piece, to such an extent that it can be difficult to work out what is scored and what improvised. This was partly effected by the fact that the solos were written as simple lines with elaborate embellishment and that to give clear form to the piece I punctuated it through this section with clear cadences followed by gaps (some of which could be taken by improvisers). What the recording cannot show is the way that for the audience the sound could begin from any direction in the auditorium and that this would enable the range of sound, texture and dynamic to be far more apparent (in the recording some of the mid-range sound becomes difficult to distinguish).

By contrast Example CD 01:08 is the ending of the piece which is an exact mirror (in reverse) of the opening section in terms of scoring. However, the improvising orchestra, improvising choir and soloists were free to change their interpretation at this point and it is interesting how this changes the feel of the notated music at this point which would otherwise refer too closely to the opening section with the use of sounds, harmonies and pauses even if these are reversed from the opening.

This ability to transform sections of scored music was exploited most fully in the middle section where the groups using scored material were mainly playing repeated motifs and rhythms (reversed half way through the section) and the improvising groups were then free to comment over this. Example CD 01:09 is of a minute from near the opening of the middle section where the different groups using scored material are starting to build rhythms over a steady conducted pulse. Interjections from improvisers start to break up the regularity of this as the piece progresses. Example CD 01:10 shows how the improvising choir broke up this rhythm as the section continued. Again, spatial distinction helped in the performance as the choir were positioned at the back of the auditorium on a balcony.

I would say that the prescribed and open elements of this piece worked together in the performance because there seems to be no hesitation in response or tentative playing from any group or individual. This was in part due to careful planning but more than that was a result of the sensitivity and commitment of the performers especially the

conductors and improvising musicians.

3.7 Overall conclusions on both works

After completing *Do Geese See God* I felt confident that I had explored the potential of merging composition and improvisation within large scale work as *Accession* had involved a large ensemble in ninety minutes of performance while *Do Geese See God* had involved eighty performers in a twenty minute piece. Both works had addressed all the issues of how to use different styles of organisation in the continuum from careful staff notation to graphic scoring and physiographic leading to text instruction and interpretation of visual stimulus (including dance) to conducted improvisation and free improvisation. They therefore addressed the first three research questions and showed how all these techniques can be employed to complement one another. Where my questions started from a premiss of assessing whether we should use one approach or another these works demonstrated that they can often be used simultaneously and are a necessary part of the vocabulary of a composer. The knowledge of the styles and approaches of any improvising musicians used in a work is just as fundamental as the decision to use an improvising musician at a certain point in a piece is an organising and compositional decision based in what that individual is likely to add at that point. This is where the composer still retains control of the structure of the work even if he or she is simply introducing a series of improvisers.

My exploration of the fourth and fifth questions was begun in these pieces. In *Accession* I explored dance collaboration and found the techniques of organising dance could be effectively integrated to control music. In both works I explored the use of performance space although this was particularly driven by the sensitivity of Ana Barbour to the use of performance space in *Accession* and I feel this collaboration increased my awareness of how to explore this potential for future works. I now decided to focus more on assessing these questions through developing work for smaller forces including solo collaboration with other artists as this would be far easier to quantify. This is what I will discuss in Section 4.

4 Collaborations with other art forms

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Aims for this section

My main aim in this section is to explore question 4: *How does multidisciplinary collaboration influence the creative process and the outcome of a work?* At the same time I will look at question 5: *Does the utilisation and exploitation of alternative performance space for the development and staging of new work significantly alter the content of work produced?* Because collaboration tends to involve the utilization of alternative space the two questions can be looked at together. The works discussed also give some scope for discussing questions 1,2 and 3 but as these have been the focus of the previous section they will be discussed within the framework of discussing 4 and 5.

I will start by explaining why I have found a particular interest in collaboration with other art forms and why I see it as important. I will then document the development of my practice in this collaboration and how it has been influenced by and has influenced the practice of others. The main focus of this is on collaboration with dance but I have also included some detail on film collaboration and I have concluded this section with a discussion on how I have developed techniques of dynamically using text in improvisation.[73] I will look at the use of performance space in the context of all the work discussed.

4.1.2 Reasons for collaboration

As I outlined in the introduction to the research, I believe that collaboration with other art forms offers a musician a number of possibilities for the creation of new work which

[73] By dynamic use of texts in improvisation I mean spontaneously extemporizing on a given text

are not possible in traditional composition (whether spontaneous or prepared). I have summarised these differences of approach that collaboration offers below:

- The impetus to create new and different work by the introduction of various stimuli to composition and structuring. At its simplest level one art form can lead in the construction of a work and the other arts can support this, as in the tradition of a narrative ordering by textual reference in a symphonic poem or the traditional development of a musical structure for dance. More interesting for me is the possibility of different art forms dynamically sharing the creation of structure by their interaction. In this instance, which can only happen in live improvisation, the participants can move beyond leading and following to create a sympathetic dialogue in which all contribute equally to the creation of the work (see the discussion of *Pierrot* in 4.3.2.2) A further level can be added if the practitioners of the art forms agree to disagree and contradict one another or even work independently in order to undermine or challenge audience expectations, especially in terms of narrative ordering. By narrative ordering in music here I mean the specific conventions for the unfolding of a piece of music through a teleological development to a climactic or concluding point. Even though these conventions have been challenged during the twentieth century they are still a basis that a composer either accepts or rejects.
- The transference of approaches from one art form to another. This can be in terms of one art form creating structures that the other makes use of or of mimicking gesture or material from one art form by another. An example would be the attempt to copy in sound a physical movement – a kind of physiographic conducting; dynamic commentary on a filmed landscape; the use of a standard musical structure – binary or ternary form - even in constructing a dance piece.
- The ability to reach a wider audience than would normally accept experimental, improvised and avant-garde music. This gives performance opportunities that allow a far more experimental approach to the creation of sound whilst still attracting a more substantial audience than experimental and improvised music

events because dance or visual stimulus appears to be more 'audience friendly'. Audiences seem to appreciate work with a level of discord and experimental sound in collaborative performance which they would find unacceptable in a concert. My evidence for this is from my own practice in performances in the collaborations discussed below. The visual seems to make the work accessible. This does not justify the aesthetic choice to collaborate but it does enable the presentation of new and experimental music to an audience who would not otherwise access it.

Further to this I would argue that many of the key innovations in Western art music were stimulated by extra-musical (and often art derived) influences:

- The initial impetus of Baroque music as promoted by the Camerata was capturing speech inflection for its representation in opera. [74]
- Key works of modernism were linked to dance and opera - *Rite of Spring, Erwartung, Pierrot Lunaire*. It is interesting that *Pierrot* and the *Rite* are probably the most extensively played pieces by their composers.
- The experimental music tradition of the 1950's was partially inspired by the interest of Cage and followers in the visual arts as well as dance (Merce Cunningham). Radical movements of the 1960's were equally influenced by visual arts – for example fluxus was heavily influenced by Duchamp.
- Jazz (as the African American art music) was developed initially as dance music.[75]

4.2 Background

4.2.1 Development of my interest in collaboration

My interest in collaboration developed through the opportunities I had to experiment on

[74] I am here referring to the Camerata and their pursuit of the ideas of Ancient Greek music as a foundation for much Baroque practice. I feel that a standard text such as Bukofzer Music in the Baroque Era (1978, p 5ff) a is sufficient to validate this well established point

[75] Again I would cite Grove Online for a validation of this point – see the article on jazz and the section on its beginnings in New Orleans

the MA course I completed between 2002 and 2003 [76] and the way this experimentation enabled me to successfully broaden my vocabulary and engage an audience in my work. Much of this experimentation was based on the traditions established by Cage in the 1950s and as I began to work with dancers during this time it was inevitable that the work of Cage and Cunningham and their approaches to creating work would become influential on my practice.

Since that time I have realised that much of my work has been enhanced by an engagement with experimental and improvisational dance (especially butoh which I have found to have really liberated my practice – see 4.2.4 below) - and through film collaboration. From 2004 I began working regularly with dancers from Café Reason Butoh Dance Theatre and found the process of designing work with dancers opened up new possibilities for me in terms of how I composed and structured my work. Initially I was fascinated by how interchangeable improvising dance and music skills were in improvising ensembles that contained dancers and musicians. This led on to the use of a number of dance derived techniques for structuring *Accession* which I have documented in section three of this commentary.

I have also worked with Barry Reeves (film) and Helen Edwards (dance) on a number of projects which have culminated in a series of films each one structurally led by a different art form (music, dance and film) and I have worked with Ana Barbour on a revisioning of *Pierrot Lunaire* for solo musician and dancer.

Key to much of this collaboration has been the issue of how far work should be developed that follows the narratives (by narrative I mean the unfolding of any thread of continuity that an audience can use to make sense of the art form – whether a traditional story line or a series of connected physical movements or a series of connected images, or a development of a musical idea to some kind of resolution as exemplified in sonata

[76] MA Contemporary Arts and Music (composition option) Oxford Brookes University 2002-2003.

form or the extended jazz solo) or the stimulus of the other art form or vice versa, or how far the development of work should run in parallel with the other art form meeting at performance to give an enhanced and alternative perspective on each art form. This is a particular issue with improvised music and dance because it is so difficult not to be influenced by the other art form in your process of creation and there is a common tendency to support one another in a way that can create predictable patterns of response.

I have included below examples of how this idea of working with and against one another can be realised in a strictly musical context in my collaborations with the Smith Quartet where we explored working together and against one another in my spontaneous exploration of texts (this is documented in Section 4.5). I have chosen these musicological examples because they demonstrate how techniques used in dance collaboration can be adapted for use in purely musical contexts. In addition I have included a discussion of the work of Cage and Cunningham below as their approach is so critical to an awareness of how far we can go in developing music and dance independently but joining the two disciplines successfully in performance.

A further issue that has become important to me in exploring the influence of one art form on another is how far words can be a stimulus for the creation of sound worlds and how the expression of these words in song and recitation can influence the way dancers react or how we view the content of a film. My focus here has been on the spontaneous creation of melody and song from text and the exploration of textual sound in response to the performance environment rather than the more established tradition of crafting songs from text.

4.2.2 Cage and Cunningham, independent creation of music and dance

The possibility of the two art forms of dance and music developing independently, with neither leading the other, is best exemplified by the work of Cage and Cunningham who successfully explored the parallel development of dance and music (and also set design) by the practice of the two only meeting in performance. In addition to the dancers being heavily drilled in a set choreography that would not allow the music to directly influence movement the musicians would be unable to see the dancers during their performance, so even if they used improvised music it would not be influenced by the visual content of the dance. This is expressed by Cunningham as follows:

'What we have done in our work is to bring together three separate elements in time and space, the music, the dance and the décor, allowing each one to remain independent. The three arts don't come from a single idea which the dance demonstrates, the music supports and the décor illustrates, but rather they are three separate elements each central to itself'. [77]

This theory is illustrated by Variations V, where a formal contemporary dance choreography is used over an electronic soundtrack created live by Cage and David Tudor. [78]

At a performance by the Cunningham Dance Company in Oxford at the Oxford Playhouse in October 2004 I saw this tradition in practice with three improvising musician**s** (including Christian Wolff and Keith Rowe) working in the music pit below the stage and improvising for 75 minutes to a collation of Cunningham works performed out of their sight by a rigorously rehearsed troupe.[79] The only point of

[77] Cunningham, 1991, p 137.
[78] Viewed on youtube (Cage. J and Cunningham. M., 2007).
[79] The publicity for the tour described it as follows: 'Celebrating the company's first ever UK tour in its forty year touring history, the company presents an EVENT unique to each host venue, creating an exceptional and original dance experience.

With music performed live by the Company Musicians, each Event combines elements from past repertory alongside new features.' (Oxford Playhouse, 2004).

influence may have been the rhythmic steps of the dancers which did sound out almost as if they had to emphasise their rhythms against the pulses in the music. This performance and the 'happy accidents' of movement synchronizing momentarily or commenting on the music (and vice versa) raised the issue of how far we re-interpret and grant meaning to work [80], an issue that was core to Cage's approach to creating work and is summarised by him as follows:

"We are faced in life with the unique qualities and characteristics of each occasion. . . . Now structure is not put into a work, but comes up in the person who perceived it in himself. There is therefore no problem of understanding but the possibility of awareness."[81]

The musicians I saw were working in a tradition that Cage had established through his role as musical director for the Cunningham dance group. The practice was explored in purely sonic terms in many of Cage's works from the 1950's onwards when he began to explore ideas of removing the kind of teleological structuring that epitomized most art music up to this time from the creation of work and allowing chance procedures to be used in the creation of work. There seem to be two interpretations of this approach. Pritchett[82] explains that Cage reached this point through an interest in Zen philosophy which led him to assert the primacy of assessing sounds as sounds and not within a schema of interpretation. Hamm[83] argues that Cage was following a postmodernist path in his work from the 1950s that was initiated by a rejection of the modernist aesthetic. I see this issue as important because my interest in an inclusive sound world that allows chance procedure as well as a range of genre references is derived from a belief in the

[80] This issue is discussed in Grove Online in relation to Film Music: 'As Claudia Gorbman has pointed out (1987), the emotive power of film music can easily persuade a spectator to suspend objective critical faculties and become emotionally malleable…' There is also a discussion of the anempathic role that diegetic music can create which I would also see as relevant.

[81] Cage in the lecture "Where Are We Going and What Are We Doing," first given in January of 1961 at the Evening School of Pratt Institute in Brooklyn (Cage, 1971, p. 259).

[82] Pritchett,76 quotes Cage 'the wisest thing to do is to open one's ears immediately and hear a sound suddenly before one's thinking has a chance to turn into something logical, abstract or symbolical' (Pritchett, 1996 p. 76).

[83] 'around 1950 he began creating works that broke radically with modernism in their anticipation of stylistic and conceptual matters later associated with postmodernism: fragmentation of style and structure within the art object; the abandonment of narrative linearity; questioning the role of intentionality in the creation of art and challenging the hegemony of Western culture; redefining the role of the listenerlobserver in the perception, reception and use of the art object' from *Hamm, 1997, pp. 278-289.*

equal validity of all music genre and the need to find a way of assimilating the plethora of cultural influences that surround us in contemporary society – ideas that I explored in purely musical terms in *Accession*. This particular strand of postmodernist thinking does not seem to be something that Cage and Cunningham embraced in their work as a key issue as much as an issue that came up in their practice as a result of prior philosophical interests. It is interesting in this respect that Cage was not interested in jazz music[84] or other genres as much as in constructing abstracted sound worlds [85] – this would apply even when he was sampling a sound world from elsewhere and seems to be a result of his philosophy on sound. Cunningham also seems to be reluctant to integrate other and especially low art genres even though much of his aesthetic was related to the incorporation of ordinary movement. Like Cage he seems to extend the vocabulary of high art but it still remains self-consciously high art in that it is specifically geared to the art house environment. In a sense it reflects the comments of Frank Zappa about how we define art [86] by framing it and that the frame defines the work more than its content. It is only if you explore the genre conventions of a low art form that you can really reference that genre and referencing sounds of a genre in isolation of its organisation is often insufficient. It is the way sound is organised within a genre that is significant as much as the style of sound. I now feel that the ability to integrate other genres on their own terms rather than within the terms and framing rules of presentation of high art is far more appropriate to the assimilation of these sound worlds into the complex of different cultural and class interests that surround us in sonic terms in contemporary society. I have ultimately found this detachment from the mundane as mundane and the way they seek to elevate it, to be a limitation in their work and for me has led to a greater interest in forms such as butoh which has a far more dynamic relation with the question of how we relate to the mundane, the kitsch and the populist when we attempt to communicate in a 'high art' genre or setting – mainly because, as a dance form it was attempting to question the hegemony of high art Western values that

[84] Discussed in Lewis ,2004A, p. 137 ff)

[85] Cage asserts that the nature of modern music 'arises from an acceptance of all audible phenomena as material proper to music' (Cage, 1995, p. 84).

86 "The most important thing in art is the frame. For painting: literally; for other arts: figuratively - because, without this humble appliance, you can't know where The Art stops and The Real World begins. You have to put a "box" around it because otherwise, what is that shit on the wall?" (Zappa, 1990, p139 ff)

had been imposed on Japanese culture in the twentieth century. I have detailed some background on butoh below.

4.2.3 Initial dance Collaborations

Although I was originally interested in the approach of Cage and Cunningham it was Cage's approach in particular that interested me because of its link with experimental music. The rigid drilling of Cunningham around choreographed ideas was not something that I was interested in collaborating with as much as more improvisatory dance forms. My interest in this was shown in the way I worked with butoh dance in *Accession*.

In addition to integration with 'conduction'[87] (conducted improvisation) this piece showed how a dancer could be used as a controller for an improvising group where the moves of the dancer could be interpreted as physiographic conduction (as opposed to symbolic). 'Treasury' (Core CD 01:08) is a section of *Accession* where the sounds were generated by the dancer Helen Edwards using specific objects to control sections of the improvising orchestra. Each section of the ensemble (woodwind, keyboards, percussion, guitars, strings) was associated with an object but in each case a single member of the group was expected to interpret Helen's interaction with the defined object. [88] The rest of the group would support that player's interpretation (this was to get round the problem of multiple interpretations by the same section of the same dance movements). The objects used were geraniums for electronic instruments and guitars; picture frame for strings; CD for woodwind; plinth for keyboards; book for percussion. Helen's interaction with the objects was a spontaneous exploration with no pre-planning of which objects she would use, when, how often and in what combinations. The

[87] For a discussion of conduction see the Appendix to this doctorate – Approaches to Organising Improvisation

[88] This technique was developed by Helen Edwards and I in a performance of a piece Meetings with Water where each of four performers would play only when an object assigned them was picked up by Helen (who was dancing).

recording demonstrates how effectively space and contrast can be created by this technique.

I found my work with butoh dancers drew me to new approaches that seemed to open up possibilities for dynamic creation of work that could include degrees of planning and spontaneity as well as degrees of concordance with the dancers. The approaches allowed me to explore all the aims of my doctorate within dance collaboration as I could explore how far to use notation, alternative methods of organising work and leaving space for improvisation as well as the nature of collaboration and alternative performance space.

4.2.4 Why butoh dance has become my main interest in dance collaboration

The approach of Café Reason Butoh Dance Theatre is to use improvisational techniques to build coherent works – often with a minimum of traditional choreographic structuring in that the dancers are given a general instruction or image to work with and use their developed vocabulary to explore this (much as improvising musicians can explore a text instruction through their own vocabulary). It can incorporate elements of modern dance as well as popular dance as the movement material chosen is up to the individual dancer, but the integrity of work is based on the ability of performers to create a poetic interpretation in the moment. By this I mean that whereas the dance vocabulary of many genres of dance (contact improvisation; ballet; kathak) tell us immediately what the genre is, butoh is similar to free improvisation in that it can use gestures and ideas from any genre that have been incorporated into the vocabulary of the practitioner. Pieces can be totally free improvisation or based around the exploration of an idea. This exploration is based on a body of established technique that is unique to each performer – but often developed through improvisational exercises in class and workshop – and that is constantly stretched by the search to establish meaning within the confines and parameters of a particular piece. This heuristic approach and the balancing of personal expression and a prescribed idea is similar to the approach to improvisation that I have adopted. For Café Reason it is often based on particular theories that different

participants have developed through their training by different butoh practitioners and at specific butoh workshops.

In addition butoh can include exploration of the potential of extended work around use of parts of the body, as well as the full potential range of expression of the body (rather than any prescribed and stylised set of movements).[89] This has strong parallels with the ideas of extending the vocabulary of an instrument that is prevalent in freely improvised music even if the derivation of the idea is from a different route.

Butoh tends to avoid rigid narrative structuring (again an interest in contemporary music and improvisation) and often looks to bring in resonance from the unconscious by establishing loose structures for extended exploration (once again this is similar in scope to much of the work of the Oxford Improvisers).

In terms of giving a theoretical framework from the perspectives of dancers I asked some of the practitioners of Café Reason a series of questions which I hope will clarify their approach and which I believe validates the generalisations I have made above.

The respondents were Paul Mackilligin and Paola Esposito (The full text of the interviews is in Appendix 01).

I began by asking how butoh was distinguished from other dance forms.
Both Paul and Paola emphasised this was to do more with the quality of movement than the style of movement in that for Paul butoh is improvised on ‘the smallest most anatomically intimate level’. This is linked to the dancer intuitively controlling the direction of movement as the dancer does not know ‘which direction a body part will move in the next moment’. For Paola movement in butoh seems ‘to be connected to the dancer, a part of her subjectivity, rather than being 'imposed' on her body as mere form’. She later expanded on this by claiming that ‘butoh is in itself a form of research, by being 'aware' or 'present' in the present moment. Another aspect of butoh is "total freedom". This is not to be intended as "anything goes" as in butoh there are a lot of

[89] The way Butoh attempts to use the body to reflect a surrounding reality is derived from the ideas of one of its founders Hijikata that the body is a repository for memory (Klein, 1988, p. 5).

important principles to be understood and implemented'.

This shows parallels with the open ended nature of free improvisation but also the heuristic aspects and the sense of working out a problem or issue, although it is interesting here whether the choreographer and composer can achieve a sense of structure whilst leaving individuals to develop their responses to a situation.
It is interesting that when I asked specifically about how important improvisation was in butoh Paul categorically said it was whereas Paola was more reserved: 'Improvisation as random series of movements makes the dance easily lose power and effectiveness. In this case, to me, it is better to have rules and improvise within those rules'. This perhaps highlights a different understanding of the term improvisation which parallels the issues I raised in Section 1.

In discussing improvisational technique Paul felt that 'patterns emerge and human dancers tend to repeat movement patterns and tend to accumulate certain individual (and group) habitual responses, so the challenge becomes to find ways to break up those crystallisation so that newer, more fluid forms can emerge. That's what 'improvisational techniques' are for'.

He went on to describe a specific butoh technique – butoh-fu in which the participants use images. Dancers' hold particular images in mind - especially images given by another person. One simple technique I like is to decide on a series of images, so that at any one time all the dancers in a group are responding to the same image.'

He concluded that 'In general, stimuli from outside the dancer - especially unusual stimuli which the dancer has no ready-made response for - can all be useful.'

Paola also concurred with the importance of holding an image with which to improvise.

I see strong parallels with the development of techniques for varying improvisation that have been adopted by the Oxford Improvisers in order to break patterns of response and broaden vocabulary.

The responses of Paul and Paola seem to highlight the improvisatory nature of butoh dance and also the range of parallels between the development of improvised music as authentic and spontaneous composition and the development of butoh dance as authentic and spontaneous movement.

I am sure it is because of the similarities that I have found between the approach of butoh dancers to constructing dance work and my approaches to creating musical work that I have found myself drawn to working with this dance form. However, it has been the evolving practice and communication for over four years that has truly established the collaborative way I have been working with members of Café Reason.

4.3 Development of my practice

4.3.1 Development of my practice in creating for large ensemble

My initial experiments in integrating dance with improvised music were conducted in the improvising orchestra which I helped establish in 2005 and in which we initially encouraged dancers to join as equal members. Much of what we did involved using conduction in which a dancer could be conducted on an equal basis to a musician. We then moved on to exploring using dance movement as a method of controlling sound where the movements of a dancer were freely interpreted by musicians.

This use of dance led (physiographic) conduction does pose some problems for a group. In traditional conduction the parameters of who plays when are controlled by the conductor and variety of texture is a key element in fashioning a piece. Although textural variety is not a compulsory part of a large group improvisation it is often a key element in creating an interesting sound world as it enables the musicians to explore their individual vocabularies in different groupings. Without a collective sensitivity to texture there is a danger of large group improvisation becoming consistently dense in sound and as a result tedious. This can apply where the performers are left to interpret the activities/ movements of a central dancer as there can be too much continuous

playing if they all simultaneously create individual interpretations of the movements of the dancer within their own sound worlds. The response to the visual stimulus can easily interfere with their sensitivity to one another in creating a musical world. The musicians have to work at two levels simultaneously, in interpreting the dancer and at the same time listening to the sounds of their musical colleagues and communicating their ideas with them. The tension of these conflicting demands can create some interesting work (it is after all a parallel to the conventional need to interpret a score and simultaneously communicate with an ensemble). However, the integration of movement with sound can be organised around different groupings and allocations, the simplest of which is the use of the 'play like' by a conductor to tell a dancer to follow a musician or vice versa. Other techniques we have tried successfully are:

- Dance led performance where the use of a particular object by the dancer indicates that particular musician(s) should play. This is discussed in 4.2.3 above.
- Performer plays a specific melody when an allocated dancer moves (again used in *Accession*). This technique was used in 'Accession' and is discussed in Section 3.4.2 (Core CD 02:04).
- Use of processional technique. A procession is based on people playing in order (usually left to right or right to left around a circle). This is used to explore different combinations by saying that a set maximum number of people will always be playing (or allowed to play). If the procession is moving from left to right and the number of players is three then the procession will begin with three players nominated (assuming they are in a circle). Each player will cease playing when they are ready to, but only after the player to their left has stopped (or at will if they are the starting player on the left). When one player stops the next player to the right joins in so there is a constantly changing set of three players until the procession has moved around the room. This standard processional of a set number of people playing at any one time from a larger group is totally adaptable to a mixed group of dancers and musicians (as is most conduction provided the instructions to play, copy etc are applied to movement and not sound). In this instance the ordering of dancers and musicians can be significant as the norm would be to intersperse dancers and musicians to prevent pure music

or dance at any one time.

This issue of how far improvising musicians should create a sound world from their own pre-determined ideas (or at least ideas that they determine outside of the influence of the other performers and the environment around them) and how far they should conform to a group and communicative effort is also critical in musical terms alone. A very polite improvising group may perform with sensitivity but ultimately can appear tediously genteel. A group of manic individualists competing to control the sound world can become equally tedious in a frenetic manner. Collaboration with other art forms – especially dance – highlights the need for a range of interactive strategies varying from polite accordance to aggressive disagreement to total disregard of each other's approach.

4.3.2 Development of my practice in small group work

The bulk of my collaborative work has been with a small number of dancers – mainly members of Café Reason and a few artists (mainly film makers). The most significant of these are Helen Edwards and Ana Barbour (dance) and Barry Reeves (film).

This collaboration – often on a one to one basis - has allowed me to develop my practice of accompaniment and recording which has become far more important to me than the previous role of scoring, arranging and conducting.

4.3.2.1 Collaborations with Helen Edwards and Barry Reeves

I will discuss three collaborations with Helen and Barry each of which was determined by a collective response to a given subject which incorporated approaches from each art form. The first, *Identity* culminated in an extended performance and the other two culminated in films.

I have discussed how they evolved because I believe this gives insight into how the

different art forms influenced one another. For example, the sensitivity to environmental space in each one is something that I see as particularly important in film and dance and this affected my approach to the creation of sound. Use of text can be important in music but the idea of creating this through texting one another prior to experimenting in a given location was an idea that developed from our collaborative discussion of both the films and is a technique I would associate with conceptual art in the appropriation of an everyday object and its use for an alternative method of documenting ideas. The same would apply to the rediscovery of value in space that is usually seen as valueless such as the ring road or a multi-story car park. The adoption of these ideas came from the ideas of Barry and Helen as visual artists.

Identity

As a reaction to a seminar day for all doctorate students on the issue of identity in 2005 I started developing a collaborative piece with Helen and Barry using dance, film and music in live performance. We were interested in exploring the notion of identity as it appears in the recording of a performance and how that recorded identity can re-influence performers as they continue to express themselves in conjunction with the recording.

Helen, Barry and I performed this piece over four hours at the OVADA Gallery in December 2005 using one other musician (Bruno Guastalla on cello and bandoneon), myself (violin and keyboards), Helen (dance) and Barry (pre-recorded and live film).

The performance was structured around the continual revisiting of material developed in improvisation for the performance or during the performance. Barry made film of Helen and I improvising during the performance which he edited and projected without sound at key points later in the performance. I attempted to remember what I had played when filmed and use that as a basis for much of the rest of my exploration. At four times during the performance Barry filmed the performance against a backdrop of the previous film he had made of the performance. The filmed performance was projected and became part of a composite image on a large white wall that ultimately

encompassed four visual layers.

Bruno recorded sections of the performance on mini disk and played this back for us to accompany at several points. Variety was further achieved by each performer working in solo, duo, trio and quartet as well as interacting with previously created images and sounds.

Example DVD 01:01 contains extracts from the performance of *Identity* which demonstrate the way material was overlaid in the space through recording and re-projection of earlier parts of the performance. This shows how the piece was used to explore the use of alternative performance space but also the way visual layering could be created in a way that paralleled sonic layering. The two aspects of sound and vision were totally integrated in this way

Our choice of position was integrated into the performance so that the dancer was projected in a recurring image each time there was a projection. Our white costumes as musicians served to allow images to be projected onto us.

The size of images and the volume of sound were designed to give the work a powerful presence within the space so that even if the audience came and went (as we expected them to do) they would be strongly affected by the piece.

This project showed how techniques of musical and visual organisation could be used in parallel and complemented one another, especially in the overloading of sound and vision.

October in Oxford

The film *October in Oxford* was created as part of an ongoing collaboration which we originally entitled *Limbs* but have recently renamed *Reconstruction.*

For this collaboration we have used a range of techniques in addition to textual exploration. These included the intuitive development of a visual response through film

and the design by Helen of key positions to frame and develop the work – a kind of choreography of stasis. The textual exploration initially involved finding a range of poem texts that related to the subject. These were then used as a basis for improvisation and the creation of a collage of different resonances of the subject through vocal delivery. This combined effectively with the formalistically developed poses that Helen had engineered. A further development was to use message texts that the three of us sent round over a period of a week and accumulated into a set of texts for improvisation.

Many of the ideas we were exploring were a continuation of what we were exploring in *Identity*. However, the focus had moved from a more internalised perspective in regard to personal memory to an externalised material perspective on how our physical presence interacts with the environment around us. We were particularly interested in the way different communities extend their physical presence (their metaphorical 'limbs') through the use of transport networks (such as the ring road or the Ridgeway) and buildings (such as a disused abbey or a car park). Memory was equally important here – especially in the use of texts which we both found and created ourselves – but it was linked to the memory and resonance that was created by material objects. These issues seem to be particularly relevant to filmic observation of the environment as well as the physicality of dance in a given space. I felt the impetus for choosing space to explore came far more from Barry and Helen and the art forms they were operating in.

October in Oxford was created by Barry from footage taken in the Westgate Car Park at 5.30 in the morning. This footage of Helen was taken to the accompaniment of me playing violin as well playing a prerecorded soundtrack on my car stereo. So, the creation of the film material was through an interactive improvisation between dance and music in an unusual (and at the time) deserted space.

When Barry came to edit the film he structured it to use the prerecorded soundtrack and chose improvised dance and shots of the car park that worked with this sound.

The soundtrack was created from the use of message texts which we had sent to one another on the subject of 'Limbs' and which I had collated. I improvised on these texts

and created vocal lines for them which I then recorded in a collage of voices. I tried to balance the use of vocal ideas in expressing the texts with the use of electronic sounds which I felt reflected the desolate urban landscape of the car park – especially at a time when it was not in use. The soundtrack represented the collation of spontaneous improvisation on text (even if that was achieved in my studio) with a clear structural development that enabled the collage of sung text messages to inter-react with electronic sounds. In effect I was using found material and creating a structured commentary from that and I saw the approach as merging ideas of collage (in the use of multiple layers of text) and structural development.

Core DVD 01:01 is the film *October in Oxford*.

The development of images in the film was determined by the development of the music which followed a traditional shape of using two arcs where it built in intensity and density of sound (followed by an expected lull in each case).

Reconstruction 3

The film *Reconstruction 3* was created by Barry prior to the creation of the music and was shot in two parts separated by six months under a road bridge that crosses the Thames south of Oxford. During the filming I improvised music based on texts that we had sent one another during the weeks previous to filming.
When I received an edited version of the images I created a soundtrack in three stages. First I played the film on a laptop and improvised a piano accompaniment. I then set up a second layer of accompaniment where I improvised singing the contents of the message texts we had created over the piano track whilst viewing the film.
Finally I added the sound of traffic going over the bridge that I had recorded during the filming.

Core DVD 01:02 is the film *Reconstruction 3*.

The different outcomes of the two films seems to represent the different influences of

the two locations on both works as well as the way different art forms led the creation of each. *October in Oxford* was led far more by the music as I had created a soundtrack for the film prior to its editing. The soundtrack seems to have fashioned the way the images were edited in the film – especially in the creation of intensity throughout it. In contrast in *Reconstruction 3* the creation of sound for a completed film led to a far more reflective approach where the layering of different sound sources avoided a teleological development but served to support the images given at the time. This perhaps reflects Barry's approach to film making which is less narrative driven and tends to focus on sustained exploration of a few images. It shows how a reflective approach to one art form can influence another.

4.3.2.2 Collaborations with Ana Barbour – Pierrot Lunaire

The other key collaborator in my work has been Ana Barbour (dancer). Although we have developed a number of works together and will develop more, the key work I will discuss is our setting of the *Pierrot Lunaire* poems by Giraud and their translation by Hartleben and use by Schoenberg .

For the Pierrot exploration (which also included a film maker Peter Green for some of the project) – we were consciously referencing the work of Schoenberg in *Pierrot Lunaire* as well as the Pierrot poem cycle by Albert Giraud and translated by Otto Hartleben that he based his work on. In addition we developed our own improvisational responses both to the texts and to each other's responses. We were interested in preparing the work for live performance but were requested to prepare the work for the Dispatx web site [90] and so prepared a series of films as part of our exploration and development of the work. This project explored all the questions of the doctorate: it related to 1 and 2 in using a mixture of notation and improvisation; 3 in covering issues of allowing space for improvisation; 4 in assessing the influence of multidisciplinary collaboration; 5 in exploring different performance space – theatre and art gallery and internet – for disseminating work.

[90] These films were available at the Dispatx web site which has since closed down.

We developed our own interpretations of the poems through a process of translation and comparison of different interpretations as well as use of the German and French texts of Hartleben and Giraud [91].

Background

We had both been interested in exploring the Pierrot figure from the Commedia del Arte and had begun work on this independently before we realised we shared this concern. I was particularly drawn to the figure of Pierrot for the representation of the lost masculine – particularly relevant in contemporary society where the concept of masculinity is so confused in our questioning of traditional patriarchy. The fragility and confusion of male desire in the light of abstracted and falsified projections of the feminine has always been with us (especially at the start of the twentieth century) but is particularly striking in the world of the MTV generation. The fragmentary and surrealist nature of Giraud's poems is an excellent basis for a contemporary exploration of this subject because further fragmentation and narrative layering seem a natural extension of his original endeavour and of Schoenberg's melodrama based on Hartleben's translations of them.

The power of the Pierrot figure is attested to by its prominence in Western culture in the past – whether through its inclusion in Opera Buffa, paintings and music of the early twentieth century or even the figure of Chaplin. Our revisioning of it through both studied and intuitive response aimed to effect an audience even when it was unaware of how far this archetype permeates our cultural past and present.

Method of collaboration

[91] For Hartleben the German text was available in the various scores I used. Translations I used were : Dunsby's translation of Hartleben in *Schoenberg:Pierrot Lunaire* (Dunsby,1992); the translation supplied in the Universal Edition publication of the reduced score (Schoenberg, 1950); translations supplied on the web site Pierrot Lunaire A Study Guide, 2003. For Giraud the source was an online version of the complete poems (Pierrot Lunaire,2010).

Our method of collaboration has tended to be based around different creative approaches that seem to reflect our personal creative methodologies rather than anything specific to the art forms we use.

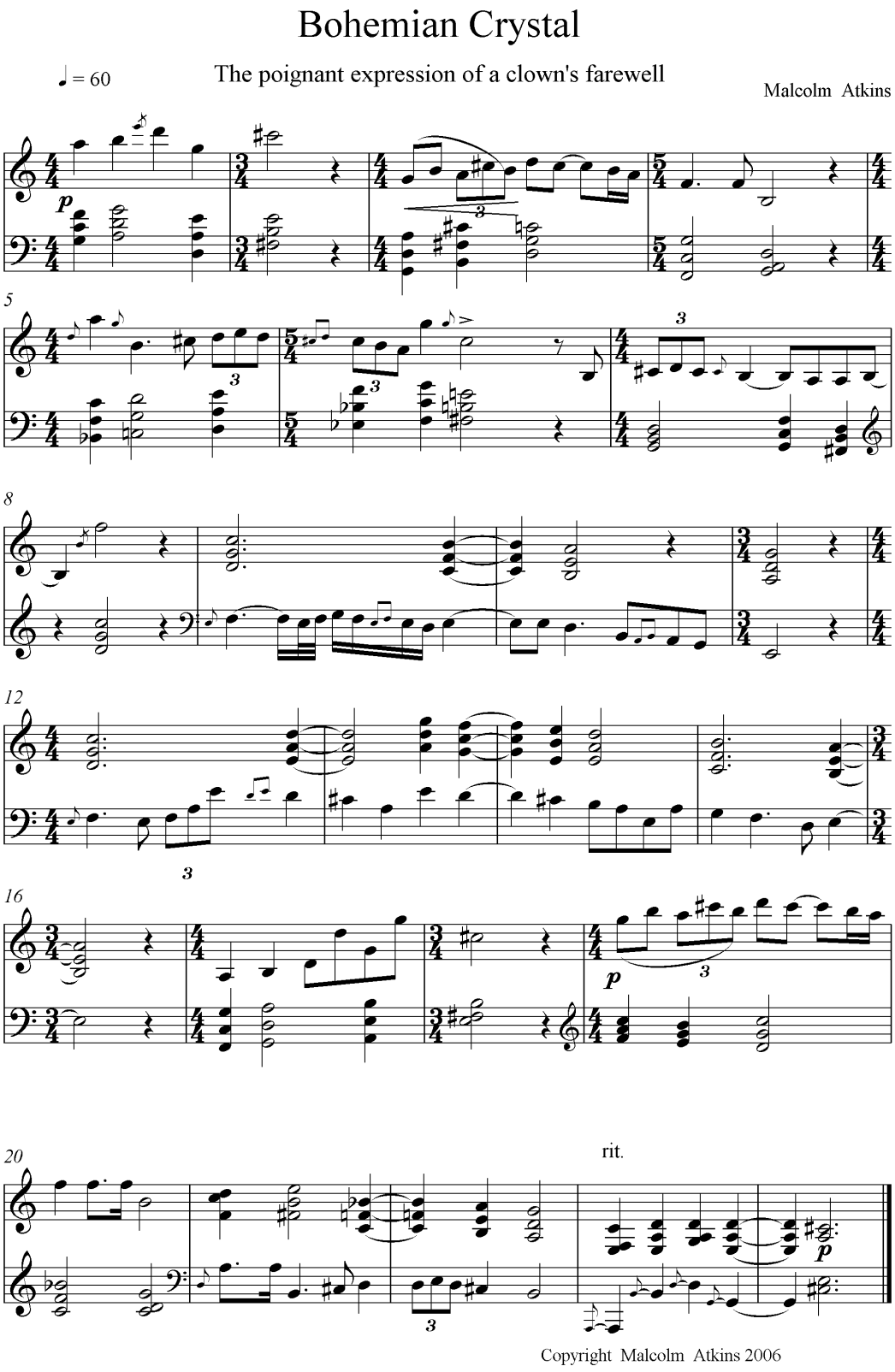
I tend to use a rational and structuring approach by which I mean I start from quantifiable processes rather than from intuitive response, using traditional compositional techniques as well as ideas and devices that have developed in the experimental music tradition from Cage onwards. These would include:

- the echoing of Schoenberg's three part structure (the poet's ecstasy; disillusion; nostalgia and reconciliation with the past) as an overall structuring technique which perhaps conforms to an archetypal arc shape with the greatest intensity reached at the end of the second part.
- The quoting of Schoenberg's melodic lines but their transformation through the variation of backing. To some extent I would see this as an exploration of the idea of 'found' material (as perhaps this whole project was).
- The use of parallel threads of text. As an experiment I prepared two musical responses for Ana to dance to. In both of these I used two poems simultaneously and developed material from a setting of a Giraud poem whilst referencing Schoenberg's setting of a Hartleben poem at the same time. Thus the opening film was based on Giraud's poem 'Theatre' (for which I created a simple melody played instrumentally) whilst I juxtaposed this with Schoenberg's melody line for 'Mondestrunken' which I played on melodica with a full electronic backing. The final film was based on a setting of Giraud's 'Bohemian Crystal' which I juxtaposed with Schoenberg's setting of 'O Alter Duft'. In this last case I deliberately juxtaposed keys and sung both poem settings to create a rich harmonic texture. I sung the entirety of Schoenberg's melody line in the original scored key. However, the fact that it is sung rather than using the Sprechstimme technique and the fact that I added simple harmonies transformed the feel of this melody. I have included my scored setting of 'Bohemian Crystal' as Example 4.1 below. The recordings of both these pieces are Example CD 01:11 and 01:12.

In contrast Ana tended to use a more intuitive approach, often using the texts and their resonance as a starting point. In terms of the poem texts she found a series of key phrases from throughout the poems which she felt would be the basis for short explorations. In fact these key phrases became far more useful than the entire poems because they tended to highlight key themes which we could explore together.[92] These lines could be used to create melodies and incantations as well as the inspiration for particular movement and sonic exploration. We used these phrases for much of our initial rehearsal and ultimately for the development of some of the films. Where the music was often collage based and fragmentary Ana would seek to express through movement the essence of fragments of text that we chose to work on. I would also extemporise on these textual fragments in live improvisations with Ana.

Ana described her approach to the collaboration as follows:

'In some sections Malcolm pre prepared the music and I responded in the moment. In others I took a key image or key images/phrases from a poem in the series and allowed the dance to build from that starting point. Other times we both read the poems aloud as preparation and then jointly improvised responding to each other live. Further explorations drew on initial improvisations where one or other or both of us was happy with an outcome which we then attempted to recapture/ incorporate .
As a series it was important to me that there was contrast in mood and texture/dynamics between different pieces. I used lighting to this effect too to set a tone/mood within which the improvisation could take place. I would also feedback to Malcolm the sounds/effects/musical phrases that I had found helpful to me in terms of generating new movement responses.

[92] I would see this technique of finding key images in the text as related to butoh-fu as described by Paul Mckilligin above.

Example 4.1 Bohemian Crystal

I had a tendency to want the music to support the dance -or rather support me in my attempt to communicate a particular mood or idea. At times however the contrast between what Malcolm chose to play and what I 'wanted' dynamically would be in conflict. In performance this at times led me into new territory with a spontaneous opposition/contrast and in fact enabled me to find new movements and intense expression.

Malcolm seems to begin with a big picture/structure which he fragments and layers whereas my general approach is to begin with a small detail or single image from which new material grows. I don't like to theorise or analyse what is going on much. What is important to me is that the expression in the moment is strong and authentic and that the outcome 'works' artistically.'

Inevitably in the process of live creation of work we tended to draw one another into our working methods and this opened up a range of new possibilities from large scale structuring to detailed exploration of key elements. The preparation of a musical backing for two of the filmed responses (as detailed above) was contrasted with the way I let Ana's movement define my response in many of the shorter films based on fragments of text. We also explored ideas of ignoring one another's responses and working in parallel through ideas of using a pre-prepared melody and movement. The response to 'Eine Blasse Wascherin' ('A Faded Laundress') using a simple repeated melodic line and a pre-planned sequence of movements demonstrates how difficult this is to achieve. The music and movement seem to be carefully aligned even though they each followed a pre-prepared plan. [93]

Preparation for live performance

Following the creation of the filmed responses we developed the work for live performance, building on the material we explored for the films. The work was performed as a forty minute piece at Oxford Brookes Drama Studio on October 19th 2008, at the O3 Gallery in December 2008 and in Chipping Norton Theatre on 28th January 2009.

[93] This is the second section of the DVD of the Pierrot performance at Chipping Norton

For this performance we structured the work as detailed in Table 4.1 below.

Act One - Explore love lost, sad moon struck clowning

Time	TEXT REF	MUSIC	MOOD
5	Theatre / Moondrunk	Set melody-melodica Reggae pulse-tutti	Whimsical Shift Whimsical with undercurrent
4	Columbine/ Faded Laundress/Madonna	Voice,piano, electronics. Faded laundress Columbine Madonna Faded Laundress	Plaintive/Mournful
4	Chopin Waltz (Dandy)	Ana plays a few bars on piano. Rhythmical staccato-violin pizz. Use sustained voice to lead into Dandy	Contrasting pos and dark

Act two - Explore the depths of spiritual despair

Time	TEXT REF	MUSIC	MOOD
4	Night	SILENCE THEN Fixed high descending repetitive violin	
7	Walk to the scaffold – red mass; gallows; beheading;crosses	Drone- Pulse – builds in intensity; Use bass line	Intense climax of the piece
3	Prayer to Pierrot	Laughter comes in over bass line from ‘Walk to the scaffold’	Disturbing

Act three - Reminiscences of slapstick, love and home (small interludes breaking up recurrent home coming theme)

Time	TEXT REF	MUSIC	MOOD
1	Homesick	SILENCE THEN Ana sings short melody Fast	Whimsical
2	Journey home		
2	Duenna	Harpsichord – use faded laundress theme on harpsichord	Love lorn
1	Journey Home	Repeat loop and continue to build	Longing; nostalgia
3	Bohemian Crystal/O alter duft	Tutti. But at end leaves a few notes sounding and just melodica	Melancholic.

Table 4.1 Structure of Pierrot for Chipping Norton Theatre performance.

This structure enabled us to explore all the facets of the work that we felt were crucial to Schoenberg's interpretation and allowed us to develop the ideas for their contemporary relevance.

Merging of scored and improvised music in Pierrot

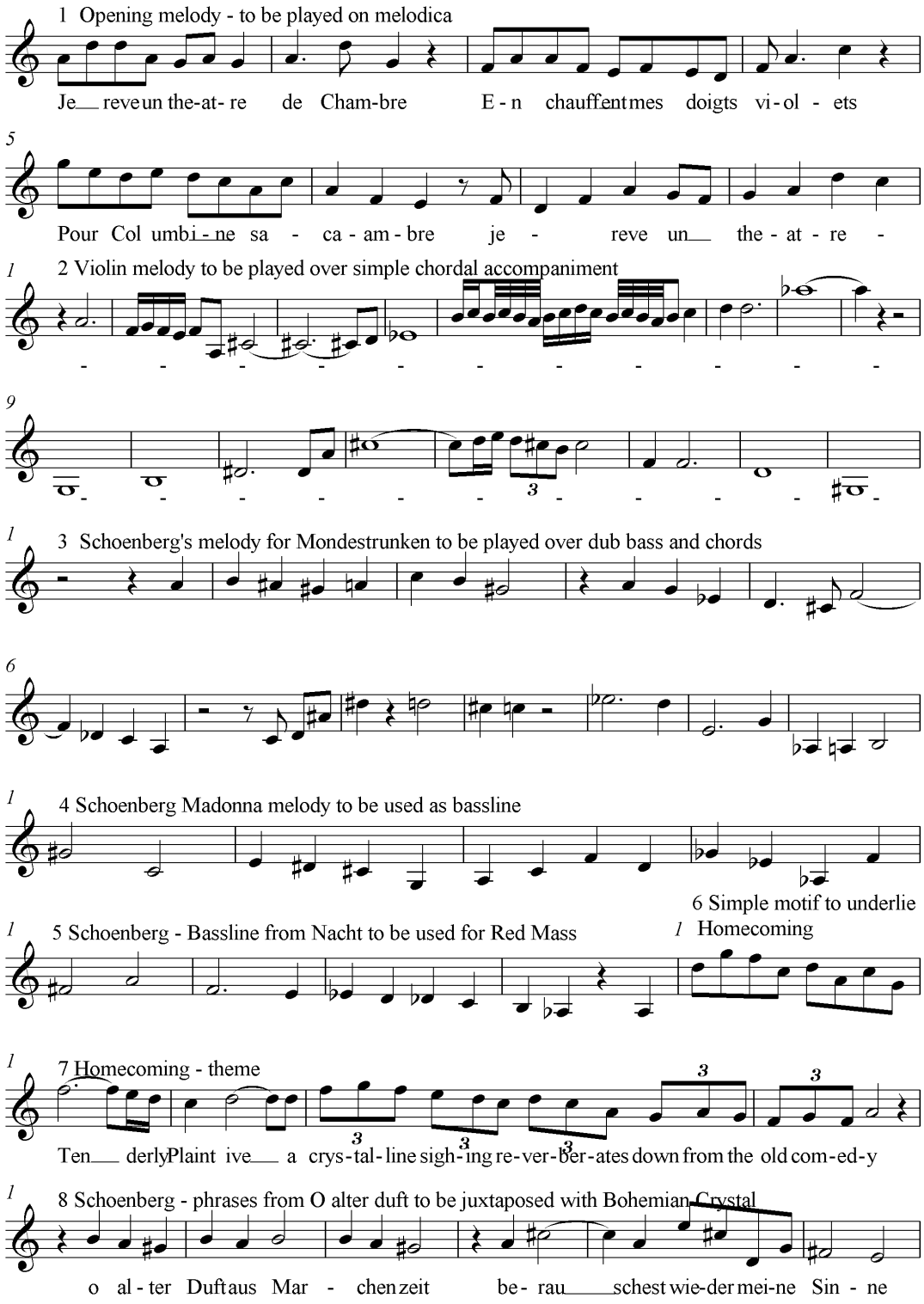
Because this piece was used to explore the aim in my doctorate of assessing how far we need to score a work I have detailed the extent I scored the work and how far I relied on extemporization.

Although I used a series of melodic and motivic extracts from Schoenberg I attempted to juxtapose this with original melodies and motifs that I had written. The reason for this was to contrast the complex expressionist melodic lines that Schoenberg developed

with simple melodies that reflected the far more playful feel of Giraud's poems that seems to be lost in the selection and in Hartleben's translation and Schoenberg's setting. I composed simple repetitive melodies for some of the texts . Example 4.2 below is a sheet of core melodies from Schoenberg and from my own experiment that I used as an aide memoire in performance. This reflects the way the piece developed from both scored and improvised responses as discussed above and also shows a similarity to the techniques I used in *Accession* (documented in 3.3.3).

Many of these melodies were then used as a basis for improvised exploration but they did give a context for creating a definite mood around a particular section of the piece and enabling a macro structure to be created.

I used the ideas of juxtaposition of the opening and closing poems as discussed above in the live performance. These were often simplified because of the requirements of live performance and response to the dance. In particular more space was left in the opening by the fact that I played the opening melody on melodica and walked through the auditorium to where my equipment was set up. In addition because everything I played was created live on stage I needed to structure the work so that I could add in parts and save them to effects pedals as part of a dynamic build up of material. I also found in rehearsal that the use of dub to support the Schoenberg melody was a more interesting contrast than in the recording I had made.

Pierrot Lunaire - core motifs for performance

Example 4.2 Core Motifs used in Pierrot

Performance set up and parameters

As mentioned above, my approach to the live performance was to create all sound dynamically even if that meant that I recorded it onto effect pedals from which I could recall it and add to it during performance. This inevitably had a huge influence on how I created the piece and created a number of limitations that using prerecorded sound would have avoided. However, the advantages for the audience were considerable as I became an integral part of the performance and was visible throughout creating from scratch and modifying the sound world I used.

In fact frequent rehearsal became necessary not just because of the need to rehearse the music but also the need to rehearse the changes in use of equipment which became extremely intricate in certain passages.

The equipment I used is detailed below:

- Two electronic keyboards (Roland XP10 and Yamaha 120).
- One electric violin (Yamaha SV-200)
- One acoustic violin.
- Melodica (Hohner Student 32 Note).
- Headset microphone (Audio Technica ATW-701H Active- Wireless Headset Microphone System).
- Loop pedal **(**Jamman Looper).
- Guitar multi-effects pedal (Boss ME-50).

All the electronic instruments I used as well as the microphone were routed through the effects pedals so that I could create a layered sound with voice, violin or keyboards.

This was the set up I used at Chipping Norton theatre. Example CD 01:13 is a section from a live recording from May 2009 which demonstrates the way the layering was used for the section on Red Mass. A studio recording I made of this section as part of my development of ideas is recorded as Example CD 01:14.

By comparing the two examples it is possible to see the way live performance necessitated the creation of layers – starting with the bass line which was lifted from Schoenberg. The conclusion of this piece in manic laughter brings the middle section of Pierrot to a disturbing conclusion.

Role of notation

The choice of techniques to use was one that evolved through rehearsal and experiment and notation was used along with recording in order to facilitate the repetition of what worked whilst leaving scope for development and enhancement.

I would often seek to memorize key motifs and ideas anyway in order to make performance less cluttered with scores – I had enough to focus on already in terms of using a range of equipment and effects.

In addition I would often improvise word setting in rehearsal and performance after stating a melody or rhythm that had been notated. I found that the melodies created gradually became set and could be notated after they had been developed in this way. That said I would feel free to alter them and develop them in performance – much as in khyal or thumri singing the mimimal notation of a bandish can be used as the basis of an extended improvisation. [94]

In this sense I feel that my attitude towards notation has evolved to a point where I see notation as a method to try and pass the minimum information necessary in order to recreate a certain style of music. This is dependent on my memory of how I have developed the piece before; what has worked; what text or words I need to use; what instrumentation I want to use; what scales or organisational material I choose to use.

The memory of a particular chord progression may be the starting point and this may be the most useful aspect to notate. For example the piece ‘Theft’ evolved from an improvisation around two clustered chords. When I listened back to a recording I

[94] In these genres the bandish (melody) alone is notated and the performer can refer to this as a starting point (Clayton,1996).

decided to make these clustered chords the basis of the piece because they contrasted so effectively with the preceding piece – based on 'Night'. I have found these chords easy to remember (as well as their rhythm) and I create this on a loop to begin the piece. I then use the words as a basis for improvisation over this simple repeated chordal pattern. I would only feel the necessity to notate this chord pattern as a way of quickly finding my way back into performing this piece in the future given the possibility that I might forget it if I did not perform the work for a while. It would not be set in stone as a definitive guide but rather serve as an aide memoire.

For the piece based on 'Night' I would always start with repeated flurries of high violin playing which would be looped to create an unsettling and scratchy effect. This again evolved through experiment and a style of sung melody evolved around setting the words over this effect. When I attempted to tie down the violin part to specific motifs the piece lost energy and I reverted to keeping it un-notated as the choice of notes to play was less significant than the timbral and textural effect of the style of playing. The original version of 'Night' as improvised to a film for Dispatx is included as Example DVD 01:02. A studio recording that reflects the evolution of the melody is held as Example CD 01:15.

Where notation has been most useful is in referencing Schoenberg's music – even though these references are often disguised by the context in which they are used – or referencing simple melodies that I have created to contrast with Schoenberg or with the textural and intricate layers I create in improvisation.

This effect of contrasting the scored and improvised is something that I have developed further with the band Nonstop Tango. Example CD 02:05 is of the band performing a song where I use the score of a Morton Feldman piano piece, the first of the Last Pieces[95] as the starting point for a 'meditative funk' piece where the singer Miles Doubleday creates a very personal song over the groove created by the band under my casual interpretation of Feldman. The song evolved from the use of the Feldman piece through rehearsal which tied down the rhythm and vocal line – although all aspects

[95] Feldman, 1998, p 24.

including my interpretation of the score are variable around mood (and the available pitch ranges of my keyboard).

Core DVD 02 is a recording of the entire performance of *Pierrot* at Chipping Norton Theatre.

4.3.3 Exploring narrative the Orpheus project with Café Reason

I explored the idea of how far we could use an established narrative in the latest Café Reason production which I suggested should be a collaboration between the dance group and the improvising rock band Nonstop Tango. I was particularly interested in the idea of Café Reason using a narrative thread as the basis for their work and felt that an archetypal myth such as Orpheus would be an ideal starting point for a collaboration. This was partly because of the importance of this myth to the Western operatic[96] and musical tradition but also because the myth has so many explored outcomes, especially within the Western music tradition, which often represented the ideas of marriage and relationship of their time.[97]

The work was developed through rehearsal and experiment – often by my solo accompaniment of the dance in rehearsal. We would then review progress and build structure from this.

As an example of this process of development of the work I am presenting the video of a key scene for which I recorded the music and added it to the filmed scene. The scene was filmed with an improvised accompaniment which supported the dance. The film editor Darius Dziala then created a film from the footage and I reworked a musical accompaniment for the film using ideas from the previous improvisations This is held as Core DVD 01:03 (it is also available on the Café Reason web site (Because I Love You, Dir Dariusz Dziala, 2008)).

[96] The Orpheus myth is integral to the Western operatic tradition (from Monteverdi to Gluck to Birtwistle) as well as the balletic (Stravinsky) and the poetic (Rilke),

[97] This applies particularly to Monteverdi's Orfeo which is particularly significant as the first opera in the Western canon. Monteverdi originally had Orpheus torn apart by Bachantes but modified this ending to have him set among the stars with Euridice (Whenham, 1994, p 57)

The scene is of Euridice's journey from the underworld as she follows Orpheus who is forbidden from turning back and looking at her on pain of losing her again. This scene was developed by Café Reason using a spiral of salt which comes to a point at the feet of Orpheus who stands centre stage. Euridice travels around the spiral and as she does so Orpheus keeps turning his back on her without walking away while she gradually approaches moving round the spiral – desperate to get his attention. This revisioning of this key part of the myth worked because it implied that the frame of reference was Orpheus' psychological state and highlighted the contrast between his willing neglect that caused her first death and his unwilling avoidance of her here which he is unable to maintain (and thus causes her second death).

In terms of the found material that I developed for this scene (both for initial improvisation and for this recording and for the live accompaniment) I began by exploring the use of the poem 'Because I Love You' by E. E. Cummings[98] – which ultimately became the name for this scene. In fact the resonance of just this phrase became the deciding material for the music as I developed a simple repetitive vocal pattern over the word 'because' which I used as the basis for harmonization and rhythmic development. The poem was part of a set of resources that we had gathered because we collectively felt they were relevant to our exploration of the myth (this poem was supplied by Jeannie). These resources , which included texts we had written ourselves, were at hand to use in rehearsal. For the subsequent performances of the work I would continue to develop material that I prepared for the film through improvisation with the band Nonstop Tango. In addition, I referenced Dowland's Flow My Tears [99] as well as including a clichéd call and answer of the two protagonists.

The film shows how a narrative unfolding in physical theatre can be supported by a music developed from found material (such as the given poem and references to other love songs) and how the resonance of these references is itself shifted by the collaboration with film. In fact, as with *October in Oxford* I saw the music as a collage of found material that supported the emotive content of the film.

[98] Cummings, 1991.
[99] Scores for this song are available at Gerbode, 2010.

4.4 Exploration of alternative space

4.4.1 Onomatomania

The pieces discussed above were primarily designed for a theatre or conventional performance space with the notable exception of *Identity* that was geared towards exploiting the space in OVADA when it was performed there. Also, *Pierrot* was adapted for use in a gallery space and for those performances we used the gallery balcony and stairs and extended sections of the work where this seemed appropriate. This was easily achievable because the work was semi-improvised.

In contrast the work *Onomatomania* was entirely developed for use in a less formal performing space and was designed to encourage audience participation and involvement in a series of performances in the upper gallery of Modern Art Oxford as part of the Brookes University art exhibition held in March 2008.

The operation of the piece is best described by the programme note below.

ONOMATOMANIA – AN OBSESSION WITH WORDS

Malcolm Atkins – music, Ana Barbour - dance

This performance will explore the resonance of words as a stimulus for sonic and motional improvisation.

The music will be constructed and layered to use a range of instruments - violin, keyboards, voice and percussion – and a range of styles. The dance will involve a range of techniques derived from Ana's practice in butoh, odissi and improvisation. We hope to embrace the full range of relationship possibilities between dancer and musician from concordance to ignorance to contradiction.

The exploration of words will be through the use of vocal extemporisation on them and

through the resulting motional interpretation of Ana and the instrumental interpretation of Malcolm. We are interested in the range of emotional meanings that can be applied to a single word and in seeing whether the resonance of a word can still affect the performer and audience even where the meaning becomes lost through the syllabic distortion of the original.

The words used will be primarily supplied by the audience who will be able to write their suggestions on cards to be placed in a box for selection by the performers. We will ask that the choice of words be linked to the performance environment and the art works on display.

Figure 4.1 Programme note for *Onomatomania*

The piece was run for an hour on three occasions during the week of the exhibition – each time attracting a larger crowd. The audience – especially the press representatives – were fully drawn into the process of supplying words and timings for our interpretations.

Example DVD 03 is a film of most of the last performance of *Onomatomania*.
It includes examples of the audience creating the parameters for the work we created as well as the full creation of a number of pieces based on the words and timings given by the audience.

This piece demonstrated the benefit of establishing a looser participatory structure for the chosen venue where people are not expecting to sit through a time ordered extended performance.

4.4.2 Butoh explorations in alternative performance space

Because butoh is improvisatory and usually responds to the physical environment in the same way that improvising musicians respond to the sonic, I have been involved in a number of explorations of physical and sonic space that are entirely derived from the

performers interaction with the space. For these improvisations there may be a general guiding principle but this is usually to free up rather than dictate to the performer.

A recent experiment was to use the space of Rousham Gardens for a series of filmed responses to the environment which were open to the view of any users of the gardens. One response in this was the use of a small cave by a pond where I set up a sound world using sustained toy keyboard violin and voice in response to a dance in the space by Jeannie Mckim. The film of this response (included as Example DVD 01:03 *Rousham Gardens*) demonstrates the emotive effect the space had on the performers (Jeannie and myself) as well as the way natural properties of the space can be exploited sonically and visually.

Another response was *Winterlight*, a ten minute piece for a street performance by all of Café Reason as part of the Winterlight Festival in October 2008. This performance was designed to use the space of Cornmarket Street outside the church of St Michael at the Northgate at nine o clock on a Friday evening. The dancers would use the entire street space for the length of the church that faces onto the pedestrian street. I would record a soundtrack to be played back in the space which the dancers could use to inform a structured improvisation in three parts. I designed the music to merge in with a busy street sound at the start and contrast with that sound later on. As the dance was to begin with fast walking I opened the piece with a moderate rhythmic pulse appropriate to this activity over which I explored a poem text and included improvisations as well as sampled street noises. This section was designed to come to an end when the dancers had moved to the church wall by which time I expected the audience to be engaged with the piece. I then created a far more ethereal sound world of disembodied voices before moving on to a more aggressive climactic music section.

These three sections used the space effectively because they were tied in to the sections of the dance which fully involved the audience by the use of simple and subtle techniques of movement which were explored simultaneously by the whole group.

Example DVD 01:04 is a film of the *Winterlight* street performance. The sound includes

the street noise that accompanied the performance and was picked up by the camera.

Details of the way I used poem texts to construct the piece are included below in the discussion on textual explorations where I have also included the music as Example CD 03:01

4.5 Exploring texts

4.5.1 Introduction

The work with Café Reason and particularly with Ana Barbour has focused increasingly on the use of text as a supporting thread to improvisation. This has encouraged me to develop techniques of vocalizing and exploring the resonance of text through the spontaneous creation of melody and the exploration of the syllabic resonance of particular words both in the context of collaboration with other art forms and in the creation of work with other musicians.

This seems to be a natural development from my interest in word setting for vocal music – which has always been a substantial part of my compositional activity.[100] It is particularly important to me to be able to improvise songs and textual ideas alongside instrumental exploration just as I feel that composition should encompass voice and/or instrument – depending on the requirements of the piece.

As an improviser I feel that my use of my voice was an essential part of my sonic vocabulary.

4.5.2 Initial experiments in extending word setting – Paradise, Purgatory and Pandemonium

My interest in word setting and simultaneously extending the boundaries of the vocal work to include improvisation and extended technique was first explored for a piece I

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wrote for The Sixteen for performance in March 2005 in Magdalen College Chapel in Oxford. The aims of the piece are best expressed by the programme note which I have quoted in full below:

The piece is written for eight members of The Sixteen, a choir and at least seven people reading texts (and making bestial noises).

The score is entirely based around the tune L'homme armé, an inspiration to the writers of beautiful Renaissance polyphony which in its lyric expresses the genocidal and hysterical shadow of the time.

Paradise is expressed through arrangements of texts from the mass, purgatory and pandemonium, by the use of texts describing Christian intolerance, bestial sounds, and the use of material which firmly accentuates the devil's interval - the tritone.

I hope, through this piece, to capture my ambivalence towards the religious music of the Renaissance, which I have always found deeply moving in its intensity and spirituality, but equally disturbing in its support of a religion which was so violent and intolerant.

Figure 4.2 Programme Note for *Paradise Purgatory and Pandemonium*

My approach was to score all the parts for the members of The Sixteen to exploit their potential to use complex prescribed material but to leave space for the choir to use some experimental technique and for the speakers of text and animal noises to be left with minimal instruction on delivery.

I was particularly keen to contrast massed voice and spoken voice with the complex lines I created for the vocalists from The Sixteen. The press review of the work picked up on this juxtaposition as follows:

'Malcolm Atkins combined some exquisite vocal lines (representing Paradise) with spoken texts and bestial noises (representing purgatory and pandemonium)'.

Ox Times March 25th 2005

I decided to use the *L'homme armé* melody as a starting point for the piece because of its prevalence in Renaissance music and because of its simplicity and structural integrity which had led to its popularity as a basis for mass setting. The very simplicity of the melody also gave scope for using alternative techniques in juxtaposition and extension of it.

The techniques used included working with octatonic scales and quartal harmony to disrupt the simplicity of the melody when scoring for The Sixteen; allowing the choir to respond by simple rules such as singing through the *L'homme armé* melody in turn using the length of one breath for each note; antiphonal responses between all three performing sections (who I was careful to place separately around the audience for sonic effect). No individual technique was original but I hoped to create an original work by the combination of so many different elements.

The full score of this work is included in Core Scores 03. A recording of the work is included as Core CD 03:02.

4.5.3 Work with other musicians

Most of the development of text based improvisation in concert with other musicians has been with the Oxford Improvisers. I have tended to use specific books of poetry or prose which are relevant to my current interests outside of improvisation and which I can then see from a different perspective when used in improvisation. I have taken these with me to improvising sessions and used them as a basis for my exploration of sound. Although I could have just used vocalizing without words or with words I spontaneously thought of I initially found that this stimulus really helped me to engage in vocal improvisation where I would have felt constrained if I had to think of words or to start vocalizing without an outside idea to stimulate me.

To a large extent I have treated the use of the texts I have brought along much as I

would a found object. I would feel free to use single phrases or words and to repeat and develop the ideas of minimal sections of a text. In this I have also been influenced by the use of words in North Indian music where in thumri in particular the tradition of bol banao allows an extensive elaboration of the possibilities of meaning of individual words.[101] However, the possibility of recitation, simple reading, whispering is all available with text along with syllabic extemporization.

This does raise the question of whether any text would be equally effective or ineffective within a piece – just as would any found object for making sound.

I have tested this out on a number of occasions and my conclusion is that I can find (or not) the required resonance in any text I use whether that is spontaneously obtained or pre-planned for a piece. Much depends on how I approach the text at the time of performance and whether I successfully transform it to a use that is sympathetic with the improvisation.

When Miguel Azguime (Portugese composer, performer and poet)[102] visited Oxford in 2008 I was asked by Jo Ross (manager Oxford Contemporary Music) to interview him at the end of his concert. As a preparation for this I offered to use the same texts he would use in concert in a workshop with the Smith Quartet on 7th April at the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building.

We tried a number of approaches to my improvising on the texts and these are attached as Example CD 02:06-08. For these experiments I used voice and electric violin which I routed through the same effects as for *Pierrot* (as described above). I deliberately avoided looking at the texts until we started the explorations.[103] For the first I improvised on the text and the quartet was distributed around the venue and followed me. For the second they worked as a group and I followed them. For the third they worked as a group and I worked independently of them. Although I felt as a player that

[101] Manuel, 1989 p 141-2 interviews Rita Gangoly about the way text is used as a basis for extemporization

[102] His work is detailed on his website (Miguel Azguime: Composer, Poet, Percussionist, 2010).
[103] The text used is from *Salt Itininery* 'II – The air of the text operates the form of the inner sound' (Azguime,2010, under texts) .

the attempts at communication were more interesting the feedback from Paul Whitty in discussion was that the engagement in competing to create a sound world of the third recording was far more interesting to an audience who could see and hear this conflict unfolding.[104] The polite concordance of the first two recordings was less interesting – even if more melodic – than the competition of my attempts to explore the words with a soundscape I created against the working of the string quartet. What I found interesting in each experiment was that I used the poem text as a structuring device for my exploration – working through it from start to finish despite some repetitions and explorations of single syllables, words and phrases.

Further to this, in a concert as part of a trio with Miles Doubleday and Pete McPhail as part of the Oxford Improvisers Cohesion Festival 2008 I pre-decided to use a poem, Dylan Thomas', 'Night Breaks where no sun shines' [105], as the basis for my part of the improvisation of one piece. I did not tell the other performers what I was using and I deliberately set myself to explore the resonance of the text independent of how the improvisation unfolded. I used the same set up of violin, voice and effects as I had with The Smith Quartet. I believe the recording (Example CD 02:09) shows that this technique created a sound world where the use of text blended effectively into the sonic world created by the three of us performing.

4.5.4 Exploration of texts in dance collaboration

With dance collaboration I have often used the same technique of randomly picking a text that at the moment of improvisation seemed appropriate to what was being explored. In rehearsals this might involve rapidly searching for a poem that relates in some way to what the dancers had been asked to do. Or it could involve the arbitrary choice of a poem that I was currently interested in, or the random choice of a poem to see whether it would work by chance.

I have also sought out texts form collaborators which they feel relate to what they are

[104] Paul Whitty in informal discussion 7 April 2008.
[105] Thomas, 2000.

expressing in the dance. This use of supplied material has been the basis of a number of recent dance collaborations.

- The music for *Winterlight* (discussed above) was prepared in three distinct sections around three poems supplied by the Café Reason dance group: Dylan Thomas – 'Light breaks where no sun shines'[106] ; Don Paterson's translation of Rilke's Orpheus poem 'Being'[107] and a Rumi poem 'We are the night' [108]. The music for this performance can be heard on Example CD 03:01.
- For a performance with Helen Edwards that was part of the opening of an exhibition of drawings of horses, I used the William Carlos Williams poem 'The Horse'[109] as well as texts supplied by Helen which I used spontaneously in performance. I also developed a recorded response to this piece using just the poem which can be heard as Example CD 03:02. This reflects the way I often develop a response to a text in improvisation whilst at the same time creating a fixed response in a score or recording. This technique of continually revisiting a text or poem and finding different resonance in it was one that I developed in *Pierrot.*

All of these techniques of using text as found material to explore dynamically in collaboration with others have become important to my practice. As has the reflection on this material and the creation of recorded work from the further exploration of text in order to explore resonances that I have discovered in it. This is perhaps a natural extension of the exploration of word setting but it has become integrated in my practice through collaboration where chosen text fragments, randomly chosen text or text selected by collaborators have all been used as a basis for joint exploration.

4.5.5 Using parallel texts and layering

The idea of creating a parallel meaning in the use of music to the meaning unfolding in a dance was something I have developed further in purely sonic terms by the use of parallel and contradictory texts.

[106] Thomas, 2000
[107] Paterson, 2007
[108] Rumi, 1994
[109] Muldoon, 1997,118

In working with the band Nonstop Tango I have developed a method of improvising from a given text whilst the lead singer Miles Doubleday explores the main text of a song. An example of this in recent practice is 'The Alphabet Song' . Example CD 03:03 is a recording from a recent performance. For this performance I was singing the words to a text Miles had written whilst he sang the alphabet words. I was also playing electric piano and exploring a similar synthetic scale to the one I used in improvising from the words. This use of parallel threads of textual meaning has often been linked to the way the band uses multiple areas of tonality. We usually aim to work in contrasting keys and explore the potential of synthetic scales that undermine and challenge a simple rock music harmony that we use as a starting point for a song. More examples of the work of this group are on the band myspace page (Doubleday,2006).

4.6 Conclusions

In answer to the fourth question of this research I have found that collaborative work with other art forms – especially dance – has broadened my vocabulary for expression through comparison of how I structure work and reflection and discussion of this.

Collaborative work has also helped clarify my approach to the fifth question as so often I have prepared work for spaces that suit dance or visual art or even a film setting and have found real advantages to using these spaces in the way that this has affected my musical exploration.

I also feel that I have successfully developed my vocabulary and technique for dance accompaniment and from this have established my ability to develop solo performance through exploration of text using received words as a stimulus for exploration. This has impacted on my approach to creating scores in that I have developed approaches to creating music spontaneously from a text. Where before I was keen on writing songs I now attempt to improvise songs and this can be in collaboration with dancers and/or other musicians. The presence of a poem text can be an effective stimulus to create

work - as much as a graphic score or a series of text based instructions.

Although the techniques I have developed have moved more and more to the spontaneous exploration of text they have still encompassed the same approaches to using a mixture of scored material, textual instruction and improvisation that characterized the large scale works I discussed in Section 3. In particular I found in *Pierrot* that the development of a work through improvisation on text would ultimately lead to the creation of a minimal scoring that could serve as an aid to performance.

I see this use of a range of compositional and improvisational methods as integral to my practice whether that is the creation of work for ensemble or my own performance and whether it is for a collaborative or a straight musical performance. So, my attitude to the first three research questions has been to always assess the efficacy of a compositional approach in the context of what is required.

In the final section of this paper I will summarise in more detail my current position on the key questions that I have addressed in this research

5 Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

To conclude my research I will summarise my findings with regard to each of the five key research questions that I have focused on throughout this study and attempt to draw out how I now relate to each in terms of my practice.

5.1.1 What are the compositional limitations imposed by alternative methods of scoring (flexible and mixed ability scoring ; graphic scores; text based scores) ?

As I discussed in Section 2, I have found that flexible and mixed ability scoring is by its nature limiting. There are two problems that I have found with this approach.

The most obvious concern with flexible scoring is that the main function of a piece written in this style is to encourage participation and this can take precedence in terms of standard, style and instruction. This does not mean that pieces cannot be created which work but the limitations in timbre and tone (through writing for unspecificied instruments) can be a problem, especially when an ensemble expects to be told what to do and does not feel empowered to develop a response to the score. Compensating factors that I have used include leaving space in terms of solo passages and contrasts of instrumentation that the performing ensemble can realise. I have found that the most interesting realisations of flexible works are often where an ensemble has time to work on a piece and develop their own response to what has been suggested and explore their own ideas for timbral variety (this is something I managed to achieve on a larger scale with *Do Geese See God* in a short but well planned rehearsal)

A more significant point for me is that for participating musicians their vocabulary is constrained by the prescription of notes to play, so that there is little opportunity to develop their individual voices within a piece. This is not an issue that is seen as important within the Western tradition of art music where I would see the performer's voice as subservient to that of the composer and serving to add depth of interpretation to the composer's voice rather than adding an alternative or contributing voice. However, it is an issue that has become important to me as I have found that collaboration between performer and composer is often far more satisfactory because of the commitment this creates in the performer as well as the framework it can allow for the performer to communicate.

Graphic and text based scores do not share the same limitations because they allow the performers to realise their vocabulary within constraints which can give direction to ensemble playing but which do not constrain the expression of the players. In these cases compositional limitations are inherent in that the outcome is far more dependent on the integrity of the players. That said, when working with experienced players, such as the Oxford Improvisers, I am able to trust that an instruction or graphic will be int**er**preted with conviction and integrity and the result will often work as well as anything that was prepared in staff notation. The difference is that this is a partnership between composer and performer which is the direction I have found myself moving in in my compositional practice.

In dealing with amateur players I have still found that graphic and text based scores are often more interesting because the players can start to find a voice and mode of expression but this does depend on confidence and the development of their own vocabulary which is often best realised by practising improvising techniques.

The two core pieces for my research into scoring and improvisation as discussed in Section 3 (*Accession* and *Do Geese See God*) both used a range of scoring techniques including graphics, textual instruction and simple scoring. These were able to work

effectively in the context of larger pieces because the variety that players discovered dynamically in using alternative techniques was often as effective as meticulously scoring timbral and instrumental variations. For example, the simple four part harmony of *Do Geese See God* in the first and third sections was continually broken up by gaps for conducted and solo improvisation – as well as some scored solos and chamber group arrangement and graphic scoring for a small ensemble. Thus, the harmonic basis of the piece could be established by a large scratch orchestra while the timbral variety that this lacked could be supplied by the other groups who could, in the case of improvisers decide how to supplement the sound within the space. Thus the harmonic and motivic coherence was supplied by the use of simple notation and the timbral variety by improvisation.

In terms of my developing practice I am keen to create pieces for specific events and using specific performing groups but am no longer interested in writing general purpose scores. This is because the limitations I see in flexible and indeterminate scoring are best addressed by working with musicians in a particular space in order to create a work for those musicians in that sonic space. This does not preclude using some open scoring techniques but I see these as a small part of my compositional vocabulary.

5.1.2 What are the advantages and disadvantages of using traditional forms of notation compared to experimental techniques for generating new music (as outlined above) ?

The advantage of using traditional notation is in the control this gives to a composer to realise ideas. The problem with this is it relies on the performing musicians having sufficient competence to realise the intentions of the composer as well as the composer having absolutely clear ideas that he or she can realise within notation. This reliance on the ability of a single person and their vision seems to operate against the spirit of our times. In a multicultural society where the traditional hierarchies between high and low art have generally been discarded it seems more appropriate to communicate a collective vision which encompasses different perspectives.

I have found that working with a creative group of musicians such as the Oxford Improvisers has enabled me to communicate on more than one level because I can use macro structuring of a work and use simple harmonic ideas as a reference point but at the same time I can allow the individual voices of performers to speak through the use of their own developed vocabulary.

I discussed in Section 1 my adoption of Lewis'[110] broader definition of improvisation to encompass the African American art music tradition with its emphasis on the heuristic as well as the communicative. If improvisation is seen as encouraging focus and clarity on exploring ideas collectively and supportively as well as allowing individual freedom or expression, it can in my experience be a very effective way of structuring new work that exploits the potential of performer, composer and sonic space. The piece 'Bulgaria' in *Accession* showed how a performer from the jazz tradition can add his own voice to a notated piece and complement what it says by his extensive vocabulary**.**

I am still committed to developing my ability to effectively notate ideas which can be used by musicians. However, I see this method of creating music as one specialised technique from a wide range which I employ as appropriate to the performing group, venue and requirement. I feel that the core works that I produced *Accession*, *Do Geese See God* and *Pierrot* all successfully exploited moving between notation and improvisation using positive elements of each. In fact they used a hybrid of notational techniques to create variety in material and performance styles.

5.1.3 How far can a composer leave space for performer interpretation and improvisation within a piece of music and still retain control and ownership of the work?

I am not sure whether I even value this question at the moment. Technically any creative

[110] Lewis, 2004B, p 170

involvement from a performer means to me that that a piece is creatively shared between composer and performer. I was originally interested in this question because I saw the role of composer as distinct and crucial for giving a unifying meaning to a work. I have since seen my role as composer more often as a facilitator to provide an infrastructure (which can include melodic, rhythmic and harmonic ideas) within which the musician can find his or her voice. At times the voice that I supply (such as in a scored melody) may take precedence, but overall the voices of the ensemble are what I am interested in projecting not my own voice. In a sense I am more allied to the pop music tradition where it has been argued that the voice of the performer is more significant than the voice of the composer. [111] This is perhaps why I am able to move between popular music genres and art music easily – as evidenced by the merging of dub elements in the 'Mondestruken/Theatre' in the opening of *Pierrot*, as well as the attempt to juxtapose simple pop style melody with Schoenberg's tunes as in 'Bohemian Crystal'.

5.1.4 How does multidisciplinary collaboration influence the creative process and the outcome of a work ?

The creation of work through dialogue with other artists using other art forms has become crucial to my practice. It is also something that I feel is necessary for any musician at this time because I see it as extending the communicative and heuristic role of music which is so important to improvisation [112]. and extending the possibilities of communication of the art form by the addition of further layers of meaning [113].

[111] Frith discusses this in Performing Rites pp 183-191

[112] I would see the impetus for the creation of communicative and heuristic approaches to improvisation as part of the rejection of some of the dictates of modernism and the idea of high art and the exaggerated importance of the individual artist. They are a reflection of living in a multicultural, post colonial society where we have to re-evaluate our attitudes to all the cultures and genres that surround us. Once we have recognised the fact that all genres in music have their own agreed conventions for structuring and communicating meaning and that we need to judge any work on the basis of the context for which it was created we can see the relevance of this for all genres of dance, visual art and literature. Once we start attempting to communicate across the boundaries of genre there is no need to limit that to simply music genres. It is a natural progression of exploration and communication to extend this to other art forms.

[113] Since the seventeenth century (or earlier) there has been a steady increase in the level of dissonance accepted in music leading to the breakdown of tonality in the twentieth century and the construction of music that rejects diatonic and modal control. This parallels a development of

The impetus for my involvement in collaborative work was working with visual artists on the MA course I attended and seeing how this opened out my work and showed me alternative techniques for generating work. In particular it showed me the significance of being totally aware of the performance environment and how the parameters of this environment were a significant part of the creation of a work – and one often ignored by composers. It highlighted to me the limitations of scoring work for small scale art music performance or even hypothetical performance when I could create real performance opportunities that could engage an audience with uncompromising music which was often made accessible by its conjunction with visual image.

My practice of dance collaboration developed after these initial experiments as I began to develop techniques of improvisation with dancers from Café Reason Butoh Dance Theatre. I found the approach of these dancers liberating because they would often explore an idea with a sensitivity, subtlety and commitment that I felt was exemplary for my own practice. Because improvising dancers have to be aware of the location and actions of other dancers they often rely on an intuitive method of communication - sensing the presence of colleagues even when they are not in sight. This contrasts with musical communication where a group can far more easily contribute to a collective response and communication through hearing one another and can become less sensitive to the presence of others.

As a result of dance collaboration I have attempted to develop my awareness of all contributors to a performance, whether musicians, dancers or artists and clarify my

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complexity in the visual arts and ultimately the questioning of the significance of narrative. Film has shown how a popular art form can incorporate increasing levels of complexity – parallel threads of narrative – often through music contradicting the narrative of the visual element; extremely fast transition – both in sound and vision. In fact if we look at a pop video such as Madonna's *Like a Prayer* we can see how far the visual element adds layers and depths of meaning through visual reference that parallels the multiplicity of audio references and styles. The song itself is not musically complex but the visual elements add a level of complexity that transforms the repetitiveness and simplicity of the musical setting. So, the creation of multi-media responses could be seen as a natural progression in visual and sonic art because ultimately when we have explored the potential of each we need to explore the extra layers of meaning that are created by their juxtaposition, collaboration and communication.

relationship with all the performers in any work I am involved in creating. I have attempted to be far more sensitive to the nuance of expression in my own practice and in that of collaborators.

The process of developing *Pierrot* with Ana Barbour was fashioned by the need to carefully assess the full visual impact of what we did in parallel with the sonic. We recorded our work as we tried out different approaches and agreed the content for each performance through an iterative process of experiment and review with constant reference to the expected performance environment.
The development of work with Barry Reeves and Helen Edwards has employed a range of techniques – sending message texts of ideas over a period of weeks prior to meeting to create work; meeting in unusual spaces to create work – a car park at dawn or a bridge under the ring road – in order to allow the atmosphere of discarded space to influence the creation of work; allowing different art forms to lead in the creation of film – music, dance or the choice of image – and comparing the result of each.

I have also taken from butoh an interest in the resonance of word, phrase and image and have developed this in my improvisation from text. This was evidenced in the way Ana and I used text fragments as a basis for our improvisation in *Pierrot* which was the starting point for our development of the whole work. It also influenced my creation of music for *Winterlight* and *Because I Love You* where I used poems selected by the dance group as a starting point for what I did.

5.1.5 Does the utilisation and exploitation of alternative performance space for the development and staging of new work significantly alter the content of work produced ?

The focus on the venue for a work and the possibilities of that venue can make a

significant impact on the way a work is presented. This can apply to visual presentation and the utilisation of a space in performance but it can also influence where and how sound is created within a space to maximise the sonic potential of that space – as was demonstrated through *Do Geese See God*.

Experimenting with alternative performance space – such as art gallery or open air space has to effect the way music is created in that there are always considerations of how the audience will hear a work when it is competing with other sounds or when it has to draw in an audience who are passing through the space. With *Identity* we used the wall space around us and the resonant acoustic to create an overpowering experience that incorporated the overlaying of sound and visual as it was created in performance (see 4.3.2.1). With *Onomatomania* (4.4.1) the audience was drawn in by encouraging their participation in creating the parameters of the sound world. With *Winterlight* (4.4.2) the use of a sound world that initially blended in with the street sounds and seemed to emanate from it helped gradually draw the audience in to the piece as the dancers gradually took over the street space.

It is now an integral part of my practice to consider the visual and sonic

Appendix 01 Interviews

This appendix contains interviews with three contemporary composers, Howard Skempton, Diana Burrell and Michael Finnissy and interviews with three dancers Ana Barbour, Paul Mckilligan, Paola Esposito.

The interviews with the three composers have all been published on the Oxford Improvisers web site.

01 Interview with Howard Skempton

The following is an email interview with Howard Skempton (HS) conducted by Malcolm Atkins (MA) between November 2002 and February 2003:

MA (19/11/02)

Unlike many of your contemporaries who began by using minimal means of expression but have since expanded their techniques to employ a more extended sound world, you have continued to exploit the possibilities of an extremely pared down style. How have your attitudes to this approach and your reasons for employing it changed over the last thirty years ?

Aspects of your music seem to have evolved from a tradition which started with Satie. Of music that undergoes minor modification but does not develop in the traditional teleological sense of much from Baroque through to modernist work. Why is this a-teleological approach important to you ?

HS (20/12/02)

I concede that I'm still attracted to a pared down style. That comes from Webern and Feldman, and even Britten as I see him. Cardew was infuriated, he told me, by my fastidiousness, which is what it is. The fact is, that what I put on paper is what I want to listen to. The lack of complication must be due to a need to reveal shape or structure.

I admit that, although I toy with the idea of development in larger works, my music is essentially contemplative. Feldman has written very beautifully about what he calls the Abstract Experience (in an essay called "After Modernism") and I suppose I aspire to that. The problem is that I write accordion tunes, which are clearly not "abstract" - or are they? The aim is a combination of immediacy and timelessness, and development is surely about something else.

MA (07/01/03)

When you talk about your 'fastidiousness', was that denigrated because the dominant motivation of Cardew and most experimental musicians of the time was the exploration of process whatever the tonal outcome of its instigation? Do you feel that the abstract can ever be explored in music through process alone (except by a very lucky coincidence) or can it only be discovered through the careful consideration of tone and timbre, especially in a minimal or dynamically soft context ? Ultimately is the real break with modernism the rejection of process as a deciding factor - in which case is much of the music that was ostensibly anti-modernist (especially that of early Reich and Glass) just a continuation of the modernist tradition in a different guise ?

Can a piece of music be simultaneously abstract but derived from a clear functional musical form? In the Two Highland Dances in your collected piano pieces you seem to have extracted the essence of a functional dance form and rhythm to create an abstraction (almost like the Platonic idea of form), just as much as in other works you have created an abstraction by

highlighting a particular set of tones with no predefined template or structure (September Song with its limited pitch set would exemplify this). Apart from the resonance of the form from which the Highland Dance is derived, is the aimed effect of the two approaches any different? Or are you in both the Highland Dances and the September Song aiming to encourage a contemplative state in the listener?

HS (11/01/03)

I think that Cardew used "fastidious" in a normal sense. He thought that I was too careful, too concerned with perfection and probably unwilling to "get my hands dirty" as a composer.

I see immediacy as a key to Feldman's Abstract Experience. Guston stayed close to the canvas. Morris Louis poured paint over canvases draped in various ways. He had the flair and judgment to devise a process almost guaranteed to produce abstract works of great beauty. Cage was also sufficiently disciplined to be sure of his results: there was nothing careless in his attempt "to imitate nature in the manner of its operation". Early Reich and Glass were no less experimental in their controlled search for new experiences.

September Song is more obviously "Experimental" in its controlled timelessness. I'm still astonished by Two Highland Dances. They were composed almost instantaneously and reveal a rhythmic impulse that my "fastidiousness" might normally have kept at bay!

MA (21/01/03)

Following your recent responses I have spent more time looking at your work and viewing it in the light of Feldman's observations about music. It does

seem to me that Feldman was concerned to use intuitive methods (perhaps even intuitive processes) to devise his work that stand in opposition to the demonstrable processes that are evident in so much contemporary music (whether open in minimalist works or concealed in modernist post-serialist). It seems that if someone is concerned with sound as sound then the intuitive process of discovering which tone or tones should sound for how long becomes paramount.

Does this bear any relation to how you see yourself composing?

I feel that much of your music works - like Feldman's - at a pre-cognitive level such that a range of tones is explored and repeated with no strictly discernible pattern and structure. But the listener feels there is a unity - perhaps because the broken symmetry of what you use is discernible outside of rational measurement. This would apply to 'May Pole', 'Riding the Thermals' or 'senza licenza'.

Does this reflect at all how you wrote these pieces ? Are there processes that you use to initiate these works which like September Song are using 'controlled timelessness'? Or do you devise processes to guide your initial tonal explorations ? Do you take conventional structures and repetitions and subvert them or do you arrive at the irregular patterns of repetition spontaneously ?

HS (02/02/03)

Sorry to take a few days to reply but these are questions of central importance. The crucial fact is that I am committed to an intuitive approach which means that I am inclined to operate initially at a pre-cognitive level (your use of "pre-cognitive" is impressively apt!) and it strikes me that there is a small family of composers - they tend to be labelled "originals" -

who work in this way (Feldman certainly, and probably also Górecki and Messiaen (inevitably, since he "suffered from" synaesthenia)). In the case of Feldman (and me), this goes hand in hand with a concern with "sound as sound". Which comes first (intuitive method or concern with sound) is difficult to say. You're right to conclude that a concern with "sound as sound" should lead a composer to regard pitch (which includes colour) and duration as paramount.

Early pieces of mine ("May Pole", "Riding the Thermals" and "September Song", for example) owe much to Feldman but the sequence of chords was determined by chance. Unity and broken symmetry were ensured through the uniform character of the different elements and a careful consideration of the proportion between the number of different elements (4 in "May Pole") and the total number of elements (16 in "May Pole"). "senza licenza", one of my "chorales", was composed entirely intuitively except that I made a decision to use all 12 notes in the last 4 chords.

MA (10/02/2003)

I have phrased this last question on another aspect of what I see as the core subject of the interview which is the nature of your inspiration to write music.

In contrast to your works which explore a timeless abstraction of tones and groupings of tones that we have discussed so far, a significant part of your work seems to be driven by the construction of simple and evocative melodic line, often resonant of folk melody. This not only applies to your word settings, but to many instrumental works, such as Saltaire Melody, Tender Melody, the Three Pieces for Oboe and Under the Elder. Much of this cantabile work is still extremely pared down but it is inevitably linked to

specific moods of the genre or the words being explored. For example, Fire, The Gypsy's Wife Song and the Tree Sequence all appear to me to be markedly different in mood in a far more definable way than your more abstracted works.

Does the inspiration for this work come from a different place to that of the works which question a specific verticality of tones - perhaps being driven by the communicative aspects of language as opposed to the resonance of colour and visual stimulus?

HS (10/02/20003)

I used to say that the spacious, experimental "landscapes" led to the chorales, which led to the melodies. The early melodies, however, are very different from the later. Saltaire Melody and Tender Melody, for example, sprang from the keyboard as "naturally" as Two Highland Dances. The method was no less intuitive and the pieces were composed almost as quickly. There was a conscious aim to "come full circle": many of these short melodic pieces are cyclic.

The difference between the earlier and later melodies is almost painfully clear when I practise a sequence of accordion pieces, as I did this morning. Those of the Seventies (Ada's Dance, One for the Road, Summer Waltz and Gentle Melody) were composed "at the instrument" whereas more recent pieces (McMullin's Waltz was composed last month) are likely to begin with a line of written pitches. This change of technique is the result of writing a great deal of vocal and choral music in recent years. I myself wrote the brief texts for Tree Sequence and the piano is clearly of central importance. In setting "real poetry", however, my respect for the words and the need for extended (rather than modular(?)) melodies leads me to work more

systematically. In most of my vocal and choral music, I begin by printing out the text and working on the rhythm (usually additive - just crotchets and quavers). Melodies may start as dots on paper but these are "shaped", and the harmony "discovered", intuitively. The music is governed primarily by the meaning of the words.

The techniques acquired through setting texts have clearly influenced my purely instrumental music. What has not changed, and will never change, is my intuitive approach to pitch and harmony. I was not surprised when a recent choral setting of mine, written for amateur choir, was described as "artless". To be anything else would be unthinkable!

02 Interview with Diana Burrell

Eclecticism and Intuition – an email interview with Diana Burrell (DB) about writing for amateurs and her piece 'The Four Temperaments' conducted by Malcolm Atkins (MA) between July and September 2004.

MA (18/07/04)

The tradition of writing music for amateurs appears to follow two strands within British society: one exemplified by the fabian, educational approach of Britten in Noye's Fludde; the other by the more iconoclastic challenge to the musical establishment of Cardew, exemplified in Treatise with its rejection of traditional notation and the encouragement of new forms of interpretation - in his view more accessible to amateurs, or at least those who have developed musical skills outside the classical tradition, than trained professionals. Where do you see your role in writing for amateurs in relation to these conflicting ideologies?

DB (17/08/04)

Both Britten's and Cardew's approaches are relevant and necessary but my own thinking on this is definitely along Britten's lines - particularly in the context of COMA. When COMA was originally set up, it was because mainstream contemporary music such as is played by the Sinfonietta / BBC Symphony Orchestra etc had become so technically difficult to play that however much an amateur musician liked the music, the only way he/she could experience it was as a passive listener. This was not the case in earlier times - the consort music played in the Elizabethan court could also be played in the home by ordinary people as could Haydn's string quartets for example. So one of the ideas behind COMA was to give back to the amateur musician the music of his/her own time and it was an essential part of the commissioning process that the composer write in their usual idiom and not in a different 'amateur' style but that the music should be technically possible for less advanced players to perform. In other words, 'amateur' music should sound like 'professional' music but just be easier.

This is very much my belief which actually goes against Cardew's approach in which he seeks to invent a new language but which is linked to a particular group of musicians - amateurs. Cardew asked the right questions, made extremely coherent arguments and produced wonderful, inspiring music! And the world of professional music should be considering his pre-occupations and learning from his work to invigorate the mainstream now. Perhaps amateurs can no longer keep him as their own!

Actually, perhaps I don't really believe in 'amateur' musicians; I just believe in musicians, some of which can get their fingers round the notes more easily than others and ALL of which should be challenging the status quo in a way that we haven't even begun to do yet.

MA(18/08/04)

Before raising more questions I would like to make some general observations about the Four Temperaments which may help summarise the piece in its historical context. This, I hope, will help a discussion (or at least a dialectic if I am totally mistaken).

I would categorise the Four Temperaments as contemporary modernist in its use of a consistent sound world (often chromatic embellishment over drone or bass line) serious engagement with a psychological subject and use of a range of experimental and extended techniques. It establishes tone colour - very effectively within the constraints of the flexible orchestra; uses powerful rhythmic interruption either in sparse textures or contrasting with a pulse; it also uses indefinite notation quite extensively - usually choice of note within defined rhythm. The raw power of the work is reminiscent of Birtwistle - especially in the use of atonally challenged tonal centres, isorhythmic techniques and the self-contained vocabulary. But the organisation of material seems to be intuitively determined around the interpretation of the temperaments and a clear teleology to express this, sectioned around the different temperaments and exploring strong contrasts between each section. It does not appear to be process derived.

The piece also looks back to the musical past. The subject itself harks back to the Baroque interest in expressing affekt; the flexible ensemble is reminiscent of a Baroque ensemble - especially in the use of key soloists within a less defined group; the text used is traditional even if used experimentally.

In your response you exampled a number of historical precedents for amateur music making before going on to raise the issue that contemporary music should be more challenging. Looking at your piece in this light it seems that you are attempting to achieve this challenge within the context of a historical continuum. Not a radical break with the past (as Cardew expounded) but an eclectic assimilation of ideas. This includes: a re-invigoration of music practice by looking back to the more distant past as well as an assimilation of recent experimental technique - including the ideas of Cardew; the expansion of the 'orchestra' to include a wide selection of electronic instruments as well as an emphasis on the use of the timbres of traditional orchestral instruments - especially the oboe and violin; the assimilation of techniques for involving players of all abilities - both the skilled and less practised. In this sense I can see how you align yourself more with the Fabian than the Maoist.

My first question is whether the brief summations above are at all accurate as regards how you see your work? Is your approach eclectic and intuitive, and is this a political as much as aesthetic choice? In addition, I would ask that you expand more on how we should challenge the status quo? Is this also social and political as much as aesthetic?

DB (05/09/04)

I think your description of 'The Four Temperaments' is very perceptive - my approach in this piece (though not necessarily in others) was to be fairly eclectic and yes, intuitive. I used a variety of techniques which you picked up on, but some of the music is in fact process-derived according to various procedures I'm involved with at the present time; the rather 'phlegmatic' piano duet sections show this as does the punchy and rhythmic

'dance' towards the end. I won't elaborate further as these methods are part of my personal compositional process and in any case, the finished piece is what counts, not the scaffolding that holds it up! One thing I was particularly keen to do in this piece though - and perhaps its eclecticism is to do with this - was to write something that demanded expression and interpretation; something rather big and possibly untidy, that the players had to bring their own colour and drama to and which could sound very different on another occasion when played differently. There is a whole canon now of pieces written for COMA where all that is given are the notes and their rhythms. Because of the necessarily totally flexible nature of the instrumentation, it seems that composers are sometimes reluctant to give any indication of dynamics or expression and indeed there is something very satisfying about the pure-ness of this approach in a sort of Art of Fugue way - I certainly make no criticism and I admire the chaste-ness of these pieces. However, emotional expression is also a part of playing an instrument and has to be developed like any other technique so I made it an important feature to be brought out here. Whether this can be said to be a political choice as well as an aesthetic one I'm not sure about - perhaps you could clarify how exactly you would define political in the light of this answer? As for expanding the status quo....well, I realise I've got to deal with that but it's not easy. It is widely assumed that what is played in our concert halls, what is piped through speakers in shopping malls, pubs and restaurants, what is sung in the churches, and what is bought on CD's and so on - any situation in which music exists - is what 'people' want, is the main popular choice. In a sense, this is absolutely correct, of course, it would be economically disastrous for it to be otherwise, but in fact it is not a choice if one has never experienced other things. COMA has a role to play in just presenting new and unfamiliar music all around and with the wonderful enthusiasm that has become their trademark - and what is important is also that new music is the only music or at least the main music that they play, it is not reluctantly tacked on to their activities after the players have swooned over some Mozart. In this country (well, probably everywhere else too) we start with the past and rarely get as far as the present, this is evident in other disciplines particularly architecture where it is assumed that the majority of people want to live in an olde-worlde-style cottage (even if it's a brand-new version!) And in music it's not just about audiences but about player's attitudes too. In our musical conservatoires, most students come to learn how to play the great classical

concertos and sonatas and there is often reluctance to deal with the music of our own time. But if we could only somehow start with our own time and then work backwards - (and then only if there was a desire to do so.....!) How on earth we accomplish that I really don't know but I feel it is at the root of the matter. It's about other things too, of course, one of them being that music should be more than just background 'pap' to have in the background whilst reading a magazine but something stimulating and challenging too on another occasion. Not easy to bring about changes in people's attitudes, but perhaps an organisation such as COMA can chip away at the all too well-established thinking patterns of most of us. From small seeds do mighty oaks grow ..and all that stuff...

MA (10/09/04)

Thank you for your responses. I was particularly interested in your discussion of the need to facilitate player expression within the scope of flexibly scored notated music. It is this lack that has drawn me to minimally scored and semi-improvised work. I will answer the question you raised and outline a few questions that follow from what you have said.

By political in the choice of the intuitive and eclectic I was referring to the conflict between the modernist tradition of developing music primarily through process (either chance or mathematical model) as opposed to personal sensitivity to tone colour, melody or rhythm. I see this as a political issue in the way it has been so rigidly enforced in the past and the fact that for many it is still seen as the only way to escape the pervasiveness and limitations of diatonic thinking. You seem to be concerned in the Four Temperaments to assimilate process and intuition within the same work.

Do you see a conflict between following processes as against intuitive exploration of sound in the way you develop your work ? Is this similar to the difficulties of balancing prescription of what to play with leaving space for personal interpretation ? Would you agree that these are two of the core issues in the development of contemporary music?

Do you see an eclectic approach as a necessary result of our post-modern eclectic times (even if you are not a post-modernist yourself)? And, if so, have all the uncompromisingly self-referential radical musical works been written and is the task of composers now to bring in the plethora of techniques and excesses of previous decades to meaningful compositional fruition in the context of their own voice?

DB (24/09/04)

You asked whether I see a conflict between following processes as against intuitive exploration of sound in the way I develop my work.

It's certainly true that in 'The Four Temperaments' I was particularly aware of this issue as I set out to write something with a kind of 'romantic' (in the 19th century art-form sense) colour to it, but then ,on considering your question, I think I probably always have had the balance of these two techniques in mind, and then on thinking about it more, it occurred to me that isn't this what composers have always done?

Even the most technically-complex music - that of the early renaissance -(don't forget that music has been 'dumbing down' ever since !) where composers such as Machaut, then Dufay and Ockeghem for example, played the most sophisticated technical games, is highly poetic and expressive too because of its creator's individual gift and desire for melodic expression. And isn't 'intuition' on its own a highly dubious concept which is likely to lead to rambling, overblown pieces with a poor sense of structure ?
A really highly- processed piece such as Stockhausen's ' Kreuzspiel', on the other hand, is surely more than a set of serialised parameters - one is very aware of the composer's instinctive love of dramatic gesture in its wonderful music. For myself, I get together my material and decide on the method of developing it, laying down the various directions I will take, the length and 'weight' of its sections, the rough surface textures I'll aim for and so on, and then make a start – usually with a great deal of trepidation and I've never known why it takes so long to get started! Once I'm into it though, I become aware of something hidden away in the 'grain' which I didn't realise was there when I started and it becomes my job to bring it to the surface and it's here, I think, that

I revel in a certain amount of freedom and yes, intuition. It's a bit like being a sculptor I suppose.

Is an eclectic approach to writing music a necessary result of our post-modern times? – you ask. I don't believe it is necessarily so, but it perhaps is always a possibility now. We all have access to so much information - including information about people's private lives - and so just about anything is seen as public property and is there for the taking. So too in music. Also, most composers will think at some point, that all the radical stuff has already happened and that it is not possible to come up with something new, but someone always does! A current example of such a composer is Lachenmann who has completely re-written the sound of conventional instruments so that often, when listening to his pieces it is not possible to tell what is actually playing, and indeed, that it an orchestra/ string quartet at all. I can be honest and say that in one sense it's galling because it wasn't me that forged such a bold new sound, but in another way, it's very inspiring because it means that there are other bold new means of expression out there waiting to be discovered. I do believe that there is an infinite number of directions still for music to take – the well will never run dry, as it were. Now that's where I am a modernist!

03 Interview with Michael Finnissy

The following interview with Michael Finnissy on the theme of writing music for amateurs was conducted by Malcolm Atkins (using e-mail and post) between October 2004 and May 2005. Due to Michael's many commitments (and the Christmas season) there were intermittent gaps and agreements to delay the interview. However, what is contained below is just the correspondence that relates to Michael's work.

MA (21/10/2004)

For many contemporary composers the call to write a piece for amateurs involves an integration of experimental and extended technique that utilises the strengths (of enthusiasm and open-mindedness) that those who choose to play new music have compared to many student or professional performers. Plain Harmony, in contrast, appears to focus on an older amateur tradition of church or community choir, employing dense textures (again unusual in much of this kind of work), which, despite frequent false relations, seem designed to emphasise a collective response. This is especially true of the opening - straight in with the direction 'Lustily, as in hymn singing' - as the instruction that 'no line should take precedence over any other'. Even the use of contrasted solo and group work (a common approach to facilitating the use of the more skilled performer in conjunction with a less experienced group) does not seem to be used to highlight individual interpretation but to enhance a collective sound. Was there a communitarian aim in your choice and style of material in this work and did the history of western collective music making (especially by amateurs) influence this choice?

MF (08/11/2004)

To answer your last point first (as it provides a context for the rest), both my father (staunch socialist) and my principal teacher Bernard Stevens (Marxist/communist) had introduced the notion of and emphasised 'community' to me in a particular way. My love of Rossellini's early (neo-realist) films - where he uses the term 'chorality' to define the collective voice of the people (or protagonists) - informs this too. I love this in Pasolini's poetry and cinema too, or the 'sensibility' (distancing, analysing) in Brecht or his 'disciples' here: Edward Bond or Howard Barker. There is a sense in which 'Plain Harmony' deliberately draws on a 1930s to 1950s tradition: the Workers' Music Association type of thing - Eisler, Wolpe, Blitzstein, Hindemith, inter alia gebrauchmusik. And particularly a 'choral' or sung aspect of this tradition, albeit that I tempered it with 'Ivesian' hymn-like references (particularly to methodist, and Shaker American styles of hymnody) rather than other types of 'popular' music - cod-jazz for example. I'm happier with forming a critique of this 'old' tradition - socially and politically. I know more about it. It seems richer in 'ideals', more solid, more objectified. More to get one's teeth into than amorphous 'extended techniques'.

In some ways the 'collective' is also very different from my compositional 'norms' - of soloistic and chamber music with one (usually virtuosic) player per part. So for 'Plain Harmony' it seemed right to find an appropriate 'metaphor' before I wrote anything. I can't just write music from an 'outside', from an all-purpose stylistic dogma. Having decided that no individual voice would dominate any part of the texture, I worked at a textural archetype (chordal homophony) that accomodated this aim. And I hoped that the 'tidal wave' of the music's discourse would carry less-experienced and more-experienced players along together. I'd already written (in 'East London Heys') music in which different strata are aimed at different levels of ability, and pieces ('Maldon' and 'Anima Christi') in which amateurs and professionals work together 'discreetly' side by side, so I wanted to try something else.

I chose (Grainger-esque) open score so that anyone (regardless of instrument, except by virtue of range) could join in. It's not supposed to sound like a traditional orchestra, indeed not blended smoothly at all. The ideal would be to include accordions, kazoos, musical-saws, folk-instruments alongside violins and clarinets. Thereby disavowing any sense of 'proper' or 'improper'.

MA (11/11/2004)

I was particularly interested that in writing a piece for amateurs you were choosing to comment on the history of that practice. Not just writing within an established genre (or set of genres) but exploring the possibilities and limitations of collective music making by reference to its history and aspects of the history that have particular resonance for you.

It seems that as a result of this you have two contrasting purposes. One derived from the need to create a piece that reminds people of (or educates people in) the pleasure of collective non-competitive music making. The other to explore a series of compositional aims: to survey within one work different aspects of collective music making - strident and passionate hymnody, sentimental harmony, lyrical folk song - and the contrasting moods these engender; to question notions of what instrumentation is allowed in an ensemble and to question expectations of how the material prepared will develop and culminate. This seems to generate a tension in the music where a traditional direction or resolution is implied and then avoided or contradicted. The eight part extended diatonic texture at the start imediately leads to expectations of a chorale style cadence which never appears. But the music continues to explore different voicing arrangements in a traditional manner full of diatonic relations, and often in traditional four bar sections. The structure of the piece seems to hark back to an archetype of the symphony in its four section move through affirmative, sentimental, lyrical to strong and passionate. But in the first and last sections the affirmative start does not reappear at the culminations which are unexpected (in the case of the first) and indeterminate (in the case of the last). The pauses in the second section deliberately break the melodic thread and in the third, snatches of beautiful lyrical melody break through randomly although the power of any one individual voice never overcomes the other parts.

Is this a fair summary of your aims and did meeting them in the context of the limitations you imposed (of equality of sound amongst all parts) present any particular compositional problems or advantages ? How far are the issues that you explore in the piece, of exploring historical reference and challenging the normal teleology of that historical material, common to your compositional practice ?

MF(19/11/2004)

Spot on! ALL my music is designed to challenge accepted teleologies and historico-musical praxis. The pieces are (at least partly) 'critiques' and 'commentaries' on (usually recognisable and, at some level, quoted and acknowledged) extant musical objects or ideas. This notion also preoceeds from (i) all music is culturally determined, reliant on 'analogical forms' (poetical or architectural), organisationally remote from sound in Nature; (ii) our relatively insistent 'Museum Culture', the invasive presence of canonical 'classical music' as determinant, as the 'norm' (actually Euro-centric and imperialistic) for (most types of? I'd include jazz, pop and Hollywoodesque schmaltzy "world-musics") musical composition.
There is, then, a collusion between me and the performer and the audience, a shared (though often latent and even unacknowledged) link - possibly 'expectation' - with which I (and they) can PLAY. This 'ludus' (a serious game probably) has layers [e.g. spotting references, detective work, archeology] or can proceed entirely superficially [in ignorance] as a (sensually/emotionally attractive) 'journey'.
"Problems and advantages" (Your Paragraph 4)?
Neither. Of course any decent composition establishes certain notional (though temporary) criteria which must somehow be met, more or less rigorously, more or less enjoyably. For me composing is mostly 'discovering', uncovering possibilities and proposing connections, trying not to sacrifice spontaneity, trying not to chew things up into baby-food. So that the result is like REAL LIFE. I am aware that, as Alaric Sumner, the writer, put it "technique can obscure iconic essence". Meaning that the act of [trained] writing can erase as much as it can reveal, obscure as much as it can evoke.
"Contrasting purposes" (Your para.3)?

These can be useful, creating a 'formalising' dialectic in the composition, positing factors that perhaps require 'resolution' or at least 'investigation'. The composition is then this (investigative or resolving) process, not its aftermath. The piece, most importantly, IS the action itself (from 'inside') - NOT a description of the action (as it were from 'outside').

MA (23/11/2004)

It seems to me that your approach to composition is in itself a working out through practical application of the contradictions between modernist and post-modernist thought. What you appear to be doing is developing a way of working that allows for an expression of aesthetic value despite opposition to the traditional idea of the art-music establishment that this value only resides in a body of techniques and methods evolved within the western notated tradition. You see the posibility of inherent value in composition, but more through an existentialist position of the composer acting in good faith in the interpretation of whatever materials are worked on, than a tradition of Romantic inspiration, or mathematical process or any other dogma that acts out the expectations of the western canon. You are wary of the cultural imperialism of Western music but seek to work in that medium by deflating its pretensions, both by subverting its expectations and highlighting your personal processes - especially in your re-interpretation of the past.

This seems to lead to a wide range of styles and references in your work where the unifying factor is your assimilation and interpretation. You have pointed to the influence of Ives and Grainger and the tradition of writing music for amateurs that informed Plain Harmony. A piece such as Tango (in Spectrum 2) takes a playful look at an institutionalised dance form (with a definite sense of Satie in the instruction to play with 'relentless elegance'). In contrast, a work like Red Earth, seems to me resonant of the expressionist tradition of modernism in its powerful evocation of landscape and the psychological effect it has on the viewer.

Is this a fair assessment of your approach to composition ? How far is this approach one evolved through praxis and how far through reflection on your role as a composer in contemporary society ?

MF (23/12/2004)

You are most perceptive in your analysis of my compositional thinking, and - as I think I did reply to one of the other questions 'spot on' with regard to the proposition of 'dialectical' positions between 'established' aesthetic arguments, I see the work as 'interlocutor' - restlessly investigative, and indeed I find the modernist arsenal of techniques (ensuring through barely disguised replication an imperialistic (euro-centric) dominance and reductionism) quite prohibitively confining (and also stupid, which makes the techniques themselves easier to parody and jettison!).

MA (06/01/2005)

Looking through your work there seems to be a consistent thread of interest in folk music. In this case there seems to be more than a dialogue with the past in that you seem to be seeking to encapsulate the ideas of lyrical expression and the a-rhythmic complexity that the human voice in solo expression can capture (before it gets trapped into the patterning that the transcription of this raw expression can impose). This would apply to the folk song elements in Plain Harmony section 3 as well as the solo parts in Red Earth, not to mention the many pieces you have written which explicitly reference folk music. Do you seek to capture something archetypal in human expression in your use of folk melody (or stylistic reference to it) that was lost in the Western tradition ? How do you distinguish your use of folk melody from the way that composers from Monteverdi , Haydn and Bartok have attempted to use it to re-vitalise a stagnating Western tradition or even the way our world-music lite culture now attempts to commodify it in exotic juxtapositions (and their usually happy resolutions) ?

(MF 01/04/05)

Folk music: Your supposition about "lyrical expression and a-rhythmic complexity" is entirely correct – I was, still am, looking to convey SPONTANEITY of utterance (as distinct from contrivance). Of course folk-music exists "in terms of/within the confines of / is often rigidly proscribed by " convention (limited patterns)… even if the impression (illusion ?) we have is that the singer is improvising (qv. !) on the spur of the moment. I suppose its another 'rhetoric' – a stance – a contradiction/paradox : Way back (1960's) I was indeed exploring, hunting 'archetypes' (melodic/rhythmic/gestural) and it seemed (Jung) that if these existed WITHIN cultures (and informed art-forms within those cultures) one would have to consult folk-music as much as Art-music, as the relationship between the two (relative dependency or influence or impact of one on the other) is not a simple one. Once one had information about 'fons et origo' later accretions would make more sense. I read anthropology ! I don't think of folk-music as different from what I do in particular of its 'intent' or even 'creation' – to give voice to / to reveal / to explore the human condition; to offset conventional wisdom with individual experience. I don't think this has been entirely lost in Western concert-music, in my politics (?) I'd prefer parity to supremacy (equality rather than dominance), I suppose folk musics do introduce the notion of "re-vitalisation", or perhaps suggest a means of "counter-acting" pomposity, dogmatism, sterile re-cycling of convention etc. etc. but I'm more interested in the notion of AUTHENTICITY (truth), and I find much English art-music clouded by pretence and artifice. If folk music is a symbol of Authenticity, its attitudes and methodology can / might be instructive. (Note : during my study of the collecting-procedures used in English folk music I found that Cecil Sharp instructed his field-workers to correct the modalities and to omit the ornamentation of melodies, to bring them into line with "correct usage" (i.e. art-music conventions). Grainger's method – transcribing "exactly" from slowed down wax-cylinder recordings – was spurned. Too complex and contradictory ? Too intellectual ? Too unconventional ? Sharp's views found widespread publication, Grainger's are in the recesses of the Library or Congress in Washington. An entire 'mini-culture' has been falsified.)

My SYMBOLIC use of folk-musics is to suggest ANTI-elitism, i.e. egalitarian towards folk- and art-traditions. Rather than trying to domesticate folk-music I'm suggesting

'rough-housing' art-music (un-domesticating it). I'm also quite (not very) interested in truthfully declaring the indebtedness of some 'modernist' gestures to folk sources (Xenakis → Bartok and 'Les Noces' –era Stravinsky) (Boulez → gamelan, melismatic vocal music of Islamic/ Indian tradition, also appropriated by Messiaen) where these remain under-acknowledged. (Jacques Longchamp recently acknowledged a late work of Xenakis in "Le Monde" as being "mercifully free of the CONTAMINATION of folk music " (my capitals).)

I've more recently alluded to Beethoven's folk-song arrangements (the largest strand of his vocal music !) as a way of suggesting a 'tradition' WITHIN European art music of "composing WITH " folk / popular /banal elements … and critically exploring them (is that distinct from 'exploiting' or 'appropriating' them? Perhaps this is a question of perspective … Is Grieg, for example, trying to define HIMSELF by the use of ethnic stereotyping ? When the 'folk' usage permeates the music that much it can't be putting on funny hats ? Adorno suggested such usage WEAKENED the substance, rather than re-vitalised it !)

I don't distinguish my use from Haydn/Bartok except in very obvious ways (i.e. I don't collect in the field, but rely on existing collections, often historic). I do make the (small) distinction that I declare my awareness of their precedent in the form (often) of a critique, or indeed a critical (and frequently politicised) DISTANCE. Moreover this is often IRONIC, or SATIRICAL. I don't (I'm not convinced this is Haydn's or Bartok's aim either) 'civilise' or 'innoculate' myself, though I empathise in some ways and abstract in others.

I only know circumstantial things about 'world-music lite' – what I've heard I DISLIKE quite strongly : too sugary, with inappropriate (ill-considered) harmony – concepts OVER-cooked and larded with inappropriate 'sauce'. Resembling (rather disturbingly) the Soviet folk-music-inspired (?!) agenda of Zhdanov and co. Also resonating with 'happy-clappy' Christianity and 'feel good' commodities generally.

"Nature Seems to look on all

fixed-up
poetry and art as something
almost impertinent."

WALT WHITMAN

04 Interview with Ana Barbour.

This interview relates to how she worked within the collaboration on Accession in terms of adapting to a preset structure and using the available space

'The collaboration for Accession was a new experience for me in terms of constructing a dance performance.

While I saw the role of the dance as a support for the music in this particular piece I still wanted the dance elements to work in themselves visually. I was also very interested in making the best use of the space at the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building.

Being presented with a planned structure was at first sight quite daunting and it was difficult to know how to approach the choreography. I resolved this through:

- meetings with Malcolm to talk through the structure and get a sense of intended mood/feeling/atmosphere/length of the sections in which the dancers would be involved.

- discussions about how to involve the dancers with musicians more interactively.

- visits to the space to decide which areas of the building I would like to use and for which sections.

Because of the number of participants we wanted to limit rehearsals to the sections where there was direct interaction with the musicians. Outside of these sections we generally attempted to prepare a basis for spontaneous response in performance through using key words for each section to inform our movement [114] and specified routes and positions for all dancers for each section whether they were active or static. I also planned to use as much variety in the number of interacting dancers as I could, using solos duos and trios as well as quartet interaction. Where there was a planned

[114] This technique of holding images in mind, butoh-fu is discussed by Paul Mackilligin in Section 4.2.4

interaction between the four of us which would run in parallel with the music, as in the garden section, we did rehearse that separately as a unit prior to combining with the musicians.

Malcolm had originally planned for us to participate in a small number of key sections throughout the piece. However, it seemed disruptive to come and go for these sections so I planned for us to be present throughout the performance even if we remained still and attempted to use unobtrusive locations that left the audience attention primarily on the musicians. As a result our presence was felt from the point we entered the performance in the second section of the piece.'

05 Interviews with Butoh practitioners Paul Mackilligan and Paola Esposito

The respondents were Paul Mackilligin and Paola Esposito.

General

How would you distinguish butoh from other forms of contemporary dance ?

Paul:
It's slower - that's the main difference. The slower speed also means that momentum is not used as much as other contemporary dance forms. And then momentum is not used so much because butoh dance is typically improvised on the smallest, most anatomically intimate level. I mean that if the dancer does not know which direction a body part will move in the next moment (or not even in THIS moment) then 'poise' in every moment, so that any body part can be moved in any direction, and future movements are not yet already committed leads to a slower, more muscularly controlled form of movement. Typically.

Paola:
If I see butoh and contemporary dance on a same stage, I would be able to distinguish butoh by some "exterior" characteristics. movement in butoh tends to be quite slow, minimal, subtle. In many cases, the movement seem to be connected to the dancer, a part of her subjectivity, rather than being 'imposed' on her body as mere form. In this sense, I would say that butoh is a more "organic" style of movement. Having experienced both butoh and contemporary dance, I would also say that there are completely different cognitive processes involved. In contemporary dance, you tend to care a lot about the final result, the "form" that your movement takes in space. Thus, there is a sense of "control" of your mind over your body. In butoh, sometimes the opposite can happen, that is, the body follows its own instincts, but that could end up being quite random. Personally, I feel that in butoh body and mind should be integrated, none of the two trying to prevail.

There are signals coming from both sides and the dance stems from this 'dialogue'. I am not really sure how to explain this concept in words.

How do you attempt to use butoh to communicate with an audience ?

Paul:
Strindberg [I think, but look it up in your referencing package Malcolm] had a character in his play, "Ghost Sonata" ask the member of a disturbingly taciturn family, "Why do you not speak to each other." ... "Because we know each other too well. We can no longer deceive each other, so we don't speak."

If the purpose of language is to deceive, then the purpose of butoh is to undermine that deception. If it's any good, then butoh tends to be disturbing to watch - disturbing and fascinating.

I would say I attempt to use butoh to communicate with an audience principally by setting up a kind of 'resonance'. Sometimes it is enough to simply be there without doing anything. Emanating imminence.

Paola:
When in front of an audience, I just tend to acknowledge their presence for myself and for the dance. This means that, in some cases, I consider the audience something like an 'energy field' to interact with. In effect, that is what happens at a physical level. I am usually scared of audiences. Both mind and body react to their presence. However, in butoh one can also try to use this feeling as 'energy', to fuel the dance.
In other cases, when I am in my most confident mood for example, I may simply let go of myself in the dance, and therefore I don’t care much of what the audience may think, or see. I just dance.

How applicable is butoh outside the Japanese context in which it was developed ?

Paul:
Butoh has almost nothing to do with Japanese culture. That's a ridiculous question Malcolm. It's like asking how applicable geometry is outside Greece.

Paola:
In a thousand of ways! This is my PhD Malcolm!
For myself, I think butoh is not just dance, or rather, it is a dance that can open you to the infinite potentialities of being human. To me, butoh is in itself a form of research, by being 'aware' or 'present'in the present moment. Another aspect of butoh is "total freedom". This is not to be intended as "anything goes" as in butoh there are a lot of important principles to be understood and implemented. But the freedom of experience, of understanding something in your own terms, through your body, without someone coming and telling you "no, you should do this way, not this other way". In this sense, I think butoh does not need to be just 'Japanese'. Although I also think we still need to learn a lot from their butoh tradition.

How important is improvisation in butoh ?

Paul:
Improvisation is central to butoh. Who thought up these questions?

Paola:
Important. But I think sometimes there are problems in understanding the very notion of 'improvisation'. Improvisation as random series of movements makes the dance easily lose power and effectiveness. In this case, to me, it is better to have rules and improvise within those rules.

What improvisational techniques do you use in butoh ?

Paul:

Ah, that's a better question. In theory you wouldn't ever need an improvisational technique; the term seems almost oxymoronic. The trouble is that choreographies are constantly and spontaneously forming - in a kind of crystallisation' process. In other words, patterns emerge and human dancers tend to repeat movement patterns and tend to accumulate certain individual (and group) habitual responses, so the challenge becomes to find ways to break up those crystallisation so that newer, more fluid forms can emerge. That's what 'improvisational techniques' are for.

One common and quite peculiar technique in butoh is to use images ('butoh-fu') while moving, so that dancers might hold particular images in mind - especially images given by another person. One simple technique I like is to decide on a series of images, so that at any one time all the dancers in a group are responding to the same image.

In general, stimuli from outside the dancer - especially unusual stimuli which the dancer has no ready-made response for - can all be useful.

Paola:
The one mentioned above. Not sure it is a technique. I give myself 'something', an image usually, which may be outside or inside my body, and I improvise with it. This is a 'rule' in the sense that, in appearance, it is a limitation to your body's 'free' expression. But, in fact, having to work with that limitation trains your body(mind) to reach greater levels of freedom.

Music

Is there any music that you feel is particularly appropriate or inappropriate for butoh ?

Paul:
My favourite musician for butoh is Hiroko Komiya - who works with Atsushi Takenouchi. She plays a variety of mostly percussion instruments, responding to the

dancers and including a lot of 'space': Hiroko 'sculpts silence' with sound in the same way a butoh dancer 'sculpts stillness' with movement. Almost all her music is unamplified, allowing great depth and subtlety.

Improvised music in general works well with improvised movement, each providing feedback for the other but on a different 'channel'.

Recorded music in general is not good for butoh, and neither is music which is too loud. Music which is too loud tends to create 'crosstalk' and can swamp other senses in the dancer which need to be open.

Paola:
I like your music Malcolm. I don't know exactly why. It allows some sort of 'expansion'. It is not intrusive to the dance. It does not feel like something external, but just like the 'right context'.

I would also like to experiment with Tim's music, more electronics and beats in it. But I don't think it would feel the same. Probably less organic.

How do you go about creating the music to support butoh performance _ are here any parameters you would use in this ?

Paul:
I haven't created huge amounts of music for butoh performances myself - apart from making sounds while dancing, or playing flute or balloon while moving. I always improvise freely in response to the movement, and I often deliberately stop playing from time to time. I like periods of silence.

Paola:

I would go for distortions of natural sounds. amplifying existing geometries or resonances in nature. But mechanical sounds also inspire me. I think it is a matter of extracting 'essences' in sound, to make them like 'pure substance'. Same thing applying to my understanding of movement. One searches for determinate 'qualities' and works with that.

How important is the construction of music and sound world for a butoh performance?

Paul:
It's actually not essential at all, but it can add hugely to a performance. Most forms of dance take their rhythm from music and would be quite lost without it, but butoh movement will almost never follow the rhythm of music. Music/sound plays a similar role in a butoh performance as it does in a film.

Paola:
I think it is important. In a performance, the construction of music and sound world supports both the dancers' and the audience's imaginative processes.

How important is a rapport between musician(s) and dancer(s) ?

Paul:
I'm not sure how important this is. Or rather, I think that any musician can work with any dancer. Sensitivity is important. And if a particular fascination with the movement or music of the other can heighten that sensitivity, then that helps.

Paola:
It is very important. I think the quality of a performance may depend on this rapport.

Appendix 02 Additional Material for Accession

01 Personal reflections on first performance of Accession (June 2005)

I have included below my personal reflections on the first performance which I wrote down immediately as a record in order facilitate developing the work :

Given the limited rehearsal time the piece worked well. The strengths of the piece were in the experience and inventiveness of the performers and the fact that we have built up knowledge of conducted improvisation that enables the rapid shaping of new work as a collaborative act between conductor and performers. The disadvantages of this approach are that people do not always pick up the symbols used and do not always watch the conductor for changes in style.

The use of an extended structure which can have built in contrasts (between scored work and small group improvisation and large scale conduction) is an advantage as it enforces a range of material that may not happen in a straight conduction where the players may not pick up on the need for variation.

The mixture of improvisation and prescribed playing has real strengths because it gives the possibility of spontaneity alongside more controlled playing.

Ideally if the piece is repeated more will be prepared for individual players to bring out the strengths of the whole group.

My comments by section on hearing the recording and reflecting on the piece a few days after the performance are included below. The initial comments are in italics but I have also included further comment to explain how I dealt with the issues I observed (unitalicised).

The first section, Fanfares, Warnings and Promises was not on the recording (it was only switched on in Section 3). From memory I felt that it did not move quickly. Players

should have stopped as they were interrupted by the next person. I decided to reappraise the opening for the next performance.

Threshold, the second seemed to work well (I have no recording to verify this). However I am not sure about imposing a previously scored piece at this point in the piece. It seems better to use material that relates more directly to the core anthems and melodies used throughout.

Torture Chamber the third section seemed to lack –the players did not pick up on symbols – especially the Eric Morecombe symbol which was critical for rapid changes. This was something I would try and address through rehearsal.

A Fantastic Edifice the fourth section was well played but I needed to define parameters for this piece better.

Armoury (5) developed an interesting percussive contrast. Again this needed more attention from the players but is is something I would try and develop further.

The sixth section Between War and Wealth (or Got anything…nice ?) was based on a scored piece for Nick Benda. It was played excellently and the accompanying electronics were very sensitive.
This is something I would build on for the next performance by reworking the scored music for Nick Benda for Clair Aldington to play (Nick would not be available for the next performance).

In Treasury (7) the players built up well on previous section. This could possibly be developed into a Concerto Grosso. In fact this was developed into a dance led piece (see the discussion in 3.4.3).

Entrance to the Garden (8) seemed to need more definite control. It would be good to try scoring this more fully. This is what I did for the next performance. In addition there was dance accompaniment throughout

Although Garden (9) should have led from the previous section the flow between the two should have been better managed. In fact they should be reworked as one section.

Death of Europe (10) was interesting but too frenetic .It should be scored and sectioned more clearly although melodica could be left as is. The way I transformed this piece is discussed below in 3.4.2.

Empire (11) needed a method of structuring anthems that leaves the contrasts but is more coherent. The contrast of drums and electronics with anthems worked well. This was changed in the November performance to use dance as a structuring method (see 3.4.3 below).

Lake of Tears (12) worked well as the parameter for quiet was a useful stimulus. This was left similar for the November performance although the addition of dance did complement the music (see 3.4.3 below).

Springtime behind the Slaughterhouse (13) worked well in combining scoring and improvisation. The only improvement would be to instruct the improvisers to be more frantic.

Accession (14) like Empire needed a method of structuring tunes.

In Summit (15) symbols and rapid changes were not picked up on effectively by orchestra. This is something that could be developed through rehearsal.

On Parting (16) was played very well by the core quartet and this could be left similar for the November performance.

Appendix 03 Approaches to Organising Improvisation

(the contents of this appendix have been published as a separate document on the Oxford Improvisers web site. For this reason it has its own contents page and bibliography. As this document was prepared during my research it reflects the development of my ideas and duplicates some of the conclusions I have reached in the main body of the research. I have amended it slightly to align page numbering but have left the content consistent with the published version outside of this).

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1.1 Introduction

This paper is an attempt to document the approaches to organising improvisation that have been influential on my practice in the Oxford Improvisers, Spontaneous Arts Collective and educational work (mainly with Kate Comberti and the Oxford Philomusica). It has been web published and disseminated separately to my research work and is included as an appendix to this research as although it duplicates some of what has been discussed in the research it is a useful summation of techniques and approaches.

Some of what I document includes suggestions and solutions to problems of creating work that I and colleagues have come up with both for encouraging participation amongst non-improvisers and for maximising participation by a group of skilled improvisers; other aspects include established repertoire and approaches from jazz and contemporary music innovators in the field which we have adapted and used in combination or in new situations. Often an approach that works well for beginners is equally valid for professional musicians - especially in the case of tried and trusted exponents like John Stevens[115] and Pauline Oliveros. [116]

This does not mean that I believe that improvisation always needs to be organised, channelled or controlled. What we have found with the Oxford Improvisers is that over time the group has enhanced its skills in communicating effectively and authentically without a predefined structure even in large numbers (10 - 12) despite the caveats of many that groups need to be small [117] A simple processional technique (where three people play together in turn with the players processing through the ensemble in turn) is often as successful in creating new work as any elaborate plan.

However, the imposition of structure can be liberating for some players and is definitely an advantage for those who lack confidence to improvise without some degree of encouragement. In addition the effort of breaking out of established patterns and vocabulary can occasionally be insurmountable even for the best improvising musicians where a predefined structure or approach can compel a change of practice.

Ideally the practice of free improvisation should continue (once established within a group) in parallel with the imposition of framing and structuring ideas.

I have attempted to categorise and document as many different approaches as possible outside of pure notation or totally 'free' improvisation. I have begun with conducted improvisation because that is an invaluable starting point for pulling a group together (it proved so for the Oxford Improvisers and I have found this in schools and community work).

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[115] Stevens work is summarised in Search and Reflect a training manual that is due for re-publication at the moment. Bailey(1992) gives a concise introduction to his work.
[116] Oliveros' work is well detailed on her site which also includes some free study scores.
[117] Stockhausen (1989, p 123) felt that five was the upper limit .

1.2 Conducted Improvisation

1.2.1 History

Although specific groups have used the shorthand of established conducting symbols for many years (I have no doubt that the Baroque ensembles of Corelli or Vivaldi would have developed easy signs for much that is left empty in the surviving notation of their work), the establishment of a standard set of signs to enable a conductor to develop a complete work in collaboration with an ensemble is a recent event. More than anything it enables a democratisation of the creative process because anyone can take the role of conductor/facilitator of a group piece once they have learnt the vocabulary of signs. It is quite likely that this echoes the democratisation of sound mixing that has taken place through the proliferation of sound mixing technology (in PC's etc). In fact the conductor in this environment is often like the sound mixer in taking over a flow of musical ideas form performers and highlighting and enhancing some (and removing others); changing the parameters for performance and setting up different combinations of sounds.

The emergence of the idea of a creative partnership between conductor and performer into the art-music world really seems to date from the American experimental music tradition with the work of Earle Brown[118] in the 1950's. Similar developments had been and were happening in jazz and perhaps it is no surprise that Brown was the most directly and openly influenced by jazz of the New York School.

Starting with Brown and his colleagues in the New York School there have been various experiments at combining the creative input of players with a minimum of structuring supplied by text scores, rules, graphics, and even prescribed signals for a conductor. This took a more overtly political stance with the work of Cardew [119] in the sixties and seventies and in recent years the work of Zorn[120] (with game pieces) and Butch Morris[121] has further developed the idea of a partnership of player, conductor/composer as opposed to the more traditional art music hierarchy (perhaps exemplified by the way Stockhausen felt his text pieces were an expression of his own rather than a collective

[118] Brown's work in the fifties is summarised in Nyman (Experimental Music). A useful web resource is the Earle Browne web site.

[119] The Treatise Handbook contains many of Cardew's observations about improvisation and the need to develop a new approach to the creation of music. Most notable is the section Towards an Ethic of Improvisation.

[120] John Zorn in an interview with Howard Mandel in 1999 in Future Jazz (quoted in http://www.omnology.com/zorn05.html): My first thought was "Here is a series of individuals, each has his own personal music. All worked on their instruments, on their own, to develop a highly personal language." So my first decision, which I think was the most important, was never to talk about language or sound at all. I left that completely up to the performers. What I was left with was structure.

What I came up with is a series of rules, like a trading system — one person plays, then the next person plays, then the next person plays — and event systems, where people independently perform events. Everybody can perform one event each, for example, but nobody can time it at the same time with anybody else. There might be a series of downbeats where at a downbeat a change will happen — if you're playing, maybe you must stop. If you're not playing, you may come in. That's just one example.

[121] A good introduction to Morris's work is at http://www.newworldrecords.org/linernotes/80482.pdf.

will [122]).

The work of Butch Morris has been particularly significant because he has attempted to standardise an approach to using signs and symbols to conduct improvisation (often for large ensemble or orchestra). As he explains in the sleeve notes to 'Dust to Dust':

"Conduction" (**conducted improvisation**) is a means by which a conductor may compose, (re) orchestrate, arrange, and sculpt both notated and non-notated music. Using a vocabulary of signs and gestures, many within the general glossary of traditional conducting, the conductor may alter or initiate rhythm, melody, and harmony; develop form and structure; and instantaneously change articulation, phrasing, and meter. For example, indefinite repeats of a phrase or measure may now be at the discretion of the new composer on the podium. In this way conducting becomes more than a method for musical interpretation, but an actual part of the process of composition. Conduction is a viable musical tool for the improvising ensemble.

The standardisation of the approach has paid off in the sense that numerous groups have been formed which use a set of symbols established by Butch Morris as a starting point for developing work.[123] The way the symbols work is that the direction (almost the mix) of a work is determined by the conductor who can decide who plays and for how long and various constraints in the style of playing. The choice of notes, rhythms and communication with other players is mainly left to the individual performer within the framework the conductor sets up.

Pat Thomas, who learned the techniques through performing in Europe with Butch Morris, taught them to the Oxford Improvisers Orchestra in 2003 and as a result of the success of their use the Oxford Improvising Orchestra was started by the Oxford Improvisers and Oxford COMA. The conduction techniques were used as a starting point but quite soon many extensions were made including their use in combination with other art forms - such as dance. The use of 'conduction' as a baseline vocabulary from which a group can develop new work has been a feature of many of the performances of this group since 2003.

1.2.2 Advantages of Conduction

The development of new work through the use of conduction does enable any member of the ensemble to control the parameters of sound of the group as well as performing within it. This had a cohesive effect on the Oxford Improvisers as it enabled everyone to develop their skills in this area. Mutual learning and passing on of skills and ideas was established and for many, the ability to establish quickly parameters for a performance led to the trial and development of new work which could be refined in rehearsal and performance.

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[122] Aus den Seben Tagen contains very loose scoring - in the sense that musicians tend to decide all pitch and duration of notes played. Despite this the work is categorised as Stockhausen's. This is similar to the issues over the ownership of 4.33' highlighted by a court case Peter's Edition instigated against Mike Batt after he placed a silent track on his album, Classical Graffiti which was credited to himself and Cage (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/music/2276621.stm).

[123] Details on conduction symbols and where to find out more on them are in Appendix A to this document. At the time of writing there are a number of Improvising Orchestras in the UK - London, Oxford, Glasgow, Birmingham and Sheffield.

Some felt that the conduction approach lost the advantages of listening, communication and mutual support that an experienced group of improvisers can achieve through focussed and attentive playing together with no directional control. Most, however, agreed that the ability to shift the direction of a piece by changing groups of players, dynamics, registers and rhythms gave huge scope that consensus based playing tends to miss. For example, it is very difficult to get a specific sub group to enter a piece as a unit and give a strong timbral shift to previous playing unless this has been pre-arranged. Or allow different players prominence at times when they would naturally shy from dominating the group sound.
These things can happen but with a fluctuating and open membership (as is the case with the Oxford Improvisers), they are unlikely.

Some particularly good examples of conducted improvisation as developed by the Oxford Improvising Orchestra are:
Pat Thomas conduction of the Armoury Section of the Accession Piece
Pat Thomas conduction of the Theremin Concerto

1.2.3 Extensions to conduction used by Oxford Improvising Orchestra

From the start of the Oxford Improvising Orchestra the opportunity was established for anyone in the group to develop new work using the symbols but extending them to incorporate other parameters (such as particular texts, graphics, melodic fragments, collaborations with other art forms etc). To highlight the range of possibilities I will discuss a number of particularly useful approaches, pieces and signs that have been used in Oxford to enhance the standard conduction practice. (These are all based on an understanding of the core principles and signs documented in the Appendix A)

Multiple conductors and tagged conduction: The liberating effect of moving from performing to giving directional control can be enhanced by encouraging multiple simultaneous conductors. These conductors can be allocated part of the ensemble or compete with one another for the whole group. The parallel development of different rhythms contrasting timbres can give an interest and complexity to a piece that a single conductor cannot achieve. This can be further enhanced by passing on the role of conductor amongst a group and seeing how the changes of personality affect a performance.
These techniques are demonstrated in the recording of Accession II (part 15 or Track 6 on the CD release. In the context of the piece this section worked as a summation of what had happened as everyone who had conducted so far in the work was eligible to participate (two conductors were agreed to start and each could pass on to one of the other nominated people at will). Hence, their techniques and styles could be revisited in this one place.

Use of texts: I have attempted to create a specific atmosphere in a piece by the use of text. Using a singer (D'orowing) who would be conducted in as any other performer I

gave her William Burrough's Book of Dreams and asked her when brought in to choose any passages at random and interpret at will.
The resonant and other wordly images of this text did create a very particular atmosphere to the piece and fashioned how I brought in musical responses from the performers. A similar attempt with Haiku was reasonably successful but the less predictable Burrough's text worked better because of its rapid transitions between the mundane and the fanciful.

The SPARC group is developing these ideas further with the use of text based pieces. Alan Buckley is currently developing a piece where a recording of a poem he has written is played on a tape to an artist who draws a response. Dancers interpret the response and they in turn are interpreted by improvising musicians. The whole process is observed by artists (in the audience) who create visual representations of it (which could be used for a further work).

Use of Melody: Although to many improvisers the use of melody was seen as a step back to a previous musical language the wide range of interests of the improvising group in Oxford has led to a philosophy where traditional methods of structuring music through notation are accepted as part of the available resources, provided the notation is an aid to structuring the free expression of the players and not the entirity of a work. This seems to parallel the increased use of melody in other improvising groups such as the London Improvising Orchestra, where composer/performers such as Simon Fell[124] use some notational ideas in their compositions.

In order to explore the contrast between modal improvisation and the total harmonic freedom of the improvising orchestra I set up a piece where a specific signal would mean use a prescribed melody of any part of that melody (played backwards or forwards at whatever speed desired). In contrast players would have total harmonic freedom when not requested to use the melody. The melody I chose was the plainsong Pange Lingua which is in phrygian mode. The way I tended to structure performance was around a continual dialectic of performers exploring the melody and its ramifications within the mode as against those free of the harmonic constraint who would tend to destabilise and destroy the melody. The weight of the performance would shift between the two sides as performers were brought in one style or another. I extended the techniques of using melody in contrast to free playing in the Accession Piece as follows:

A series of fragments of melodies was used by all performers. These fragments related to full melodies used throughout the piece (all accession state anthems or folk tunes). A performer could be asked to play a fragment at any time by a symbol (F) followed by the fragment number indicating the specific one to play at the next down beat.
Accession I (13): Four players were allocated folk tunes. Each of these players was linked to one of four dancers. They played only when the dancer moved. The dancers came in turn and left gaps between moves. Ultimately two dancers remained in motion

[124] A particularly good article on Simon Fell's own experience of organising large scale group improvisation is available at http://www.btinternet.com/%7Erubberneck/fell.html

and the entire improvising group (18) was split between the two conflicting melodies. Ultimately one dancer alone continued at which point all played the same tune (or improvised on it).
Accession II (17 – track 4 on the released CD): Eight players were allocated anthems. They begun their anthems as conducted in The remaining ensemble created a wall of noise that began softly and gradually took over all players - including the anthem players.
Accession II (16 – track 3 on the CD) A melody written around the lyric of the poem Springtime Behind the Slaughterhouse was played solo on alto clarinet. When played through two string players joined the clarinet player in an improvisation following from this melody.
Accession II (20 – track 7 on the CD) a melody based on the lyric of the poem On Parting was played on flute. A group of three players joined the flute player. Simultaneous to this each remaining member of the ensemble played a very soft very high note (starting in turn as brought in by the conductor). Ultimately the improvising musicians joined the ensemble to indicate the end of the piece (which also marked the end of the whole work).

Sonic space, subtlety and timbral exploration

In large group improvisation there is always a danger of overplaying. Although this often lessens as a group coheres it can be lessened by specific structuring techniques. The same also applies to volume and the ability to hear subtle sounds and extensions of instrumental technique.

These problems generally do not apply in small groups - especially in duos and trios - where the players will more easily adjust to hear the quietest sounds. Also the concern with subtle effects and simplicity is a particular phenomenon of our times and reflects the increasing importance of the legacy of Feldman [125], the French Spectral Composers [126]. The New London Silence Movement reflects a radical improvisational position with regard to these issues. An interesting web discussion of their label is at http://www.splitrec.com/index.php?go=subreductionismandth

The processional is one approach to allowing space for performers. Other approaches listed elsewhere (dance led improvisation which controls who plays or conduction which can isolate individual performers or small groups of performers) can also help indirectly.

[125] Morton Feldman's compositional principles revolved around the creation of the purest form of 'absolute' music, and the need to define the relationship between sound and silence with the utmost precision. Webern was his starting-point, from which he elevated the pause to the same importance as all other gestures. Different kinds of notation were employed to create an exact equipoise between sound and silence, and to explore the interstices between painting and music; between time and space; between form and content.

[126] Spectral music began a quarter century ago in France considers tone colour (or timbre) as the main element of music - supplanting such traditional aspects as melody, counterpoint, and rhythm. Tone colour and harmony are understood to be essentially the same thing. Sonorities are based on the natural overtones and generalizations from such structures. Leading practitioners: Tristan Murail, Gerard Grisey, Jonathan Harvey

Dominic Lash, possibly influenced by his connection with London performers, has been keen to explore space and quiet. His piece Van Hagen's Voicebox explores setting up a range of timbral effects for instruments (originally voices) which enforce the use of extended technique. Further pieces have explored the interplay of quiet unvoiced sounds.

I set up the section Lake of Tears in the Accession Piece to explore quiet sounds whilst using all the parameters of conducted improvisation outside of volume. The section was controlled by the parameter that no-one could play above the volume of a singing bowl - which had to be audible for the duration of this conducted improvisation. I asked **Bruno Guastalla** to conduct this piece because of his expressed interest in extending parameters to playing by conceptual ideas. His original approach to this conduction was to add in symbols to indicate playing 'cold' or 'hot'. The abstruseness of this concept did produce some interesting results but in fact the concept of the Lake of Tears proved sufficient to influence the players - along with the rigid control of volume throughout.

Miles Doubleday explored the idea of enforcing space by structuring a piece so that all the players thought of a number and a pulse. They would then count to that number repeatedly using the pulse they had thought of. Every second time they counted to the number they would play their instrument.

Miscellaneous pieces:

Rapid Fire Duos: Miles Doubleday developed this piece on the principle of exploring the effect that a series of duos (brought in and terminated by the conductor) can provide sufficient variety and interest to constitute a piece in its own right. So, given this pre-condition the conductor simply points at two people and with the down beat they start playing together and play until they are signalled to stop. Other duos can play (as separate units) in parallel with them at the discretion of the conductor.

1.3 Use of other musicological principles (some of these relate to small group improvisational structuring as much as to extending conducted improvisation)

1.3.1 Use of series

The use of a series to create a particular style of work has been attempted in a number of pieces. Although qualitatively this may be seen as similar to using a specific mode or scale it seems to create a different effect by the fact that it does not so easily fall into the production of melody or riff. It tends to encourage the use of sound colours - reminiscent of the total serialist approach. The easiest way of using a series is to use a

conventional chart and an improvising group (ideally not too large) can use the chart in any direction (Appendix C contains some example charts I have used).

Much depends on the style of the tone row developed. An interesting experiment is to take a series by Webern or Berg and see whether the improvisation bears any stylistic resemblance to the work of the original composer. All the considerations that apply to deriving a series for a formal composition apply to deriving a series to use for improvisation: the choice of intervals; repeating (or retrograde) structures in the series etc.

The 'pointillist' nature of the outcome of a series based improvisation is often enhanced by the lack of direction and resolution that the encouragement to use a non-diatonic approach, with no other guiding principle, can have. This can be a useful non-directional aim in itself but it can be obviated by further structuring techniques. **Bruno Guastalla** in the use of a series for dance collaboration prescribed that the three performers used a chart at will, but when they reached a central block of four squares in the series chart that they stayed on that repeating set of notes. This narrowing of the parameters gave a clear direction to the piece.

Chris Brown in his piece the Remnants of Resonance (for three performers) used a series to structure sections of an extended work which explored contrasts between free improvisation, the timbral contrasts range of each combination of the trio (solo, duo or trio) and the expression of the series in different styles.

I attempted a similar structuring in the piece Rented Space (Appendix B) which I developed with Barry Reeves in 2003. This used five performers each in a stall in a disused dairy. The performers all had the option of using a series (or not) in their improvisation. The piece was in five sections each one preceded by one performer reciting part of a dream he had had and playing a version of the series on the English Concertina. Each improvised section had a different parameter or structuring mechanism (fast or slow; different numbers of performers; antiphonal responses; different order of entry or exit of the performance).

1.3.2 Use of pitch class set

The use of a motif and its repetition and transposition within a group is often a key element in the communication strategies of a group of improvisers (as exemplified by the Spontaneous Music Ensemble - Karyobin as a key example [127]). In a sense this was always an element of art-music, especially in fugue and the inventions of Bach. Here however, the interest is often enhanced by the conflict between tonality and the exploration of motif. In the Second Viennese School pre-serialist works of the early twentieth century an increasing interest in motific and canonic structuring becomes

[127] Karyobin was released by SME (Spontaneous Music Ensemble) in 1968. It featured Kenny Wheeler, trumpet, flugelhorn; Evan Parker, soprano saxophone; Derek Bailey, electric guitar; Dave Holland, bass; John Stevens, drums. SME were one of the first groups to explore communication between different instruments with no preset rhythmic or tonal boundaries.

more important as tonality is discarded. It was not until the 1960's that the idea of using atonal exploration in improvisation became a formal aspect of performance within the new genre of free improvisation.

Formalisation of a pitch class set as the inherent structuring device of a piece is perhaps a limiting device that enforces this kind of interaction. However, it defines and limits the parameters for extension in that expansion and contraction of a set of notes is ruled out if players are to strictly adhere to this approach. As with the series, the construction of a set determines a great deal of the initial style of a piece. A pitch class set that incorporates octatonic relationships will often create a resonance of atonal expressionist works (as a series in this style will also).

1.4 Text and Graphic Scores

1.4.1 Introduction

The development of text and graphic scores seems to be prevalent from the 1950's - again with the work of the Cage circle (Cage, Feldman, Wolff and Brown). Text scores can create a broad overview of the way a piece should develop totally removed from the actions that will be used to achieve the score, or impose strict limitations on what performers can do.
Graphic scores can be equally generic or specific.

I will try and categorise approaches within each genre.

1.4.1 Text Scores

Listening and communicative exercises.

The work of **John Stevens** (co-founder of SME) in the UK and **Pauline Oliveiros** in America seems to exemplify an approach around the development of listening and communication as the key skills in improvisation. The pieces that they have developed can be treated as exercises to develop skills or concert pieces in their own right (provided they are played with conviction). They tend to keep instructions simple and clear and demand a level of concentration on performing a simple task to the best of your ability (whatever your previous musical training). Quite often they involve the development of musical skills of listening (Oliveiros refers to her whole approach as Deep Listening) and development of alternative techniques through a communicative atmosphere. The scribbling piece by John Stevens demands that players 'scribble' on their instruments (i.e. play without conscious planning) while they listen to two other players. They gradually start listening to their own sounds after they are comfortable with the sound world created by their companions.

We were fortunate in booking Maggie Nichols (who worked extensively with John

Stevens) for a workshop where the efficacy and relevance of his work was demonstrated. As a result the idea of using simple structures to organise sound has been further validated.

Complex instruction

The philosophy of Christian Wolff whose text pieces were explored by the Oxford Improvisers at a workshop run by Howard Skempton in 2004 was often to use the ambiguity of language to create variety and complexity in a piece. So, in Play (quoted in full in Nyman p 114), the language is confusing and convoluted and the specific requirements are not tied down. The effect this has on performance is twofold. An ensemble may adopt a group approach that is very different, either within the group or compared to others. The performers may feel uncertain and stressed in trying to find the correct interpretation (because there is not one to be had). This can create a different level of concentration, more akin to attempting to realise the impossible complexity of a Ferneyhough score or the physicality of a Lachenman work.

The fact that the complexity and ambiguity is usually in the process of sound creation rather than the desired end result marks these as experimental works different in scope to the more prescriptive approach of Oliveros or Stevens where there is often a clear sonic aim.

Esoteric Instruction

The text work of Stockhausen in Aus Den Sieben Tagen further refines the ambiguity of instruction and the physical displacement of performers by demanding that they relinquish food and sleep or that they play in the manner of the Spirit of the Universe. But here the aim is confused because Stockhausen feels that he owns the work (in the traditional hierarchical mode of Western composition) whereas there is a democratising element in much of the work Wolff, Stevens and Oliveiros. This is born out by Stockhausen's possibly tongue in cheek comments about how the performers will know they are playing a vibration in the rhythm of the universe [128].

How these approaches have affected the Oxford Improvisers

Although Stockhausen's work has not been directly influential, the idea that an abstract state of mind or physical state can be used to colour a interpretation is one that has been championed within the group by **Bruno Guastalla** and **Helen Edwards** whose background in Butoh (a contemporary Japanese improvised dance movement) has probably encouraged this approach. Hence the unpopular suggestion by Helen that players swap instruments (only playing those that they are not familiar with) and much of the work that has been developed in the SPARC group (see multimedia work development below).
Bruno has often combined the use of physicality in playing with an interest in

[128] Bailey, Improvisation p 72 : Musician: Herr Stockhausen, this indication in the score tells me that I should play "in the rhythm of the universe". How will I know if I am playing in the rhythm of the universe? Stockhausen: I will tell you.

generating different colours and timbres of sound (this may reflect a particular cultural disposition as he is French).
His instructions can be deliberately abstruse as in the idea of rapid shifts between moods (developed first for the Butoh Dance Group) or the imposition of the ideas of playing 'hot' or 'cold' within a conduction (an idea he trialled in Accession for the Lake of Tears which he conducted). The difficulty of interpreting this last command produces unpredictability (and an obvious player insecurity) much as the commands of Stockhausen can or even the convoluted nature of Wolff's texts.

1.4.2 Graphic Scores

Pure abstraction

Because of their proximity to improvised music the Improvisers have concentrated on the more abstracted graphic scores in performance:
Brown's December 1952 was performed at the Barbican in January 2001 by the Improvising Orchestra (I conducted) and in Oxford. It was performed by Hadaly (improvising trio in which I perform) accompanied by **Ana Barbour** (dancer) who interpreted the score on an equal basis with the musicians. What was interesting in these performances is that both adapted the performance of the piece to represent current ideas of the performing groups. The Oxford Improvising Orchestra performance was conducted (I wore the score printed on a T Shirt so all the players could easily see it and my instructions) and the conduction structured the performance in a way that reflected the normal operation of the group. Hadaly worked with a dancer who interpreted the score on the same terms and as an equal participant with the musicians.

I organised a performance of Cardew's Treatise in its entirety in December 2004. This involved some dance as well as combinations of different ensembles (some conducted) performing different selections of pages. Prior to this performance I organised a workshop by John Tilbury on how to interpret the piece (John, as a member of AMM has performed this piece for thirty years).

My personal experience of both these pieces was of how intense the process of interpretation has to be.
To some extent we pre-planned how we would interpret the pages of Treatise we were allocated (I allocated them mainly by chance) and were then forced to focus on these interpretations whilst trying to react meaningfully with other musicians in their interpretations. The constant dialectic between these two aspects set up a tension in the playing that was greater than in normal ensemble playing, whether improvised or through traditional notation. Cardew's aim in producing Treatise is expressed in his 'Towards an ethic of Improvisation' (an accompanying document to the Treatise score) where he explains that he is looking for people who have a musicality, but not one corrupted by the expectations of conventional musical training. For these people the open ended nature of the score will be a stimulus to invent rather than simply relating the 'musical memories they have already acquired to the notation in front of them' (p xix).

This pressure in performance is similar to what I experienced in playing Wolff's for One Two or Three Players. The notation here is process oriented and Nyman (p 69) comments on how this can give a sense of urgency in the performers belied by the calm and restrained nature of the music produced. I suspect that this pressure of interpretation in ways that are so different from our normal cultural conditioning (either notation of desired end result or framework for communication) is what causes this end result in both graphic scores and in the process orientation of Wolff's.

Derivation from musicality

Although Treatise contains staff lines on all its 193 pages, the other symbols used are often deliberately non-musical and force an alternative method of interpretation. This fits with Cardew's aim quoted above of moving away from traditional music making and finding musicians who were open to new methods of expression and able to interpret visuals as a means to this.

In contrast, much of the work of Bussotti tends to start from a known musicality which is deconstructed accordingly. The same could also be said of Cage – especially in the Piano Concert.

Bussotti [129]

Cage (Piano Concert)

Mythological reference

Logothetis tends to combine mythological themes (from his native Greece) with comprehensible graphics relating to the named myths.

The piece Styx is a picture of the meandering Underworld River along which the players are expected to slowly progress in interpretation. The similarity to the progress of a stave makes this a very accessible piece for beginners in improvisation who can choose how far to attempt to address the oppressive mythological reference or else simply interpret the linear unfolding of symbols to determine their performance.

I have found the work Styx by Logothetis particularly useful in workshops for beginners in improvisation.

Minimalism

Tenney's On Never Having Written a Note for Percussion can be treated as an exercise in developing listening and co-ordination much as the pieces of Oliveiros or Stevens. In a sense it is similar to the kind of improvising exercise that says get as much variety as you can out of a climactic crescendo and decrescendo on one note.

[129] Griffiths p 137 ff discusses the theatricity of this work

1.5 Game pieces and alternative structuring

Although we have not directly explored the specific pieces of Zorn structured around games and game rules, the imposition of external and non-musical rules and ideas has been very influential in the development of work for the Improvisers because of the influence of the Butoh Dance Theatre, multi media pieces and of the interests of particular members of the group.

Antiphonal experiments.

The idea of groups (or individuals) playing against each other can open up a sound world that effectively uses performance space as well as unpredictable results (if groups have rules for interrupting one another). A simple technique which we tried was to set up two groups opposite one another. One group starts playing and continues until any individual from the other group interrupts, at which point that group takes over until they are interrupted. This approach can be entertaining in the short term but the limitations of the game prevent it going anywhere. A refinement that I tried was to start with one person opposite a group. The group plays until interrupted by the single player (who then solos). The last person from the group to stop playing when interrupted has to join the solo player. The group remaining interrupt at will. But again when they are interrupted by either of the two players opposite the last player in the group to stop playing joins the duo. This process continues until everyone has moved across the room .

Obviously there is a strong 'play' element in a piece like this but the simple structuring can be useful in creating sonic variety and in cohering the group. It is still simple enough to allow the performers to concentrate on their methods of expression although the result will be very different to a free improvisation.

Satie Instructions

The book a Mammal's Notebook by Satie contains a series of eccentric and esoteric performance instructions. These can be used in a conducted improvisation to create either a more tense or ludicrous improvisation (depending on the attitude of the group). I have used the instructions in a number of contexts:
In a conducted improvisation where the conductor has the option of giving a performance instruction to a player (or a group of players).
In a free improvisation where any player was free to get up and find an instruction and read it out. The group would then have to follow it.
In a dance led piece where some of the instructions would be randomly distributed to individual performers during the performance.

Processional and variants

The standard processional of a set number of people taking it in turn to play at any one

time from a larger group is a well used improvising technique for a large group. Where a procession is of three consecutive players, the procession moves through the group by one player stopping and the player three along from the player immediately starting to perform. This continues with each player dropping out and being replaced in turn until the performance has processed around the entire group (which has to be sat in a circle). Some alternatives that we have found useful are:

A crescent shaped procession is begun by four players, the two on each end of the crescent. The procession then move inward from both sides simultaneously. When the two innermost players are engaged (i.e. when the two strands have started to cross) players can join in at will (moving out consecutively from the centre) until everyone in the ensemble is playing. The idea of this structure is to give an antiphonal sound at the beginning but also to vary the thickness of the sound (it will go down to two players in the middle, then expand to incorporate everyone).

Two processions are instigated but each procession is of one player at a time. However, one procession is very short (i.e. usually one note or sound before moving on) and the other is longer The idea of this is to allow solo expression to be supported by a pointillistic response by the remainder of the ensemble.
Rather than processing one or more musicians start a piece and can choose 0 or more players to take over playing when they have finished. This can create rapid shifts between 1 or 2 performers and most of the group. The piece finishes when the last player ceases without passing on to anyone to continue.

Sonic space, subtlety and timbral exploration

See page 6 above.

Spatial pieces

Punishing Schedule by **Jill Elliott** is a simple but very effective piece which enables structuring through the movement of one person. The score for this piece is included in Appendix B. The piece is structured around a predictable but variable element. The progression of a person around a room who is the stimulus for different people to play when he/she comes into vision. He/she progresses 16 x and each the performers who see him have an increasing number of musical events to perform (reaching an impossible number to achieve by the end).

1.6. Collaborative structuring between different art forms

1.6.1 Introduction

The use of alternative art forms to structure and influence work has always been key to the experimental music tradition. The Cage circle were particularly influenced by visual artists [130] and Cage developed many of his ideas if collaboration with Cunningham

[130] Brown was influenced by Calder's mobiles for many of his structuring ideas (Nyman p 51; Cage

(dance) and Rauschenberg (visual art). The Scratch Orchestra also had a strong influence from other art forms - perhaps because so many were former art students[131] and because Cardew was wary of the effect of musical training. I would suggest that the influence of extra musical ideas has generally been the stimulus for all developments in music in the modern era[132]

1.6.2 Dance

At the formation of the Oxford Improvising Orchestra links were built with the dance group Café Reason Dance Theatre through the presence of **Bruno Guastalla** and **Ana Barbour**. These links were built on by a series of collaborative ventures which included performances at the Abingdon Festival and at Harcourt Hill Theatre as well as a number of events organised by **Helen Edwards** (also a member of Café Reason). The approach of Butoh Theatre includes exploration of the potential of extended work around use of parts of the body, as well as the full potential range of expression of the body (rather than any prescibed and stylised set of movements). This has strong parallels with the ideas of extending the vocabulary of an instrument that is prevalent in freely improvised music.

Butoh tends to avoid rigid narrative structuring (again an interest in contemporary music and improvisation) and often looks to bring in resonance from the unconscious by establishing loose structures for extended exploration (once again this is similar in scope to much of the work of the Oxford Improvisers).

From the outset of collaboration we found that many techniques developed for improvising musicians could be used with dancers, even to the extent of using dancers and musicians interchangeably within a performing group under the control of conduction or of a prescribed system of control (such as a processional).

In addition a dancer could be used as a controller for an improvising group where the moves of the dancer could be interpreted as physiographic conduction (as opposed to symbolic).

Further to this point an interpretation of December 1952 by Hadaly (three musicians and one dancer) showed how interchangeable dancer and musician can be in the interpretation of an abstract graphic score.

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collaborated extensively at Black Mountain College (Nyman p 72) Feldman professed to be more interested in attending art galleries than new music concerts (ibid p 51)

[131] The article at http://www.splitrec.com/index.php?go=subreductionismandth contains personal recollections of Scratch Orchestra membership from a participant.

[132] I believe it is quite likely that music as an art form can become too introspective and technically obsessed when academised and that most innovation in music comes through the cross fertilisation of ideas from other disciplines or a rejection of developed practice, often for a simpler means of expression. This could be applied to the initiation of the Baroque (through an attempt to re-capture classical culture and a desire to capture the inflexions of human speech in the recicative); the acceptance of folk melody in Viennese Classical music in rejection of the complexity of the high Baroque; the influence of literature on the Romantic composers; and the rejection of the legacy of total serialism by the minimalists (themselves perhaps reacting to the influence of a modern art movement).

The use of dance led (physiographic) conduction does pose some problems for a group. In traditional conduction the parameters of who plays when are controlled by the conductor and variety of texture is a key element in fashioning a piece. Where the performers are left to interpret a central dancer there can be too much continuous playing. In addition the musicians have to work at two levels simultaneously, in interpreting the dancer and at the same time listening to the sounds of their colleagues and communicating their ideas with them. The tension of these conflicting demands can create some interesting work (it is after all a parallel to the conventional need to interpret a score and simultaneously communicate with an ensemble). However, the integration of movement with sound can be organised around different groupings and allocations, the simplest of which is the use of the 'play like' by a conductor to tell a dancer to follow a musician or vice versa. Other techniques we have tried successfully are:

Dance led performance where the use of a particular object by the dancer indicates that particular musician(s) should play. This was developed by Helen Edwards and I in a performance of a piece Meetings with Water where each of four performers would play only when an object assigned them was picked up by Helen (who was dancing). Helen could interact with all four objects simultaneously if she chose - or none. So the parameters were open and the variety of expression would flow from a chance mechanism - Helen did not plan when she would interact with each object or how. This technique was further used in the Accession Piece (Before the Entrance to the Garden) when a series of artefacts representing aspects of European Imperialism were used to control the 18 piece ensemble. Each section of the ensemble (woodwind, keyboards, percussion, guitars, strings) was associated with an object but in each case a single member of the group was expected to interpret Helen's interaction with the defined object. The rest of the group would support that player's interpretation (this was to get round the problem of multiple interpretations by the same section of the same dance movements).

Performer pays a specific melody when an allocated dancer moves (see description under use of melody above)

Use of processional technique. The standard processional of a set number of people playing at any one time from a larger group is totally adaptable to a mixed group of dancers and musicians (as is most conduction provided the instructions to play, copy etc are applied to movement and not sound). In this instance the ordering of dancers and musicians can be significant as the norm would be to intersperse dancers and musicians to prevent pure music or dance at any one time.

Use of texts to develop performance. Two projects that have employed the use of texts to colour the method of interpretation of dance are a revisualisataion of Pierrot Lunaire in improvised dance and music and a collaboration around the emotive aspect of how we use and see our limbs.

For the Limbs Project – a collaboration between a film maker, Barry Reeves and Helen Edwards and myself – we also used a range of techniques in addition to textual

exploration. These included the intuitive development of a visual response through film and the design by Helen of key positions to frame and develop the work – a kind of choreography of stasis. The textual exploration initially involved finding a range of poem texts that related to the subject. These were then used as a basis for improvisation and the creation of a collage of different resonances of the subject through vocal delivery. This combined effectively with the formalistically developed poses that Helen had engineered. A further development was to use message texts that the three of us sent round over a period of a week and accumulated into a set of texts for improvisation. Details of this project are on a myspace page.

For the Pierrot exploration – a collaboration between Ana Barbour and myself (as well as a film maker Peter Green or some of the project) – we were consciously referencing the work of Schoenberg in Pierrot Lunaire as well as the full set of Pierrot poems that he based his work on. We found that key moments in the Pierrot poems could be isolated by using a few lines from each poem as a basis for exploration. These lines could be used to create melodies and incantations as well as the inspiration for particular movement and sonic exploration. The dance and music was combined around the interpretation of these fragments in a series of seven filmed explorations framed by pieces consciously composed to recontextualise Schoenberg's music. This set of films is currently held on the Dispatx web site.

Issues of synchronisation

Much improvisation involving dance and music inevitably tends to generate an atmosphere of mutual support between the two practices once the artists are attuned to one another. The possibilities for developing new approaches as each art form influences the other directly are enormous, but , the possibility of juxtaposition and the interest that inappropriate pairing of sound and movement can give can be lost as well as the notion of the 'happy accident' that was so important to the Cage and Cunningham collaborations .

This issue came up in a recent collaboration between Bruno Guastalla, Pete McPhail and myself and the Café Reason Butoh Dance Theatre. In this work we attempted to avoid the straight support role by the following techniques:

- one musician would face a dancer and work with them. The other two musicians would face away and work together in contrast to the musician supporting the dancer, deliberately interrupting and subverting.
- Although we were predominantly an improvising trio we attempted to link in a series scores to our performance so that there were prescribed sections of music. In parallel , some dance movements were choreographed to limit variety and the influence of the musicians on the movement of the dancers.

1.6.3 Film

Although structuring improvisation by film is part of the legacy of the silent cinema the use of narrative to structure improvisation (in the straightforward method of silent film) is not an area that we have attempted to explore due to its easy appropriation by melodrama (the exception to this was a recent overtly melodramatic performance of a Victorian melodrama - half film half live action - using a Victorian toy theatre. This was initiated and organised by Miles Doubleday as part of a SPARC group concert). Our interest has been non-narrative film which enables the development of expression in parallel with the resonance of image, rather than directly supporting image. This has also enabled the involvement of dance in conjunction with the music, also developing a parallel path of expression.

Sumida Gawa

Barry Reeves developed a film, Sumida Gawa, which he based on ideas from the eponymous Noh Theatre piece which influenced Britten's Curlew River. The film highlighted key issues of the play, using images of the river around Abingdon extensively in this. Like much of Barry's film work the images were explored slowly and deliberately with no attempt to cut or move through a narrative sequence.

At the point I took on organising the music to this film for a performance in 2004 at the Ark T Centre, we had, in the Improvisers group, attempted a number of film accompaniments and had realised that with the subtlety of images present in films such as Barry's, that a simple small group improvisation using an extensive timbral range (to reflect the textural depth of the images chosen) was an effective accompaniment. To this end I set up an ensemble of three (myself - violin and piano; Clair Aldington - recorders; Dominic Lash - bass) for the music (supplemented by Chris Brown - guitar at a later performance where there was no piano). Barry and I also felt that the slow pace of the film would allow a dancer to interpret the images projected - dancing in front of the screen and even creating shadows on the projected image where appropriate. Helen Edwards took on this role.

I structured the music around the elements of the most timbral change that could be achieved with the musicians available. For this I worked out those passages where a solo performance by each instrumentalists could support the images most effectively (recorder solo to start; bass solo in the middle and violin solo to end). Between these solos combinations of duos and trios could enhance the images with more complex layering of sound.

Identity

As a reaction to a seminar day for all doctorate students on the issue of identity I started developing a collaborative piece with dance and film. I was interested in exploring the notion of identity as it appears in the recording of a performance and how that recorded identity can re-influence performers as they continue to express themselves in conjunction with the recording.

Helen Edwards and Barry Reeves each explored their own interests in the subject (as equal partners in the collaboration) and we agreed to perform the piece over four hours at the OVADA Gallery in December 2005 using one other musician (Bruno Guastalla on cello and bandoneon), myself (violin and keyboards), Helen (dance) and Barry (pre-recorded and live film).

The performance was structured around the continual revisiting of material developed in improvisation for the performance or during the performance. Barry made films of Helen and I improvising during the process of performance which he edited and projected without sound at key points during the four hours. I attempted to remember what I had played when filmed and use that as a basis for much of the rest of my performance. At four times during the performance Barry filmed the performance against a backdrop of the previous film he had made of the performance. The filmed performance was projected and became part of a composite image on a large white wall that ultimately encompassed four visual layers.

Bruno recorded sections of the performance on mini disk and played this back for us to accompany at several points. Variety was further achieved by giving each performer working in solo. Duo, trio and quartet as well as interacting with previously created images and sounds.

1.6.4 Collaboration with visual arts

Project at Oxfordshire Health Authority School

Much of this area is covered in the discussion of the SPARC group but I did trial a number of ideas at the Oxfordshire Area Health Authority Schools earlier this year, as the composer in a team set up by Kate Comberti of the Oxford Philomusica Orchestra.

The basis of the project was to explore links between the visual arts and music and as a starting point we looked at work by Rothko, Mondrian and Pollock and encouraged young people to use works as a basis for improvisational expression. From this point on we encouraged young people to create collective works (using conducted improvisation) to reflect reactions to visual arts works.

We then reversed the process by using recordings of the music produced as a stimulus to encouraging young people to spontaneously create a visual response (under the guidance of Mark Rowan-Hull an artist who specialises in this kind of work). The work was created on a floor space using a huge canvas (created by combining a number of sheets together).

Finally we took the large scale painting created by the group of participants and encouraged them to find interesting shapes and ideas in it that could be expressed musically (via a graphic score). We created this graphic score by placing a huge plastic sheet over the painting and tracing the chosen shapes.

The graphic score was then used to create a final musical response by all the participating young people, taking it in turns to conduct and choosing when to use the score and by whom it would be used.

I have detailed this example because it demonstrates how an ordinary group of teenagers can be drawn into the process of creating work across different media and fully engaged in what is quite a challenging conceptual idea. The same techniques of feeding the process of one art form into the other have been developed extensively by the SPARC group.

1.6.5 The SPARC Group - collaboration across multiple art forms

In order to further develop the approaches of parallel development of work across different artistic media I was happy to help **Helen Edwards** in the formation of an open access group that would seek to develop work by improvisation across all available art forms. Practitioners were invited to join sessions that incorporated poets, visual artists, musicians and dancers.

The SpontaneousARtsCollective has been meeting since January 2006 and has just succesfully completed a week of developing and displaying work in the Old Dairy, Headington Hill Park at the end of July. This week culminated in five two hour performances by different combinations of the ?? artists (from different media) who are members of the SPARC group.

Development of work

As with the Improvisers Collective, all members of this open access group are encouraged to bring ideas for new pieces to the meetings. These are then trialled along with any ideas that come up spontaneously in the session (provided there is time to do this). Helen runs each session and tries to facilitate as broad a range of material as is practical. What is interesting about much of the work that comes from these sessions is the efficacy of simple structuring techniques (much as with the Oxford Improvising Orchestra work) and the similarity in what is produced to the pieces developed by the Scratch Orchestra.[133]

Works Produced

I will try and categorise some of the styles of work produced and give examples of

[133] The Scratch Orchestra documented a range of ideas for pieces in 1971 in Scratch Music. Many of these pieces are similar to the ideas coming out of the SPARC group. This is perhaps not surprising because the Scratch Orchestra contained a wide range of artists as well as musicians. In addition, the anti-hierarchical ideology of both the Oxford Improvisers and the SPARC group is part of the legacy of the Scratch Orchestra as well as a British communitarian spirit (expressed also by John Stevens and the legacy of his ideas as continued by Maggie Nichols).

methods that seem to have worked well. The group is still evolving techniques so it is likely that a far wider range of pieces will be produced in the near future.

Oxford Improvisers Legacy

Because so many on the group have been in the Oxford Improvisers a large number of techniques for organising the larger scale pieces have tended to come from the members of the group experienced in developing work for that group and from extending the conduction techniques that work so well for large musical improvisational groups.

Particularly interesting in this respect is a work devised by **Miles Doubleday** which allows for a rapid change of performers . Each performer (from any art form) holds a coin. The piece starts when the conductor bangs a gong and at this point everyone flicks their coin. Those that return 'Heads' perform at a second signal from the conductor. At the next gong sound the people not performing flick their coins to see who will perform next. At the next signal from the conductor those performing cease and those who were waiting to perform commence. The process continues in this way until the conductor indicates the end of the piece. The unpredictability of this approach (0 - n people can end up playing in any one section for as long as the conductor allows) provides interesting results and a total concentration from the performers. Miles had trialled this work with musicians alone at a previous Oxford Improvisers rehearsal.

Chains of instruction across different media

As part of the aim of the SPARC group was to explore the interplay of different art forms, it is not surprising that much of the work of the group has been around the establishment of structures whereby the effects of one art form can directly influence another.

Alan Buckley's piece exploring the effect of a poem demonstrates how one media can inform another. This idea has been explored in a number of other works:

Use of specific performance space

Chris Stubbs piece Radion is structured around the use of the bandstand in Headington Hill Park. A set of performers stand at the bandstand and slowly progress from it in straight lines that radiate out from it. At the same time musicians , who are distributed in an arc away from the bandstand, move towards it in straight lines, playing their instruments and converging on the bandstand. The two groups of performers should move at such a pace that they cross paths at the same time within an arc shape.

Janet Stansfeld developed an improvisatory piece that employs the use of musicians distributed in the stalls of the Dairy in exactly the same way that Barry and I developed Rented Space four years ago. Janet was unaware of the previous piece and perhaps this demonstrates how an attitude to developing work that exploits the potential of a specific

space tends to lead to similar pieces.

Jill Elliot developed a piece that explores the contrast between inside and outside of the Dairy in which performers gather ideas from outside the Dairy and bring them in the Dairy to use in conjunction with other performers - on the model of gatherers bringing food into a shared domain.

Esoteric ideas

As part of the generation of ideas and creating of a collaborative atmosphere **Helen Edwards** has devised pieces which tend to enforce collaboration through the creation of undefined space or unusual activity that enforces the imposition of structuring by participants.

1.7 Conclusion

I have attempted to document a range of approaches to organising and structuring improvisation which have been of benefit to practising musicians (in the Oxford Improvisers and the SPARC group); within education; and to my personal practice as composer/performer.

To some extent I feel that this work supports the view of Bruno Nettl [134], that the terms 'improvisation' and 'composition' can be misleading and it is better to look at music in terms of the number of fixed elements and the number of free ones. Thus, whether a performer is constrained by specific notation, a set of text instructions, the conventions of a genre (such as blues or raga) or their own developed vocabulary is just part of a continuum that stretches from the work or a performer such as Ian Pace interpreting the complex notation of Michael Finnissy to Evan Parker rejecting the notion of the score as a valid means of structuring a piece [135] and using the environment he is in to fashion the vocabulary he uses.

If we adopt Nettl's view then the choice for any composer or performer (as far as they are able to escape the conditioning of their society) is in how far to attempt to develop their own vocabulary in order to develop material spontaneously in performance, and how far to rely on pre-structuring (via score or any other means) in order to repeat aspects of a work that are interesting or original (at least at some point in time).

I would not subscribe to the view that notated composition is more 'original' or 'innovative' than music developed (or perhaps composed) in performance. This does depend on the skill and experience of performers and composers and it does depend on whether the implicit rules behind the generation of music in performance are more restrictive than those that apply to composers developing work prior to performance. The elevated status of composers within Western art house music has enabled many to

[134] Nettl 1974 pp 12-13
[135] Bailey 1992 80-81.

develop ideas and methods of expression that are far less predictable than those that tend to arise from a genre where the building blocks of a piece of music are predefined and unchangeable while the performers create the detail. However where improvisation is undertaken by performers who are free to develop a work as they see fit [136], as with contemporary free improvisation, works may surprise and explore new territory just as effectively when composed in performance as when pre-composed.

That said, musicians do tend to rapidly coalesce to similar modes of expression as so much that we express is a vocabulary that we develop through hearing others and applying that to our own development. Most musical movements tend to stultify until replaced (often quite forcefully) by an alternative method of expression. The high art motivation of total serialism is perhaps the most extreme example of a movement in which the main practitioners discovered, developed and then attempted to prescribe a more rigid set of rules for aspiring composers than has been imposed on many artists by commercial, political or even religious factions in the past [137].

This can happen within an improvising group where a collective approach prescribes rules that may be valid for the time and current practitioners but can only become restrictive if applied unquestioningly for the future. [138]

The advantage of using a range of organising techniques, especially those influenced by other artistic media, is that it can broaden the vocabulary and approaches of a group of musicians in a way that the use of a single approach (just improvisation as dialogue within a group, or just notation) cannot. In fact the frequently cited inability of the classically trained to create any new work in performance is testament to this. The play element in many methods of structuring work via text instructions, graphics or collaboration with other art forms also opens up these traditional 'experimental' techniques to use in education where they can compensate to some extent for the damaging psychological effect that classical musical training can have on young people [139].

As someone who writes music I feel that I should be aware of as many different possibilities for the structuring of performance as I can. The integration of a range of performer options within one piece (from complete performer freedom to complete prescription) opens up the possibility of a far wider range of expression than any one approach. They can all be subsumed into the creation of a work provided the design of the work does not necessitate a completely closed and repeatable piece. If it does, this surely (by definition) places it in a very restricted and specific genre category. This may be a category that uses improvisation and this perhaps highlights how the ideas I have documented here are a resource for 'experimental musicians' following Cage's

[136] I would see this as a relatively recent phenomenon within Western music and cannot think of any other cultures where this has happened. Then again the freedom to compose music outside any but self-imposed boundaries is really only a phenomenon of the twentieth century occident.

[137] Boulez: '[A]ny musician who has not experienced - I do not say understood, but truly experienced - the necessity of dodecaphonic music is USELESS.' From *Eventuellement...* (1952), translated as *Possibly...* in *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991

[138] (no use of melody (AMM) ; intense communication between all musicians (Spontaneous Music Ensemble); layering of sound (AMM))

[139] I have successfully used conducted improvisation in Wood Farm Primary School (2004,2005); Cambridge String Quartet Association - all ages - 7-65 (2006) amongst other places.

definition that experimental music is that in which we do not know the outcome. They are part of (or should be part of) the vocabulary of any composer who is not working within a specific and predetermined genre i.e. any art music composer. Which techniques are used must depend on the requirements of the piece - which can include educational, communitarian or commercial ideals as much as aesthetic ones. There must always be situations when the most appropriate choice is to give a group of musicians total freedom to develop work in performance and others where a totally prescribed score is more appropriate.

Annex A

Conducted Improvisation Signs.

CONDUCTION VOCABULARY - SIGNS AND GESTURES

BASIC BUTCH MORRIS SIGNALS:

DOWN BEAT is used after a preparatory command. Usually given with the baton, but may be given with the left hand or body.
SUSTAIN (chord or continuous sound) left hand extended, palm up, one finger fom right hand laid across the palm. Followed by down beat.
MOCK (OR MIMIC) (similar to repeat #3) You are to mock a player or sound. The conductor will point to the left ear, then to the player or area of sound to be mocked. This is followed by a down beat.
DYNAMICS (LOUD - SOFT) Raising the palms up for loud, down for soft. There is immediate response to this gesture, with no down beat. Or, a clenched fist in the chest area for loud, left hand finger to lips for soft, both given with down beat.
MEMORY If a particular section or phrase is to be committed to memory, the conductor will point with left hand to (left) temple and designate a number with left hand (using fingers as the number). When this action (left hand to temple and number) is repeated with a down beat, you are to recall that particular area. Whatever you were playing when the number designation was given is what you will return to when it is given with down beat.
TIME (PULSE) is given with the baton (or finger), tapping rate of desired time. This may be given with a down beat or asked for as an immediate response.
RHYTHM is given with the baton(or finger) as if beating a rhythmic figure in mid-air. The left hand marks the beginning of the phrase. A down beat is given to begin, generally preceded by a hold.
CONTINUE IN THIS WAY Pointing finger of left hand - (two) little circles directed at the musician you wish to continue a developmental process.
ENTRY (COME IN OR FEATURE) A wave of the hand, as if to beckon - to improvise. The response is immediate.
LITERAL MOVEMENT The sign for this command is to place the baton parallel to the body, in front of the face, after which the baton serves as a tool for midair graphics. In literal movement, and all graphic information, the lower the baton, the lower the sound on the instrument. The higher the baton, the higher the sound. The down beat is the beginning of the gesture.
PANORAMA (PAN OR PANNING) The sign for pan is the baton upsidedown parallel to the body (a raised finger if no baton) , the down beat is when the baton moves across the ensemble. 1) If you are not playing - when the baton enters your physical (body) field, you play. When the baton is out of your field, you stop. 2) If you are playing when the sign for panorama is given, it is the exact opposite of #1. As the baton enters your field, you stop playing. When the baton departs, you begin.
MELODIC MOVEMENT is a gesture used to suggest melody. This can be done in a variety of ways - I have used it by beating time with the left hand and giving graphic information with the right hand. This is done with a preparatory command, without stopping the movement, giving a down beat.

In theory, all gestures are open to interpretation. However, a graphic movement such as:
STOP (DON'T PLAY) Left palm facing ensemble. This brings playing to a stop

OTHER SIGNALS:

ERIC MORECOMBE: Conductor selects members of the group and imitates waving glasses. On the down beat all indicated do something different to what they had been doing to that point.

OTHER BUTCH MORRIS SUGNALS WE DON'T TEND TO USE

REPEAT (three circumstances) 1) If you are not playing - you must create something to repeat; 2) If you are playing something - the conductor would like to hear it again; 3) If someone is playing something, and the conductor would like you to play it - the sign for repeat is given with the left hand to form the letter "U." All are given with down beats.
HOLD (DON'T PLAY) Left palm facing ensemble. This is usually given when the conductor wants to give a preparatory command. This is done to give the ensemble ample time to understand the direction.
CHANGE IN TONALITY (KEY OR TONAL CENTRE) Left hand thumb up or down, with down beat.
DIVISION OF ENSEMBLE Slicing motion with left hand, to separate or divide the ensemble in parts or sections.
DEVELOP (OR GO ON) is given to indicate when the musician is to develop a phrase, a repeat, or sonic area. This is done by pointing with the right hand to the extreme right (flank), arm extended. This may be done with or without a down beat.
EXPAND is used to develop a phrase or area, then to bring it back. This is done by placing both hands in front of the body (extended arms) together (for the phrase) then separating the hands for the development.

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Annex B

Locations of Example Pieces (this section will be updated with references as these pieces are added to the site)

Malcolm Atkins:

Rented Space
Accession (video excerpt)
Do Geese see God (recording)
Limbs collaboration (myspace)
Pierrot project (film on Dispatx web site)

Chris Brown:

Miles Doubleday:
Duos
Coin Piece

Helen Edwards:
Limbs collaboration (myspace)

Jill Elliott:
Punishing Schedule (score)

Bruno Guastalla:

Dominic Lash

Chris Stubbs:
Radion II

Pat Thomas:

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Useful web resources

Simon Fell articles on large scale improvisation: http://www.btinternet.com/~rubberneck/fell.html
See the web links from the Improviser site/

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