

A PORTFOLIO OF ACOUSMATIC COMPOSITIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

This portfolio consists of a series of acousmatic compositions presented in stereophonic and multichannel formats. The works in this portfolio reflect a variety of different compositional approaches undertaken during a period of time between 2010-2013. In this compositional research particular emphasis is given to the use of diverse sonic materials and their relationship in the exploration of acousmatic composition, along with discussion of important underlying principles and ideas, such as evocation, *topos*, mood and emotional states, anamnesis and catharsis. In addition, a secondary part of this compositional research uses text and voice within a musical context while still assimilating the aforementioned notions. Furthermore, this commentary reveals the compositional process in general by detailing its formation. Each piece is then individually discussed in order to outline the compositional objectives in relation to the key subjects of investigation.

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MEDIA CONTENT

Attached to this commentary is a USB data disc that contains the compositions that are submitted in this portfolio. Within the disc are two main folders separating the stereophonic works from the 8-channel ones. The 8-channel compositions are submitted as 8 separate mono files in order to be arranged more conveniently into the configuration that they were composed. All compositions are in full quality versions (48kHz, 24bit).

1. Introduction

This document is a commentary accompanying the portfolio of musical compositions. Its purpose is to elucidate the research intentions that have led to the creation and development processes of the submitted portfolio. In this compositional research the aim was to challenge the ideas of composition that I had already pursued and then to develop a distinct style using different techniques and approaches in order to enhance the musical result – always maintaining the underlying interest in evoking images, feelings and emotions. The research is practice-based, and has been focusing on my own practice as a composer of acousmatic music. Within my compositional work I have posed myself research questions such as: how can I use similar sonic materials in different pieces to evoke different imagery and moods? How can I evoke imagery and emotions that might not directly be connected to the source of the sonic materials by their varied juxtapositions in my works? How can I utilize anamnesis and catharsis as effective structuring principles in my compositions? How do I create a unified workflow that consists of two clearly distinct steps – an improvisatory pre-timeline period focusing on combining different materials in order to evoke different moods; and a timeline period focusing on temporal organisation?

The pieces that have been created in this research project have investigated the relationship of real-world and more abstract sounds along with a prominent use of pitched materials in an acousmatic context. I am particularly interested in using non-pitched sounds drawn from the environment that could be manipulated in ways to reveal their potential gestural/textural qualities or to remain ‘intact’ as sound environments within the composition. In parallel to this sound element, an interest in the juxtaposition of pitched sounds that in large part derive from instrumental sources

has been fundamental to this particular compositional research. These pitched materials can be of a harmonic or inharmonic nature depending on the source. The exploration of harmonic and inharmonic content from instruments or objects are significant factors that can, through intricate treatment, provide interesting and rich spectromorphologies bolstering the ultimate goal of inducing emotional responses within the musical context. My goal in composing in an acousmatic context lies exactly in bringing together – in parallel motion – these different sounding bodies: the natural (i.e. environmental) sound with all its intrinsic/extrinsic characteristics, along with electroacoustically transformed sounds and materials rich in pitch content. These elements constitute a platform that allows me to organize and create musical structures that can eventually provide an effective path towards evocation and ultimately the emergence of mood and emotional states. Inevitably, my personal way of thinking in acousmatic composition also gives way to surreal sound phenomena and contexts of an ambiguous nature, which in addition is another key aspect of my work.

This text does not follow a generalized approach but rather it attempts to shed light on several key subjects concerning the overall aesthetic and technical background of the compositional process. As such, the chapter ‘**Compositional issues, Aesthetics and aims**’ presents the principal ideas that underlie the compositional research undertaken. Within this chapter I have broken the text down into sub-sections in order to discuss the following notions individually: ‘evocation’, ‘topos’, ‘mood and emotional states’, ‘anamnesis’, ‘catharsis’, ‘text and voice’. These particular key notions are fundamentally linked to each other as one total area of concern in relation to the compositions in this portfolio. Essentially these notions weave in and out within the pieces, with the result that some of them occasionally

become more primary objectives within a particular work.

The chapter '**Materials and workflow**' expresses the general approach of selecting sound sources and also attempts to provide a detailed account of the procedures behind the compositional process.

Finally, the chapter '**Notes on compositions**' is an insight into each composition and elaborates the important aspects of the individual pieces in this portfolio.

1.1 Background and early influences

Ever since I can remember, I have always been drawn to music: it was the thing that excited me the most, holding a very special importance for me. It seems that after so many years I have come to acknowledge a profound attraction to sound. I am a self-taught composer: before my undergraduate degree I never studied music at school and I am not a classically trained musician. During my teenage years in the mid-90s, I became heavily involved in the electronic music scene, dance music, electronica, ambient, IDM, etc. I was particularly interested in the ambient and more experimental electronic domain and in pieces that had a novel musical element to my ears at that time. That particular era was very productive in the popular electronic music scene, with numerous groups and composers experimenting and producing music that I personally found very exciting. This excitement eventually led to an urge to pursue the creative activity of making similar music myself. It all began with an exploration of analog and digital synthesis, drum machines and sampling techniques. Several characteristics from that early period of composing music became deep-rooted in me and have continued ever since. The most important ones include aspects

of my general compositional workflow, such as improvising by mixing layers of sound¹, the use of clear rhythmical patterns and, most importantly, the extensive use of pitch. Many of the pitch relationships in my acousmatic works are diatonic; something that originates from this early period, as the general electronica repertoire that influenced me was primarily diatonic. Because of the plethora of artists in which I was interested at that time, it is impossible to refer to all of them. However, a tiny list of some of the most influential groups and albums that had an aesthetic effect would include Future Sound of London's *ISDN*, The Orb's *Orbus Terrarum*, Aphex Twin's *Selected Ambient works Vol. 2*, Autechre's *Incanubula* and *Amber* and Boards of Canada's *Geogaddi*. A particular album that had a very strong influence at one point and began to shift my interest to different musical soundscapes was Biosphere's *Substrata*. The frequent use of field recordings and the overall atmosphere and mood of *Substrata* were very intriguing to my ears. Through searching for other similar ambient works, I eventually stumbled upon the *Storm of Drones*² compilation and discovered acousmatic music. The encounter with the world of electroacoustic music had a profound impact on my musical ideas.

Once I started to study the field of electroacoustic music in more depth as an undergraduate student, I engaged in a very attentive listening to works from the repertoire. The composers that caught my attention in this early period were mainly Bernard Parmegiani, Francis Dhomont, Francois Bayle, Jonty Harrison and Denis Smalley. What really shaped my early acousmatic compositional work and, consequently, my future development are works by these composers – essentially, I

¹ In this early period the mixing was mainly between looped sequences of drum patterns, bass lines, melodic material, sampled material etc. As a way of working, this methodology of mixing sound material in continuous loops as an improvisational activity continues to this day.

² A *Storm of Drones: The Sombient Trilogy* (1995) is a three-part CD compilation of ambient, dark ambient and electroacoustic/acousmatic music. Additionally, through this compilation I also discovered two more compilations with similar musical content: *The Throne of Drones* (1995) and *Swarm of Drones* (1995).

learned how to compose based on my careful listening to their works. Some pieces I believe that had the most profound impact on me were Parmegiani's *De Natura Sonorum* and *Dedans-Dehors*, Dhomont's *Cycle du son*, Harrison's *Klang*, *Unsound Objects* and *Splintering*, Bayle's *Erosphère* and Denis Smalley's *Pentes* and *Empty Vessels*. Each of these composers, with their unique individual styles, offered a plethora of diverse approaches towards musical exploration. As a consequence, the influence that these composers had on me proved in the long run to have a strong effect on my subsequent development.

2. Compositional issues, aesthetics and aims

2.1 Evocation

Music has an undeniable power to produce responses in listeners' minds. The issue of evocation has always been a fascination of mine and especially with regards to the art form of music, in which I believe it occurs in a profoundly strong way. Moreover, in acousmatic music specifically, the issue of evocation has even greater implications because of its ability to include recorded sounds from the everyday environment, and this is one of my central interests in my own composition, in which the evocation of mental images, imagination and fantasy is a central feature. The 'evocation' that I am referring to here has to do with evoking mental images not only from individual sounds but also from whole musical structures that can potentially lead to the emergence of mood and emotional states. Acousmatic music's unique ability to use recorded sound has triggered a more direct evocation of our sonic environment by inserting it directly into the musical experience. However, going further from merely presenting an unprocessed field recording for the purpose of a direct evocative response within a piece, transformational techniques can create a variety of sound materials that increase the potential for more ambiguous evocations. This distinctive element of acousmatic music is discussed by John Young in terms of the sound image.

The concept of the sound image is more than simply one of presenting 'realistic' or literal 'torn from reality' field recordings – though of course these are important aspects of the practice. Imagery may be more generally regarded as part of the response mechanism that listeners may bring to sounds of uncertain or abstract origin – the imagination's response to that which is fantastical or remote from

known physical sources. Sound image is, therefore, a term used to define both the associative and referential aspects of sound, including recognition of realistic objects and actions as well as illusory figures and forms associated with electroacoustically transformed or re-shaped sound materials. (Young 2007: 25)³

In my opinion this quote is very telling and encapsulates precisely the power of the sound image and its potential for evocation that I personally envisage. Turning away from the ‘realistic objects’ and their apparent evocative effect, I would like to emphasize the significance of the ‘illusory figures and forms’. This is where the emergence of more intriguing and complex evocations with a more ambiguous nature can occur, which then in my opinion begin to form the basis for eliciting imaginative associations. This is exactly where Smalley’s emphasis on the ‘imaginative and imagined extrinsic connections’, encouraged from ‘the variety and ambiguity’ of the materials in electroacoustic music has, in my opinion, a central role (Smalley 1997: 110). Smalley’s discussion of indicative fields is essential here for the issue discussed.⁴ Young concurs by appropriately stating that, ‘as a way of locating bases of sonic imagery, their relevance is clear’ (2007: 27).

Furthermore, crucial in the evocation of imagery in the musical flow are ideas such as ‘motion and growth processes and behaviors’ (Smalley 1997). Once more Smalley’s words are telling when he states that, ‘the invisible freedom of spectromorphological content and motion creates a much wider and more variable pool of extrinsic, behavioral references’ (1997: 118). The relevance here lies in

³ The reader is referred to Young’s article ‘Reflections on sound image design in electroacoustic music’ (2007), which provides a very detailed and revealing discussion about the topic of sonic imagery and its implication within the compositional process. Furthermore, what is very significant is that Young cites Antonio Damasio’s concept of image: [defined as] ‘...mental patterns with a structure built with the tokens of each of the sensory modalities – visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, somatosensory’ (Damasio 2000: 318).

⁴ Smalley’s (1996) discussion of each individual indicative field offers useful information that is very relevant to this general discussion.

explaining the evocative power not only of single sounds but also of whole structures. The varieties of spectromorphologies and their structured relationships give rise to complex networks and associations on a higher level that eventually activates the power of imagination and fantasy. Particular emphasis here should also be given to the proposal that non-sounding extrinsic links also become possible (Smalley 1996: 83). Thus, the juxtaposition and evolution of sound images within the musical flow can create an arena of multiple meanings and ambiguities that give rise to imagination. Ultimately this propensity for the imaginative can lead the way to fantasy, where improbable connections are made in the mind of the listener. This key aspect of evoking such responses in the listener is an extremely important element in acousmatic music and in my personal creative endeavors.

2.2 The concept of *topos*⁵

Since the very beginning of my encounter with electroacoustic music, initially as a listener, I felt there was a very profound and consistent tendency towards the evocation of *topos* (τόπος, place). This effect causes listeners to imagine a ‘place’, where actions, events and ambiances are unfolding. Because of this effect, I tend to associate much electroacoustic music with the concept of a *topos* (a sense of a place or place of activity) whether this is a place connected to reality, or juxtaposed with unreality, or completely unreal and/or artificial. Besides the obvious implication of the use of ‘real’ sound images as mentioned earlier, which inevitably offers the

⁵ The use of this word here should not be confused with the literary term *topos*. Moreover, it has nothing to do with the theory of musical *topos* which was developed by Leonard Ratner (1980) in his book *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style*.

listener the evocation of a real environment, the idea of *topos* is not limited to a strictly representational aspect. In my view and as already mentioned, the richness and ambiguities of spectromorphologies and their relationships can still create a sense of place. A *topos* in acousmatic music can be entirely occupied by sounds that are totally remote from reality. In this respect *topos* becomes an imaginary or abstract phenomenon. Acousmatic music's core compositional element of 'the use of space to articulate sounds and musical structure' (Smalley 1996: 90) and the creation of spatial perspective is a significant factor that, in my view, increases the idea or imagination of *topos*. Suk-Jun Kim raises the issue by saying that, 'spatial cues are invitations to listeners to imagine a sense of place, which may be richer in its details and more suggestive through its inferences than the cues of spatial ambiance by themselves' (2010: 50). One suitable example of the idea of *topos* in its manifestation as real and imaginary is *Empty Vessels* by Denis Smalley. The piece begins with a clear sense of place, which is presented by 'sounds that corroborate a particular place' (Kim 2010: 44). The listener then is gradually transported to more ambiguous, and imaginary situations through the manipulation of certain sounds while many of the 'real' sounds always retain a presence throughout the piece. This effectively creates a shift between real and more unreal musical *topoi* in *Empty Vessels*, which Kim refers to as 'place vs non-place' (2010: 45).

The implications (aesthetical, psychological, emotional) of this particular imaginative response that I experience through acousmatic music have also been crucial to my persistence in working with this medium. The aesthetic power and potential of *topos* in acousmatic music and its significance to my sense is summarised very well by Jonty Harrison in the following quote:

Listening to acousmatic music [...] One is temporarily dislocated from one's normal environment and mysteriously transported to 'other' worlds, where [...] the normal rules of physics can be transcended: events and locations are superimposed, one can leap instantaneously from place to place, and the logic of cause and effect is malleable. (Harrison 2013: 311)

2.3 Mood and emotional states

The discussion of musical mood and emotion in music is an enormous and complicated task. Furthermore, with regards to electroacoustic music in general it is even more 'problematic' since there has not been much discussion on this matter in any great detail. As Gary Kendall rightly says, 'when we come to the role of feeling and emotion in electroacoustic music, professional discourse has been so aloof' (2014: 192). Be that as it may, my discussion here does not intend to provide a general or global framework or theory about emotions in acousmatic music. Rather it will concentrate on simple ideas concerning my personal opinion underlying its importance, and how I view it in connection with my compositional intentions. Therefore, this section focuses on a personal account stemming from empirical observation.

For me, the kind of evocation discussed earlier is one of the principal ways in which emotional content can be expressed. For instance, the possibility of mental imagery to induce emotions or feelings through the sound image is crucial. Coming back to the issue of imagery, Young writes about the 'distinction between "realistic" sound images, those understood as tangibly from life, and those more connotative sounds whose imagery is not phonographic but might stimulate feelings of known

actions and objects’ (2007: 27). Young rightly states that ‘there is difficulty in being categorical about sound imagery – it tends toward the interpretative and personal’ (2007: 27). Nevertheless, this possible stimulation of known ‘actions⁶ and objects’ or, similarly, places (topoi) derived from sound images can carry significant emotional and psychological content which then, through transformation, combination and organization, can generate ‘larger’ emotive impressions or moods.

Patrik Juslin details some of the different theoretical mechanisms that have been proposed to explain how music may arouse emotions. I find his comments on mental imagery particularly relevant:

Music can be highly effective in stimulating mental imagery. The images may not necessarily be about the music [...] but about anything [...] Emotions experienced are presumably the result of an interaction between the structure of the music and the structure of the images. Also in non-clinical settings, mental imagery may be an effective means to enhance emotional responses to music [...] (Juslin 2005: 103-104)

This particular point about the ‘structure of images’ is how I often sense the exploration of mood in my work. As Andrew Hugill puts it, ‘musical excitement and interest is often generated by listener perception of the relationships between the various sonic elements, which add up to a “mood” picture’ (Hugill 2008: 109). This is a very appropriate description of the way I perceive the evocation of mood in my compositional practice. By meticulously exploring the spectromorphological content of different sound images and then experimenting with the juxtaposition between them, I often reflect on the sense or feeling I experience by listening to the derivative combinations. I ask myself questions concerning how a particular combination of

⁶ Gesture here is crucial as it also ‘concerns emotional and psychological experiences’ (Smalley 1996: 84).

material makes me feel, or what mood is being evoked in me as a listener, and so on. These combined layers of sound, then, are evaluated in terms of the quality of their effected atmosphere, impression, expression, emotive content, etc. By distinguishing the mood for a specific musical passage that I am working on, I can then venture into creating other passages within the same work that might express different or conflicting moods. As Kendall mentions, ‘listening to music gives rise to a confluence of feelings and emotions, sensations and thoughts all at once and constantly changing’ (2014: 193). The interactive relationships between separate moods formed in the temporal space can potentially result in the enhancement of emotional responses experienced in a work. This particular concern with mood constitutes a fundamental issue in my work, since I am constantly striving to achieve a situation whereby I can potentially arouse the listener’s feelings and transform his/her emotional state by navigating through different ‘mood pictures’ within the course of a composition. As David Huron says: ‘emotions add subtle nuances that color our perceptions of the world. Emotions add depth to existence; they give meaning and value to life’ (2006: 1). Listeners’ responses will of course vary – everyone is an individual. Nonetheless, if there is success in affecting the listener by arousing various emotional states through the musical flow, it is my view that the listening experience can become more meaningful and memorable.

2.4 Anamnesis⁷

The concept of anamnesis (ἀνάμνησις, recollection) has both intrinsic and extrinsic implications in relation to acousmatic composition. The extrinsic aspect relates to what the earlier discussion of the concept of the sound image and its potential anamnestic possibilities (evocation) in a listener's mind – for example, recognition of an environmental or gesture-action sound. The triggering of personal memories from a sound is an undeniable and straightforward form of anamnesis. Apart from a direct recalling of memory through a sound image, anamnesis can also be triggered by the phenomenon of source bonding as well (Smalley 1997: 110). However, the discussion here is focused more on what I call the intrinsic aspect of anamnesis: compositional use of reference and recollection – regarding sound materials, events or whole structures – and their role as structural elements within the composition.

The notion of memory here with regards to musical composition concerns the anamnestic possibilities that sound and musical structures can offer the musical discourse. The use of repetitive devices and recurrence of musical material plays an important part in the formation of my compositions. Personally, I find that the ability to re-engage with material and events that have been heard previously in a composition enhances the prospect of recognition and continuity. This way of recognizing past material can, for example, help in identifying a past experience, which then can serve as an evocative mechanism within a work, thus attempting to emphasize the internal reference between musical events striving towards a coherent

⁷ The word anamnesis here is not associated with the Platonic theory of Anamnesis: plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-rhetoric/ [accessed in October 4, 2015]. Apart from the obvious etymological meaning, the choice for this particular word has been inspired further by Lacoue-Labarthe as cited in Helen Abbot's book 'Between Baudelaire and Mallarmé' (2009: 208-209).

sense of structure. The idea of anamnesis as a structural process thus becomes a sort of rhetorical device by which the organization of sounds in the temporal space can be guided. The concept of anamnesis that I am proposing here is very closely aligned to and inspired further by Ambrose Seddon's 'recurrence thesis' (2007). Seddon sets out to describe the significance of perceiving recurrent phenomena within a work, which can assist in the better understanding of musical structuring related to acousmatic composition (2007: 1). He does that by defining certain aspects that are linked with the notion of identity such as contour, source links, temporal relations, sound streams and the perception of units (Seddon 2007).⁸ One very significant idea that Seddon proposes is that musical recurrence does not have to include just returning identities:

[...] but also returning states, event types, and the perception of their derivations through transformation processes. In these cases, interesting connections between sound materials may be made. Where certain features are seen to unify various sounds, then broader groupings can be established, from which recurrences and structural significances may be deduced. (Seddon 2007: 2)

This proposition is particularly meaningful for my own perception of this subject. Since the idea of anamnesis does not consist solely of recognizing specific sounds, but extends to higher levels of structures or events, ideas such as motion and growth processes or behavioral qualities have a particular significance. Musical events or structures within a composition that might exhibit similar behavioral characteristics or patterns can heighten the reference between them in the temporal organization and this can help overall in defining a certain character, identity or perhaps a conceptual idea with which the piece might be concerned. Therefore, through intrinsic

⁸ See Seddon (2007) for more detail on each individual topic.

organization, the idea of *anamnesis* expands and also strives to establish identity on the global level of a musical work.

2.5 Catharsis

A particular feature that has had a consistent presence in my work since the very beginning of my compositional practice and could be considered as a type of stylistic marker is what I refer to as catharsis. This idea of catharsis is typically manifested in the endings of my compositions, which to some extent establishes it as a structural function. In other words, catharsis becomes a sort of final ‘destination’ in relation to the structural process in a composition and its aim is that of final resolution. Furthermore, catharsis has an elemental role with regards to emotional tension and release. In this context, I personally view catharsis as a heightened emotional state that can be expressed through musical means.

For some insight about the phenomenon of catharsis I will turn to Kendall, Terrence Deacon and Arthur Koestler. Kendall calls attention to an important feature of Koestler’s bisociation theory,⁹ which is that it offers a ‘framework for the temporal evolution of an aesthetic experience leading to resolution, as a release of cognitive tension (jokes), the eureka experience (scientific discoveries) or catharsis (arts)’ (Kendall 2014: 199). He continues by saying that the ‘joke is a simple example where there is a sudden shift from one of two competing organizational frames to the other;

⁹ Koestler (1964) presents his theory of bisociation in the book *The Act Of Creation*. Koestler at one point writes: ‘I have coined the term ‘bisociation’ in order to make a distinction between the routine skills of thinking on a single ‘plane’, as is it were, and the creative act, which [...] always operates on more than one plane. The former can be called single-minded, the latter double-minded, transitory state of unstable equilibrium where the balance of both emotion and thought is disturbed.’ (Koestler 1964: 35-36)

the shift releases the cognitive tension' (Kendall 2014: 199). These organizational frames are essentially what Koestler calls 'planes' or 'matrices'. In relation to catharsis in the arts Deacon refers to the matter based on Koestler's theory and informs us that:

Here, often two or more matrices are juxtaposed, but neither is cryptic or necessarily more primary, and their roles can shift over the course of appreciating the bisociation. In art, according to Koestler, the matrices are shown to be only partially compatible, and often it is the incompatibilities that are the focus of the fusion and which drive the dynamic of the bisociative process. For Koestler, it is the sustained juxtaposition and incomplete fusion that is key; for this tension, resolved in various ways, is the source of what he describes as catharsis, or a sort of eventual grounding of emotion. (Deacon 2006: 43)

Koestler himself indicates that 'the matrices with which the artist operates are chosen for their sensory qualities and emotive potential; his bisociative act is a juxtaposition of these planes or aspects of experience' (1964: 352). In this regard we can make a variety of analogies and suggestions in relation to musical structures, as Kendall attempts to do in his analysis of an excerpt from *Novars* by Francis Dhomont (2014: 199). The idea of the 'eventual grounding of emotion' is an important notion in relation to the temporal flux. For example, emotional catharsis can be heightened in the musical flow depending on the musical context that preceded it. In my opinion, this is what occurs in the segment 2'22"– 2'54" of Marcelle Deschênes' *Big Bang II*. A sudden sense of tranquil catharsis emerges as a heightened consequence, since it is preceded by a highly intense musical event. In this case catharsis offers resolution and transition.

A different type of musical catharsis where juxtaposition plays a significant role, in my opinion, is the excerpt between 9'22" – 10'21" in Denis Smalley's *Pentes*.

In this instance, the surprising appearance of the Northumbrian bagpipes is juxtaposed with the previously established musical context, which creates a ‘sudden transfer of attention from one matrix to another with a higher emotive potential’ (Koestler 1964: 328). Moreover, what also magnifies this change of attention is that the familiar bagpipes sound appears within a surrounding musical context, which is highly ambiguous. The bagpipes carry an emotive aspect, which fuses with the rest of the material creating a kind of ‘grounding’. The enhancement of catharsis on this occasion is helped by the recognition and familiarity of the bagpipes and their perception in a new and different light (Kendall 2010: 70).¹⁰ Lastly, a sense of catharsis in a musical passage can also be provided through the resistance of resolution. Kendall describes this as ‘seeking a blend’ or as ‘a union of its conflicting elements’ when he discusses the musical excerpt from *Novars* mentioned earlier (2014: 199). In this respect another musical example from Francis Dhomont that for me evokes this type of cathartic effect through a sustained juxtaposition, and which remains unresolved, can be found in the movement *Anticha* from *Forêt profonde*. Here a discourse between conflicting different sound layers creates an opposition of calm versus urgent. The high pitched synthetic sound along with the rhythmic layers produce a tense feeling that is contrasted with the other main musical component – the harmonic layer. Once more a sense of familiarity with the chords in the harmonic layer creates a shift of attention between the different layers that ultimately produces a blend that remains relatively unresolved.

On a personal level, there is a consistent tendency to seek out and create oppositional or emotionally contrasting musical structures, which often magnifies the

¹⁰ This also brings to my mind Koestler’s idea of, ‘“spontaneous illumination”: the perception of a familiar object or event in a new, significant, light; its *emotive aspect* is the rapt stillness of oceanic wonder.’ (Koestler 1964: 328) [italics in original]

elements of tension and release within the musical flow. This characteristic inclination often highlights the necessity for some sort of resolution that essentially attempts to signify an, ‘eventual grounding of emotion’. This, together with the fact that I have a compositional interest in a strong sense of finality in a musical work, is what lies behind the use of the word *catharsis* as a figurative term in describing this particular musical idea. The ideas of ‘eventual grounding of emotion’ and finality are fundamental in respect to my personal aspiration in the compositional process, but also raise the importance of catharsis as a structural function. In my sense, catharsis can be a momentary (or short length) musical event, but also a continuous state or structure, that attempts to emphasize a particular emotive aspect. Additionally, a musical context that might be suggestive of catharsis does not have to occur at the ending of a piece but can emerge at different temporal locations within a musical work. However, the way that I personally seek to create catharsis in a musical work is to express a particular emotional ‘statement’ and ‘closure’. Therefore, in relation to Smalley’s description of structural function, it can be suggested that catharsis in my work serves, at a higher level of musical structure, both as a continuant and termination (Smalley 1997: 115).

Another reason behind the choice of the word *catharsis* as a figurative term to describe this particular musical idea is its suitability in encompassing a variety of emotional experiences. The term has long been associated with emotionally distressing contexts, certainly because of its origin in Aristotle’s use of the word in relation to tragedy.¹¹ For me, emotional catharsis in music is not necessarily connected specifically with the arousal and resolution of negative emotional

¹¹ See Aristotle’s *catharsis* at plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle [accessed in October 4, 2015]

responses, although this of course is a powerful feature in music generally.¹² Rather I believe that it can induce a variety of emotional experiences from exaltation and calmness to sadness and darkness or a ‘mysterious sense of awe and wonder’, etc. (Huron 2006: 25) As might be expected, sensing an emotional catharsis is a subjective matter and will not be interpreted identically (or even as such) by all listeners. Moreover, in relation to catharsis as a structural function, Smalley asserts that ‘the attribution of a function to a particular event or context is not a simple cognitive process’ (Smalley 1997: 115).¹³ Nevertheless, for me it often constitutes a musical objective, not least in order to leave the listener with a final impression of the experience of a piece.

2.6 Text and voice

During the last year and a half of my doctoral research there was an important shift in focus towards a very specific compositional idea, centering on the incorporation of text within a composition. Ever since my listening experience with pieces such as Christian Calon’s *Minuit* or Francis Dhomont’s *Forêt profonde* I began to have an interest in the compositional potential of the spoken word. The piece that became a sort of a catalyst for the desire and decision to use speech and, more particularly, to compose some works based on text (in this case, poetry) was Phillipe Mion’s *L’Image éconduite*. Initially, this fascination resulted from the interest I had in inserting semantic content, but also from a wish to use the voice as a sound element within the compositional process. Specifically, the compositional intention is the

¹² Catharsis is mentioned in such a context in a particularly interesting essay titled ‘*Music and negative emotion*’ by Jerrold Levinson (2011) in his book *Music, Art, and Metaphysics*.

¹³ See Smalley (1997: 115) for the four different elaborations on the issue of function attribution.

creation of a text-sound relationship whereby the voice as a carrier of semantic meaning, but also electroacoustically transformed, blends into and further assists the musical articulation. After reading several poems over a period of time, I felt the urge to compose acousmatic works based entirely on poems or verses primarily from 19th century poets such as Goethe, Pushkin, Heine, Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Verlaine (and a crucial point to be made here is that the musical output is the result of a personal and free interpretation of these particular poems); pieces based on poems by Heinrich Heine and Paul Verlaine have been selected for inclusion in this portfolio.

Poetry has played a significant role in my artistic practice in general. A principal interest that I have with the art form of poetry has to do with the phenomenon of evocation. The nature of the poetic text and its ability to give rise to multiple meanings (including ambiguous ones) and, most notably, evocations is key to an associative link I enjoy in my mind between poetry and acousmatic music. The phenomenon of the poetic image becomes crucial here as it echoes in my mind that of the sound image discussed earlier. Imagery once again occupies a fundamental role with this personal allure. Poetic images thus become a source of inspiration that further motivate their creative exploration in sound. Bachelard corroborates this idea when he writes that: ‘... poetry is there with its countless surging images, images through which the creative imagination comes to live in its own domain’ (1964/1994: xxix). Moreover, poetry’s nature as a temporal art form furthers the interest and imaginative potential for musical compositional explorations. As Elizabeth McCombie describes:

The distinctive joint feature of music and poetry is that the formal apparatus of each is based on the rhythmic apprehension of time, and on the periodic division of or resistance to temporal continuity. Both arts turn time into form... (McCombie 2003: 7)

Since I have been inspired by the structural phenomena of poetic analogies, I have immersed myself in various readings of poetic texts over the years. This has consolidated an intermeshing of the texture of the ‘poetic phrase/image’ with my musical output: for example, certain musical ‘scenes’ can be linked to poetic verses or even just single lines from poems. Various lines and verses have inspired musical structures through a process that could be described as *free non-literal association*. At times, lines and verses fixed in my mind are read as imagined musical ‘scenes’. The reverse process can also happen: some musical structures that I have created have evoked in me an association with a particular verse. The relationship between music and poetry is a vast field requiring lengthy and complicated discussion beyond the scope of this thesis. I merely want to underline the fact that, for me, poetry is often the inspiration for musical creation.

I turn now to the other crucial part of this discussion, which is that of the voice and its essence in the musical space. It is beyond question that the human voice is the most universally recognized sounding entity. This is precisely the reason that Smalley refers to the indicative field of utterance as archetypal and details its implication by saying, ‘The fact that the sounds of utterance are generated from within the body, and that they are the essential vehicle of personal expression and communication, makes utterance intimate and emotionally charged’ (1996: 86). Furthermore (and this point is very significant for me personally), Smalley continues by saying that ‘in electroacoustic music the voice always announces a human presence, perhaps in a sounding context that is not regarded as directly human’ (1996: 86). This is of particular interest since it is notable that many acousmatic works convey a strong sense of ambiguity or unreality. The presence of voice within such structures can enhance the musical ‘play’ between the voice and soundscapes that

might exhibit such qualities, thus creating potentially rich associations. Additionally, the ability to transform the voice or 'reveal vocal micro-sounds' or 'create new voices' through technological means further increases this musical possibility (Smalley 1996: 98). This becomes essential as the interactive relationships between voice(s) and the surrounding musical material can generate contextual shifts within the musical discourse. As Smalley indicates, the perception of voice in a sounding context will move the listener's attention towards the 'unseen human presence', which then leads to the effect of trying to interpret the 'meaning of its utterances and the relationship of the person to the sounding environment' (1996: 98-99). If the sounding environment is of an ambiguous nature, this becomes particularly intriguing, as the voice is re-evaluated within such a context. Again Smalley sheds light by saying, 'It is not only the expanded utterance repertory that is significant for electroacoustic music but also the potential relationship of the human being to new environments' (1996: 99).

In view of the fact that my personal focus in exploring the use of voice compositionally has been largely its role as a carrier of semantic/poetic meaning within the musical flow, the aspects of recitation and language are of particular importance. The point I would like to emphasize here is the use of a dramaturgical voice in the musical space. As well as the significant features of utterance already mentioned, another important aspect of the voice which is fundamental to this discussion is Helen Abbott's statement that, 'although the voice has an identifiable materiality within the human body, it also bears aesthetic properties through language' (Abbott 2009: 12). It is my belief that the aesthetic properties emerging through language, and through poetic language in particular, are highlighted through the use of the dramaturgical voice. Concerning this matter and its significance in

relation to the compositional process, Don Ihde expresses the idea that ‘the dramaturgical voice amplifies the musical “effect” of speech’ and that ‘this heightens the significance of the word that has been spoken’ (2007: 167). The essence and aesthetic quality of the dramaturgical voice and its potential to intensify the effect of poetic language thus also becomes fundamental to my compositional exploration in these works. Finally, and with particular relevance here, Ihde suggests that ‘the music and rhythm of poetry retains its adherence to the spoken word, for poetry is “close” to music as a form of dramaturgical voice’ (2007: 175).

3. Compositional materials and workflow

In the following sections I will discuss some key ideas and aspects of the overall procedures that take place in my compositional practice.

3.1 Materials and recording

Since my early years of composing, I have accumulated a vast library of sound materials (recordings, synthetic sounds, samples from audio libraries, etc.). However, during the last five years, the period of my doctoral study, this library has been greatly expanded, especially through recording sessions in the Electroacoustic Music Studios at the University of Birmingham. Certainly, one of the main reasons for collecting large quantities of material in the last few years has been access to the top quality recording equipment at the Studios – the Sound Devices 744T or certain microphones, such as the Neumann K184. However, many of my recordings were made with my own zoomH4n recorder, using the Soundman OKM studio binaural microphones (which in many ways I consider to be my ‘instrument’). I find the OKM very appealing, since it is a binaural microphone that has provided very interesting spatial information in the recordings. In general, I am very interested in capturing the actual space when recording a source. This is particularly important when recording in closed spaces, such as large rooms, where the overall reverberant space can be captured. This then results in a very rich spatialisation content within compositions, when multiple sounds, each with its individual spatial information are combined. Such juxtaposition can create spatial ambiguities within the musical soundscape.

The recordings I have made over the years have included a wide range of different sonic material, from instruments to general objects of interest and field recordings. I have a particular attraction to sounds of the environment. Objects such as stones, wood, vegetation, water, etc., have a particular appeal to me as possible musical material. This can be attributed to specific evocative responses that I experience with this type of material. However, my interest in sound sources is very wide and the criteria for choosing an object for recording, apart from the possibility of evocation, are normally spectromorphological content and its potential for musical play. I search for sounds that might generate appealing gestural, rhythmical, and textural spectromorphologies and which offer potential for further musical development.

The interest in exploring the physicality of an object is also important here. For example, rubbing a balloon with a close microphone technique and capturing the intricate details can lead to the creation of rich textural motions. This last point also links to another very significant matter, which is the personal interest in real or implied human ‘agency’ in my compositions. This is an approach whereby in the recording there is a purposeful ‘improvisation’ of the objects being recorded. Through this physical exploration, first-order gestural surrogacy emerges which in turn magnifies the perception of a human presence behind the sounding context (Smalley 1997: 112).

The extensive recording of instrumental sources has also been a constant pursuit of mine over the years. The use of pitch has a very prominent role in my work; as stated earlier, this originates from my time as an electronica composer. My compositional thinking always gravitates towards creating pitch relationships and, most importantly, combining pitched material with non-pitched sounds. Instruments

of personal interest that are present in the works of the portfolio include piano, violin, cello, percussion, clarinet, flute and voice. The selection of instruments has very much depended on a personal preference that is to a large extent linked with the emotional and evocative qualities each individual instrument provides. The timbral characteristics of instruments and their potential for creating rich instrumental spectromorphologies through electroacoustic techniques are crucial in this respect. For synthesis material I have used some of Logic Audio's virtual instruments quite extensively, in particular *Sculpture*, which is a physical modeling synthesizer. Finally, sampled instrumental sounds from libraries such as the Logic Audio sample library also appear frequently in my pieces.

3.2 Workflow

Much of my compositional workflow is intuitive in its nature, which may appear to make the whole process a little nebulous. This intuitive aspect arises from years of exploring sound and composition, whereby conscious and unconscious activities almost merge together, leading to the existence of 'automatic' responses within the process of composition.¹⁴ By this I mean that many times there is a sense of proceeding compositionally in a very specific manner but not realizing definitively the reason behind the decision. This in my mind is reinforced by the fact that the word 'intuition' in Greek contains the word aesthesis (αἴσθησις, 'di'- aesthesis). However, in a more detailed way, I can identify a sense of intuition in what John Young

¹⁴ An account given by Xenakis from an interview has merit here in my opinion: 'You see, in music, when you are composing or listening, part of the past engages you in the future. This can become tedious, but if you go too far away from what you are expecting at any given moment, then it becomes too far removed and you can't make sense of it. So you have to stay between some limits. As a composer, you learn this by experience, by working and thinking, until it becomes a kind of unconscious feeling and action.' (Harley 2002: 13)

articulates in the following passage about the spectromorphological approach to music:

... by following the dynamic life of a sound event, we may be able to form images of structure—initiation, tension, release—that may then imply other events *before* they happen, promoting engagement and connection with a discourse. [italics in original] (Young 2005)

For example, the ‘images’ described in the above quote that might emerge – and the way one might proceed compositionally in a given musical work – are not necessarily a totally conscious developments.

After careful scrutiny, many important steps in the workflow can be identified. The way that my compositions come into being is through a persistent and lengthy improvisatory practice. As a general summary, it is a continuous model of action-perception-reflection-decision/rejection which then produces the idea(s) of a piece. In what follows, I hope to address the different activities and steps taken throughout the initial stages of a composition and beyond. I am not going to discuss pieces of software in any great detail, since for me they merely constitute tools that enable me to reach my primary concern and objective, which is the musical and aesthetical result.

My workflow makes a significant distinction between the ‘pre-timeline’ or ‘pre-compositional’ stages, where the improvisational activities take place, and the ‘timeline’ stage where the composition (or sequencing of selected material) happens.

3.2.1 Pre-timeline

...Composers build musical situations by creating constraints that act as ‘reflecting walls’ inside which a tissue of specific relationships is spun...

(Vaggione 2001: 57)

The practice of improvisation is fundamental in my work. It is a very natural approach for me to work in this way and has been since I began composing. For example, it is through ‘playing’ with sounds and trying them out with other material in the studio that an idea for a piece emerges. Once I have certain sounds, which I have selected for a potential piece, I start processing them and soon after obtaining satisfactory results they start to be played in a loop, alongside which other sounds are introduced in a real-time fashion. This effectively initiates certain improvisational activities where sound materials play simultaneously, in order to determine the interaction between them, by focusing on spectromorphological or behavioral qualities.¹⁵ This constant ‘playing’ with sounds eventually leads to certain crucial associations between sound events or objects. This includes links through the morphological or behavioral character of sound objects, pitch relationships, symbolism perhaps – or just simply an arbitrary connection of unrelated objects which happen to be sonically/musically interesting to my ears.

Once these initial stages of ‘playing’ sounds together produce some interesting results, then the improvisation starts to become more specific. This means

¹⁵ Without wishing to contradict my earlier declaration that software is not a primary subject of discussion, it may be of interest to note that this improvisational stage is greatly helped by Wave Editor’s ability to open and play multiple sound files while also having the capability to change plug-in parameters in real-time.

that once certain sounds have produced an idea or a structural foundation for a piece, the focus is on the development of a more detailed and larger structure; the potential piece therefore begins gradually to unfold. In the more advanced stages, where the idea of a piece has been already established, the improvisational activity begins to focus on more fundamental details such as the processing of 'key' sounds, the creation of motivic elements, textural variations, gestural shaping, spatial activity, etc. Once I have obtained certain sound results I may make structural plans such as drawings and sketches in order to imagine how the piece could potentially be formed. These are intended as an aid during this particular phase of the compositional process and it does not necessarily mean that these plans define the final result. This whole process, which is repeated over and over again during a period of time, produces constantly new ideas; new sounds are introduced and tried, other materials are rejected and, eventually, this accumulation of information finally starts to create a network of relationships that define an area with which the piece is concerned. Once there is an overall 'world' of material and I feel confident that this entire process has produced sufficient results for the creation of a composition, then the transition to the 'timeline' domain takes place.

3.2.2 Timeline

...But after all, what is music but organized noises? And a composer, like all artists, is an organizer of disparate elements... (Varèse 1966: 18)

My normal process of work, then, moves from the pre-timeline, open-ended exploration of materials and their relationships to the more fixed domain, which I term the ‘timeline phase’. Essentially the timeline phase is where the mixing/sequencing of each piece takes place in the digital audio workstation. By now all the sound material has been edited, processed and ready to be organized in the DAW timeline. As a rule (since my first efforts at composition), once I reach the timeline point, I prefer to have the entire sound material of the piece already processed and ready to be put together. This is because I always need to have an idea (even if it is only a vague idea) of what the piece will be like, and also to avoid the necessity of having to process sounds within the DAW. This is extremely important in my workflow since it is a way of restricting further alterations of sound materials during the sequencing process. In the initial stages of learning ‘composition’ I discovered that by processing sound through automation very often led to seemingly endless possibilities with no clear objective. This inevitably resulted in confusion and distraction during the process in the timeline. Therefore, a clear decision was made which was that all sound material for a piece would be ready when the moment of sequencing takes place. In the event of requiring additional sound material for the piece I can always step back and process again outside the timeline. By eliminating the chance of substantially altering sounds through automation I can focus solely on the articulation and flow of the material. In other words, by avoiding the distraction of

having yet more possibilities, the task focuses on the strengthening of the temporal relations between the materials of the composition. I have found that this restricting rule provides me with greater freedom within what I aimed to do in a certain piece.

Having listened to all the material and decided previously on what the piece should be like does not necessarily mean that I already know how the temporal structure of the piece will unfold. This is significant since, at the improvisation stage, there is no clear temporal space but only a vague idea of things such as the length of a movement or the entire piece (essentially the temporal space is potentially endless!). In the timeline, as the very name also suggests, there needs to be significant decision making in the organization of the material: how it develops, its articulation and for how long, and all without missing the meaning and importance of each element as previously intended.

Of course, not everything always runs smoothly once I am at the ‘timeline’ point. There have been numerous occasions where structures or specific movements that have been decided on previously simply do not work at the stage of sequencing and therefore a redirection needs to take place. And this is one of the most interesting aspects of the ‘timeline’ phase – the unexpected results and variations that emerge once I start organizing the material for the piece. In a way, the material drives the piece and makes its own rules at this stage, but it is essential at the same time to try and steer it close to the direction that has been intended or imagined. It is like an experiment that often leads to significantly different structures and solutions from the ones I previously imagined. What I find interesting in this is the fact that my passion and curiosity for a piece that I am composing is considerably elevated in the quest of trying to join together all the elements in a coherent way, whilst also trying not to diverge too much from my preliminary conception of the piece.

3.3.3 Form/Structure

The issue of structure is a very important matter in my work. A substantial amount of time is required for me to discover the formal attributes that will define the outcome of each piece that I compose. This is because for me form is the most crucial element in understanding a piece. Form brings all the elements together and it thus becomes the vehicle whereby the general and specific idea of the musical discourse of a given piece is expressed. Indeed, I am convinced that it is through form that a composition succeeds in being coherent and meaningful.

I have discovered through my own experience in composing that the sound material will often dictate form. As mentioned previously, once I have gathered some sound material that interests me for composing a piece, the interaction I then have in the studio with that material (i.e. through improvisation) gives rise to formal structures. Almost like an invisible driving force, the work starts making its own 'rules'. Of course, this does not imply that the structural development of a piece is an easy matter. Furthermore, there can be times where there might be a pre-existing concept or specific intention for a composition that represents the form as dictated by an idea. My compositional practice much of the time is based on intuitive processes, so that I sometimes grasp the formal arrangement of a piece only after its composition. Nevertheless, two very significant points can be underlined about the way I usually structure pieces. One of these points is the sectional character that my pieces often exhibit. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, and in purely practical terms, it is very common during the improvisation stage that I get absorbed in certain montage-like 'attitudes' where I will juxtapose material and 'tweak' the same

parameters over and over again. This cumulative process tends to lead to structures that are often unique and quite independent from others. Secondly, and in more aesthetic terms, a sectional formal pattern, or narrative form, is interesting for me because of the diversity that it can offer. This also adds to the fascination I have in creating contrast between sections within a piece. The important challenge, then (and this is why structuring for me is so time consuming), is to join together sections in such a way that a coherent totality can be achieved. The contrasting nature of sections within a piece needs to be moderated by a continuous flow and by internal reference (i.e. *anamnesis*).

4. Notes on compositions

The following sections will look at each piece in the portfolio individually and these are presented in chronological order of completion. The selection of which works to include was made through a personal belief that the pieces presented finally in the portfolio are representative of the general (personal) aesthetic interests and variety of approaches that I have explored over the last four years in Birmingham.

***Reverie* (2011)**

Format: stereo

Reverie was the fourth composition that was completed during my studies. The intention behind this piece was to compose a work that would deliberately be based on a limited range of material. I normally tend to compose pieces where the sound material comes from many different sources and recordings. The source material in this piece is a shakuhachi flute that I had recorded in the past, with additional shakuhachi samples taken from the Logic Audio library; to these were added some percussion sounds (bass drum, wooden chimes, tabla, tam-tam, doumbek) and broken wood sticks. This restriction of source material was decided on because the idea that I had for this piece was to focus mainly on the timbral/pitch qualities of the shakuhachi and its development parallel to the rhythmical element of the percussive sounds. This approach proved to be a good exercise in creating a piece in which the main musical discourse would essentially explore the articulation and interaction between two specific musical layers.

This subsequently prompted the aspiration to investigate structural behavioral characteristics that emerged through that interaction. During the period of improvisation I firstly set out to explore the pitch and spectral qualities of the shakuhachi. Processes such as spectral time stretching, filtering, freezing, pitch shifting and also granulation techniques produced a variety of gestural/textural materials that formed a starting point for musical articulation. With the introduction of percussive sound textures and gestures as a secondary layer, clearer structural ideas started to flourish. One important musical element that became apparent and defined a specific area of interest for this piece is that of interaction and causality. It is through an increasing amount of textural/gestural activity deriving from the flute and the percussion that a variety of causal relationships came to be perceived. A type of rigid causal behavior distinguishably takes place in the section between 4'10" - 6'20" where the musical context shifts to a very tightly controlled rhythmical articulation. In relation to the rest of the piece where the relationship between materials is freer, this section stands out as the materialization of causality between the elements is exaggerated. It can be suggested that the above can be linked to the 'loose-tight, voluntary-pressured continuum' (Smalley 1997: 118). Because of the fact that the main musical discourse is focused on two distinct morphological layers, their dynamic relationship results in a distinctly perceptible foreground and background state. Overall the two layers proceed through different behaviors between events that can be indicative of the concepts of 'dominance/subordination' and 'conflict/coexistence' (Smalley 1997: 118). For instance, in section 1'38" – 3'23", the relationship between the flute and textural material is much more loose (in 'motion coordination') and voluntary in terms of 'motion passage', while in the section mentioned above it is tight and pressured (Smalley 1997: 118). Once more in the

section 6'50" – 8'28", the articulation of a less rigid relationship reoccurs. This fluctuation between different states of behavioral relationships throughout the piece enhances the possibility of a continuous alteration of emotional states. Finally, the overall rhythmic character and the prominence and continuous presence of the flute, establish a clear identity in respect to the musical context of this piece, thus increasing the prospect of *anamnesis* on the global level.

***Pelagos* (2011)**

Format: stereo

Pelagos (πέλαγος, 'sea' in Greek) is a suite in seven movements and is the longest work in the portfolio. Composing *Pelagos* was a tremendous challenge for me, since I had never composed such a long piece before and in this particular manner. Indeed, the formal style of *Pelagos* is substantially influenced by the French tradition of acousmatic music. By that I mean the tendency whereby several French composers have composed long pieces that are divided into separate distinct movements. In a published interview with Francis Dhomont the composer mentions among other things:

'When I compose works of any substantial dimension [...] I organize them into a succession of relatively short movements [...] Each section or movement has a particular character that often contrasts with the preceding one [...]' (Mountain 2006: 17)

The evolution of *Pelagos* into such a format was not such an accidental outcome, for I have been greatly influenced (and particularly in the aspect of form) by the works of

Parmegiani, Bayle and, particularly, Dhomont. The gestation of this compositional idea also grew stronger following my listening during that particular period to Michel Redolfi's piece *Portrait de Jean-Paul Celea avec contrebasse*. Although this piece is for tape and soloist, the unified atmosphere of each movement was influential in relation to what I wanted to achieve with *Pelagos*.

In the initial stages of this piece I had no specific idea about a theme or anything relating to how it might eventually evolve. Indeed, *Pelagos* began to form itself from an entirely arbitrary stage of its development. It was simply an attempt to connect very unrelated sound materials with each other: namely, piano, percussion, voices, various types of noises, balloons, etc., thus creating a very peculiar landscape of sounds. During a period of experimenting in the studio by juxtaposing all these disparate elements, I began to discover the incipient stage of focusing on interesting developments that would lead to expanding them further towards the final piece. It was through certain characteristic sounds, which triggered a personal, imaginative response that a more specific thematic direction eventually surfaced: a variety of gestural and textural spectromorphologies and their juxtaposition began to provoke extra-musical associations, thus creating an evocative drift towards the primary theme of *Pelagos*. After establishing the blueprint of the theme, certain relationships between sounds started to coalesce in which structural patterns emerged. With the theme in mind, I aimed at creating organizational and behavioral patterns that in my mind would make an allusion to this specific conceptual idea. It was then that I consciously decided not to include in this piece any sound recording of the sea or water or anything referring directly to it, but rather decided to play with the idea of creating sounds and gestures that might be considered a more evocative and metaphorical, rather than literal reference to the subject of the sea (i.e. 'pelagos').

When the moment arrived finally to start organizing the material in the timeline, I realized that I had generated so much material and had invested so much attention in sectional structures that it became evident that the way to proceed was actually to compose it in small individual movements. What became the main compositional challenge, then, was carefully to structure the movements in such a way that could eventually achieve a sense of clarity within the narrative of the piece. This meant that I had to organize the material on the timeline as quickly as possible. The significance of structuring the several individual movements in a linear fashion – and within a short period of time – was to maintain a sense of momentum in the pacing of the piece which was, I believe, an important attempt to achieve a natural flow between the movements.

Since the amount of material that was generated for this piece was enormous, it was crucial to organize the piece carefully in order to obtain an overall unity. The idea of *anamnesis* played an important role in the structural process in order to maintain such a unity – recurrence of material is a feature of the piece. For instance, a clear case of a recurring sound event occurs with the spectrally filtered staccato voices in the first movement that appear at 3’58” and then in the last movement at 2’36”. Another such example involves the granular ‘metallic’ texture that can be heard in 0’48” – 1’00” (fourth movement) and then 2’30” – 3’00” (last movement).

While the previous examples are of sounds that have retained their identity, other materials reappear modified and obscured – for example, the pitched textures in 3’06” – 3’50” (third movement) that derive from the piano gesture that opens the whole piece. Such transformational variations of sound material are widespread throughout the entire piece. Besides the recurrence of sound images (clear or modified) a further type of clear *anamnesis* relates to structural behaviors and events.

For example, the salient features of rhythmical patterns and gestures from percussion in movements one, four and six constitute another way in which the reference between them is strengthened. In general, through the effort to suggest such anamnestic possibilities, I believe the unity of the narrative is enhanced, potentially ‘assisting’ the listener to follow a continuous thread of referential points throughout the piece. The compositional issue of *anamnesis* in such an approach was a priority while structuring *Pelagos*, for it is a work that runs for almost thirty minutes, and the possibility of leaving the listener in a confused state was very real.

On a more conceptual note and as explained above, a primary objective behind *Pelagos* is the extensive use of a symbolic musical articulation that excludes any real environmental references along with the evocation of a musical journey. The driving force behind this notion of the quest consists of transcending particular conspicuous sound events by means of a more abstract representation that avoids specifically depicting an acoustic location such as, for example, sea waves, tempests, lapping of water on beaches, etc. Thus, *topos* here is deeply linked with improbability and ultimately with the idea of fantasy. As far as the musical journey is concerned, what I set out to achieve was to create a sense of voyage on a metaphorical plane through all the particular stages of the seven-movement piece. The idea of the seven-movement continuum works as if it were a voyage that a listener can experience, in which the multifarious associations of sounds are linked together, leading towards a final destination.

The notion of the sea voyage is particularly interesting to me on a personal level. First and foremost, I have been contemplating this ‘feel’ for the sea from an Aegean contextual frame of mind that alludes to Homer’s *Odyssey*, an epic that has been an influential work since my youth. During the gestation period of composing

this piece, I had begun reading Hölderlin's *Hyperion* that reinforced this feeling for imaginary locations as part of a quest. Indeed, the Aegean landscape (or sense of *topos*) resonates as an imaginary signifier that has become a beacon for my musical imaginings.

***Another Day* (2012)**

Dedicated to Jonty Harrison.

Format: 8-channel

The work *Another Day* represents another personal novelty in many ways. First of all, it is the first 8-channel work that I composed in the Electroacoustic Music Studios at the University of Birmingham, but also it is a piece that has two other aspects which were also novel to me: it uses sound materials recorded mostly from one location and it was structured according to a pre-compositional narrative.

The composition of this piece was essentially my initiation into multi-channel sound exploration that was entirely new and also triggered a personal curiosity. There was much time spent in realizing techniques of spatialising and processing sound material in an 8-channel environment. These technical experiments were made almost entirely with the BEASTtools software developed at Birmingham. An important aspect about working with BEASTtools was the fact that I could create 8-channel files through recording various processes in a real-time fashion, thus corresponding to my personal workflow.

After spending a considerable amount of time in the studio where I was experimenting with certain recordings, I began to have specific ideas about a

composition. Since I was completely inexperienced in the area of 8-channel practice, my compositional approach changed and for almost the first time ever, I designed a narrative idea instead of ‘finding’ it through improvisations. The concept was simple: to create a narrative piece focusing only on environmental sounds (excluding the synthesizer atmosphere at the end) that would represent the course of a summer’s day starting from dawn and ending at night.

After establishing the concept, I immediately accessed my recording library where I had an abundance of material recorded the previous summer whilst on holiday on the island of Andros in Greece. This is a very important point to mention since it is very closely linked with the development of the idea for the piece itself. When I was on that island I made multiple recordings using a zoomH4n with the binaural Soundman OKM microphones. Totally immersed in the seductive Aegean atmosphere, I trekked alone around the rugged island landscape and deserted hills with the microphones; the whole experience has remained in my mind as something personally unique. Hence the idea came to use these sounds for this piece in an attempt to re-engage myself with some of these moments, to re-create an atmosphere that for me was captured in the sounds recorded. Naturally composing with these sound recordings in an 8-channel format was even more effective, because the idea of creating an immersive sound environment quickly came to my mind as the main focus for this piece. The idea of immersion in a soundscape is also the reason why the presence and movement of most of the sounds is active in all eight speakers, thus attempting to ‘enclose’ the listener within this environmental sound-space.

Aesthetically this piece is concerned with the idea of *topos* as evocation but also in terms of what Aki Pasoulas describes as ‘temporal setting’ or a sense of place in time (Pasoulas 2011: 64). He elaborates by saying that, ‘the characteristic sound of

the nocturnal cricket that lives in Mediterranean countries connotes night; it implies night-time when one knows the sound and can therefore deduce the setting' (Pasoulas 2011: 64). Since this piece was preconceived to portray the sequence of a day, the idea of *temporal setting* through association of specific sound images was fundamental. The particular sounds which are of interest here are dawn chorus 0'00" – 2'00", cicadas 3'55" – 6'22", and nocturnal crickets 13'23" – 15'24". Throughout the piece, the association of these sounds with early morning, midday and night is crucial in the aim to present the general temporal linearity of a single day.

Additional material present in this piece includes dry vegetation, rocks, water streams, wind on wooden shutters, fire, bees, insects, thunder claps and rain. A crucial point is that much of the material is processed in a subtle manner. Original recordings, producing layers of these sound events, have been inserted, thus preserving the reality of the specific *topos*. The insistence on this aspect of maintaining the reality of most sounds was essentially an intention to transport the listener to this *topos* and to evoke a sensibility of one experiencing the sounds of this place. Additionally, the intention of creating a general mood of tranquility was also very present in my mind. The only processes involved in this piece, therefore, were basically granulation, reverberation, filtering and harmonization, all done through BEASTtools.

The overall character of natural subtlety also brings to the surface a contrast with the more processed materials, accentuating a kind of ambiguity. This occurs many times, by means of the layers of different spectral drones that are derived from some of the original sounds. These drones mostly appear in the background throughout the piece and their quality brings about a mysterious atmosphere. Similarly, the sound behavior of some of the more clearly granulated material can be

described as non-natural. The contrast between natural and the more rarely occurring, more processed sounds is very evident in a passage appearing approximately in the middle of the piece (7'20" – 9'16"). This is the only time a climactically dynamic moment occurs, where sounds of a swarm of bees are heavily harmonized and stretched, thus leading to a transition point that separates the first half of the piece from the second (though in overall structure, the piece can be more accurately described as being divided into seven segments that reflect the different parts of a summer's day, from early dawn to late night).

Finally, I would like to point out that the insertion of the synthesized atmosphere at the end of the piece is the only part where such an unrelated non-environmental sound is introduced. This could be considered as something relatively arbitrary. Despite the fact that this insertion might be thought of as a cathartic moment, it was mostly thought of as an element enhancing a certain ambiguity and a sense of nocturnal mystery.

Unfelt, Unseen (2012)

- *Desolate Shores*

- *Streams*

Format: stereo

Unfelt, Unseen is in fact divided into two pieces. The reason behind this is that this work was conceived at a moment in which one piece (*Streams*) emerged out of the other (*Desolate Shores*). At a certain point during the improvisation stage I decided to split them into different directions for reasons to do with the material and the overall thematic character. Both pieces share common ideas concerning energy, motion and the nature of fragmentation. At the time of realizing these pieces I was particularly immersed in several of Mallarmé's poems that provided the inspiration behind the notion of fragmentation. Mallarmé's poetic language is notorious in its complexity of structure and meaning. However, despite the numerous different aspects of Mallarmé's poetry, the one that caught my attention in relation to this particular project is the 'conflicting story of fragmentation and discontinuity' (McCombie 2008: x). Moreover, McCombie asserts that, 'broken syntax and semantic discontinuity occur throughout Mallarmé's poems [...]' (McCombie 2008: xxiii). This metaphorical notion of 'broken syntax' evoked images of disruptive movement and fragmentation in relation to sound and structure. Eventually this idea of fragmentation in the two pieces focused on the aspect of sound morphology (external and internal) and temporal articulation.

Other features of both pieces include a kind of intense and erratic energy and the motivic use of the clarinet. In the first piece the clarinet is foregrounded

thematically, whereas in the second piece it plays essentially a background role towards the end. The fundamental decision to split up the two pieces was to introduce, at a preliminary phase of development, some synthetic sounds that could work as supporting material. However, this material grew in quantity and started to acquire a more independent status especially through its distinct spectromorphological attributes. This eventually resulted in the formation of new structural ideas and behaviors. Therefore, I decided that the work should be divided first into two pieces: the first would explore these ideas with real sound recordings; the second would be shaped entirely with synthetic sounds. The two pieces were composed almost simultaneously.

Desolate Shores (2012)

Format: stereo

The initial point of exploration for *Desolate Shores* was to compose a piece that would have a very clear and characteristic dichotomy between instrumental sound and sound objects of relatively uncertain origin. This is once again a clear case of juxtaposing two musical layers. After exploring the sound of a normal clarinet, I then transposed it to a lower octave artificially. This was combined with time-stretching techniques that began to create bass drones and textures. The drone material, along with gestures from the clarinet, was processed subtly with some effects (mainly flanging), and started to take on a clear structural character that could then be used as a launching point for the piece. Another aspect that became interesting aesthetically was that these clarinet low drones evoked an ominous

character in terms of the overall mood. During the initial stages of improvisation, I started to experiment with the clarinet sounds in conjunction with the other chosen sound objects that gave the impression of impacts, scrapings, frictions and collisions, that further advance this ominous feeling. These somewhat harsh sounds include recorded materials such as styrofoam, plastic materials, wooden planks and rubber surfaces. During the experimentation period in the studio, I was intrigued by the interaction of those two layers: on the one hand, the very recognizable sound produced by the clarinet, and on the other, a palette of fragmented and mostly indistinguishable fragmented sound objects.

The idea of the fragment was very present in my mind while composing *Desolate Shores* and it primarily concerned the non-pitched sound objects. ‘Fragmentation’ here refers to my interest in cutting into many of the non-pitched sounds (some of them unprocessed, and others heavily granulated); by organizing them I tried to create an articulation that would present a structural dynamic based on separation and discontinuity. By creating abrupt cuts in the editing of many of the non-pitched sound objects, their external morphologies appeared as fragmented or incomplete. Strangely, through this type of ‘incompleteness’, a part of their identity is revealed. Additionally, sharp and irregular attacks within some of the granular textures also generated a degree of ‘roughness’ and, once again, fragmentation. For me, this created a basis for exploring the dynamic relationship between the assorted spectromorphologies, leading to source-cause patterns that could reveal a ‘strong’ feeling of fragmented energy-motion trajectories. This can be heard, for example, in section 1’22” – 3’45” where dynamic causal patterns create movement that evokes a sense of discontinuity. After a period of improvisation, certain ideas began to form about the overall character of the piece. The main objective was to create a tension

between a somewhat continuous (though not too complex) clarinet presence (i.e. a thematic thread) and a more ‘frantic’ layer of the fragmented sounds that would create a parallel rhythmical discontinuity. The layer non-pitched sounds follows a pattern of erratic behavior throughout the piece, maintaining its identity as fragmentary and discontinuous. These two layers would eventually develop in parallel, thus forming a discourse of continuity versus discontinuity while preserving an antithesis between them.

This suggestive antithesis through sustained juxtaposition also plays a significant role as an intended catharsis in the end section between 6’10” – 8’59”. While the introduction of the time-stretched melodic texture at 6’55” intentionally aims to evoke an emotional response, the tension among the layers remains to some extent unresolved, prompting a shifting of attention between them. In this case, the idea that the different layers are ‘seeking a blend’ gains some relevance. In a similar fashion to *Reverie*, the relative pitch stability and permanence of the clarinet throughout the piece alongside the distinct behavioral character of the non-pitched sounds strengthens the anamnestic possibilities, which subsequently can establish a particular character of the overall musical context.

Streams (2012)

Format: stereo

As mentioned before, *Streams* emerged as an offshoot of exploring sounds and improvisations related to the previous piece. It was composed immediately after I had established the central idea of *Desolate Shores* and while I was generating material for that piece I had the idea of inserting some synthetic sounds in order to complement some of the fragmented materials, ‘playing’ with the dichotomy between ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ sounds. Much of the material that was generated exhibited a more crucial structural compositional divergence, which became impossible to integrate into *Desolate Shores*. Therefore, a new chapter opened, in which a totally new piece would focus solely on these sounds.

For the creation of these synthetic sounds I turned to Logic Audio’s virtual instrument *Sculpture*, which is a physical modeling synthesizer. While researching this instrument and creating sounds, a variety of intriguing spectromorphologies were discovered that motivated me to investigate this material in more detail. The intrigue centered largely on the intrinsic morphological character of many of the sounds generated. Likewise, the idea of composing a new piece entirely from these synthetic sounds was magnified by a sense of curiosity in an attempt to compose a work that would be almost entirely focused on spectromorphologies remote from reality. In contrast to *Desolate Shores*, in this piece the musical articulation is manifested by spectromorphologies of unknown origins. The dynamic source-cause patterns are ambiguous and uncertain, which consequently triggers an imaginative response. For instance, the ‘gestural surrogacy’ in this piece is entirely of a third and remote order, which can give rise to more adventurous wanderings of the mind (Smalley 1997:

112). Still, certain analogies concerning the types of motion present in the piece can be made in relation to the motion of objects (Smalley 1996: 89). For example, the evocative impression of a bouncing ball can be made with regards to the texture at 0'20".

The majority of this material also proved to be very malleable. While processing these sounds (especially with granular techniques) I discovered that they behaved in a very 'plastic' way, as if playing with clay. The plasticity and malleability of the sounds assisted in achieving very specific transformations of morphological qualities such as the creation of textural motions that defined a key area of interest because of their intrinsic form (i.e. 'bouncing ball' texture). These textures became a salient feature in this piece because of their 'discontinuous motion'; their internal consistency is more or less fragmented through aperiodic iterative motion (Smalley 1997: 117). With their idiosyncratic morphological profile these textures offer a continuum of identity throughout the piece that also assists the general concept of fragmentation. The creation of several variations of these textures, each with their individual 'internal fluctuations in tempo', provided a rich stream whereby dynamic motions could unfold in the temporal flux (Smalley 1997: 117).

This is particularly manifested from 5'40" onwards, where a stream of textural layers coalesce into a mass in which various degrees of differing internal motions (periodic-aperiodic/erratic) result in a dynamic sense of movement. It is also in this particular section that a suggestive catharsis unfolds with the appearance of the stretched out melodic line of the clarinet at 6'08". Similarly, a sustained juxtaposition between the streams and the clarinet, implying stasis through constant recycling, creates a blend that ultimately remains unresolved as all the elements simply fade away gradually.

Absence, Memory, Darkness (2012)

Format: 8-channel

This is the second and last 8-channel composition presented in this portfolio. Although it began as a stereo project, I felt a particular longing to compose another multi-channel piece, and it was finally composed in eight channels.

After composing several pieces up to this point that dealt with various other compositional ideas, I had the desire to return to a piece structured along more narrative lines. The narrative notion here does not resemble the one presented in *Another Day*, but rather follows what I would like to call a more ‘free-floating’ type of narrative. In the stages of composing and thinking about the general form of the piece I had in my mind a concept of movements that would be clearly separated from each other and which would have the effect of transporting the listener to different musical states, ‘places’ (*topoi*) that would evoke diverse emotional responses.

It all began while exploring and developing some of the recordings made on the island of Andros that I mentioned above in relation to *Another Day*. Within these recordings I captured sounds of some metallic impacts and resonances that I very much wanted to use for a piece. These sounds came from some rusty metal sheets that I found, remnants of an old barbeque grill and cover. I positioned a few of those metal sheets in a square formation and then placed the OKM microphones inside, thus capturing the resonances created by tapping on the metal sheets around them. Even the slightest tap would generate some beautiful resonances. The character of these metallic sounds was impressive and this encouraged me to make the decision to compose this piece in eight channels. Through processing the metallic sounds, it dawned on me to make this the basis for the piece within which other ideas could be

developed. After having accumulated a significant quantity of variously treated materials from these metallic sound objects, a clear path was being paved for the formation of structural planning. Soon after this, new sound material and ideas began to gestate, signifying the potential progression of the piece and the gradual formation of its separate movements.

Having already composed two pieces in eight channels, I felt much more confident about the overall technical and compositional aspects of the procedure. Unlike the way, technically, in which I composed *Another Day*, where almost all of the sound materials were processed directly in eight channels, I chose for this piece a different approach where most of the processes were executed in stereo at the first stage and then later were spatialised into eight channels (though some sound materials were rendered directly into eight channels). This approach for me created a much more focused ground for thinking about how the overall spatiality of the piece would behave. For example, some sounds were only frontal; other sounds moved in a specific panning trajectory; others rotated; others localized; and other sounds diffused in all the speakers, etc. This essentially created a clear stratification of spatial intention. I believe this was a significant compositional decision, since it gave me a very clear idea on how the spatialisation of different sounds in the piece would behave, thus creating a robust spatial character for the piece. To be more specific, the spatial character of *Absence, Memory, Darkness* was decided quite early in the compositional process: the main spatial focus would be directed towards a frontal unfolding, thus foregrounding the main and wide stereo pairs, while the rest of the speakers would serve mostly as an effect for diffuse material.

As already mentioned, a main concern in this piece was the illusion of contrasting *topoi* through a successive passage of different musical contexts. The

piece can clearly be divided into five sections, each section portraying a *topos* occupied with independent behavioral characteristics and spectromorphologies. Due to the relatively distinct separation of the movements the phenomenon of ‘sectional identities’ emerges in relation to the spectromorphological content and patterns of structural behavior of each movement (Seddon 2007: 8). These local level identities ultimately express different states of activity, thus attempting to induce divergent emotional responses. Nevertheless, the different movements do connect with each other through association of similar behavioral characteristics and with the recurrence of specific sound identities, of which the metallic ones are the most prominent.

In section 2’16” – 4’10”, dynamic source-cause patterns of metallic objects create a sense of motion through temporally proximate repetitions. The harshness of the metallic sounds and the developing rhythmic patterns create a tense situation; the intention is to express a feeling of unease. The whole section establishes itself as a distinct identity through its behavioral and spectromorphological character.

In section 4’50” – 7’45” the creation of motion and tension is again explored, although with different morphological types. Spectromorphologies deriving from material such as plastic and wood result in rhythmic textural entities. Several layers of these textures create a stream of erratic polyrhythms that create tense motions. By contrast, section 7’50” – 10’50” marks the transformation of mood into a much more relaxed state, which is expressed by the decrease of activity and a general structural stasis. Furthermore, the evocation of *topos* becomes magnified through the sound image of the sea and the reappearance of a sparsely repetitive metallic gesture, which alludes to the image of big waves crushing. The metallic gesture, although this time spatially distant and reverberated, strengthens the *anamnesis* through its spectromorphological identity.

Finally, in section 10'50" – 13'53" an explicit case of intended catharsis takes place for the purpose of final resolution in relation to all previously explored emotional states. Three elements that can be defined as trying to express a specific emotive aspect are the repetitive thematic element consisting of two chords, an eerie female voice and staccato synthesiser sound accompanying them. Parallel to the chord motif, which is reminiscent of a baroque cadence and inclines towards a nostalgic or lamenting effect, the return of metallic identities and the granular textures raise the tension. All the elements join together in order to trigger an emotional catharsis in order to signify an 'eventual grounding of emotion' and closure.

From the early stages of composing this piece, a general mood and feeling was directed towards depicting a dark, cavernous realm, capturing a sense of threnody. This means that the sounds and musical movements are trying to evoke a sense of deep desolation, aiming towards an air of melancholia. During the period of composition I stumbled upon a poem by Lord Byron titled *Darkness*, which by coincidence created a kind of osmosis that inspired me further towards the concept of desolation. Indeed, this combination induced by Byron's atmosphere created an alluring association for me.

Sie Liebten Sich Beide (2012)

Format: stereo

Voice: Gregor Bauer

This particular piece is influenced by a poem written by Heinrich Heine in 1827 and included in his work titled *Buch der Lieder* (“Book of Songs”). This was the first of the text-based pieces that I composed and therefore it marks an initiation into this new personal endeavour of compositional exploration. Apart from the fact that I have admired this poem for several years now, another reason for choosing it at the time was its length. It is a very short poem consisting of just two stanzas and this provided me with the advantage of not having to experiment with a very complicated and extensive text. Using speech in a musical work was a new experience for me and thus the crucial decision to focus on a short poem provided ample ‘room’ for trying different approaches to how the voice could be integrated within the composition. This was very much aided by gaining inspiration from certain examples from works that use text and vocal transformations as an element within a composition. One such work already mentioned was Phillipe Mion’s *L’Image éconduite*. The dynamic interplay between clear spoken voice, vocal transformation and the surrounding sound material in this piece provoked motivation to experiment and improvise in a similar manner with my own materials.

Once I had the selected recording of the recitation I experimented on the voice material with various processes – mainly random shuffling and time stretching. After getting some initial results from these processes, I began to think about the general character of the piece in terms of the mood that I wanted to achieve. Reading this poem brought to my mind feelings of distress, anxiety, melancholy and loss. My

reaction to and interpretation of the poem's content triggered my musical imagination. I started improvising with sound material in order to reflect the emotional states that I felt from the poem's effect.

The main sound materials I chose to start working with – apart from the voice – were some recordings I had made from a bass drum. More specifically, using a close microphone positioning, I captured the vibration of the bass drum's membrane after having placed little objects on it. Continuously tapping it produced a sort of rattling sound from the physical interaction between the objects and the membrane. Another technique used was the scraping of the objects on the surface of the drum. These little objects consisted of a metallic bracelet, small chess pawns and old CDs. These sounds and their electroacoustic transformations provided sensations that I deemed appropriate for this piece. The spectromorphological qualities of many of the sounds, such as the scraping of the metallic objects or the rattling effect, evoked images of edginess and fragility. The relevance of such images on a personal level was significant as they became associated with the semantic content from the poetic lines (*'As enemies, they saw each other / And almost died of their love.'*). In sections 0'30" – 2'00" and 2'59" – 4'16" the combination of sounds and their temporal articulation strive to create an uneasy feeling. This feeling, influenced by these two poetic lines, signifies an attempt to suggest a notion of 'strained relations'.

Throughout the improvisation stage, whereby the granulated voice was interwoven with the other sound material, I came to the decision not to reveal the content of the text until the final section of the piece. The intention behind this was that the piece would evolve and express the intensity and anxiety along with the voice appearing in a fragmented state; thus only a hint of utterance is given. In this way the processed and fragmented voice blends into the musical articulation as a

textural/gestural element alongside the other spectromorphologies. In one such example between 4'45" – 5'18", a granular vocal texture becomes a key component in a 'surging' stream of textures that function as a transitional passage. The fragmented voice prior to the clear recitation of the poem can be described, borrowing from Cathy Lane's list of compositional techniques concerning spoken word in composition, as the dissolution of semantic meaning through processing and/or deconstruction:

(1) *Dissolution of semantic meaning through processing.* The semantic meaning of a word or phrase is dissolved through a processing effect such as layering, overwhelming reverberation, reversed echo, spectral processing, etc. [...]

(2) *Dissolution of semantic meaning through deconstruction.* Words are split into their component syllables or smaller units and are used acousmatically [...]. [italics in original] (Lane 2006: 5)

Finally at the end of the piece, where the musical atmosphere has reached a much calmer and more melancholic state through the appearance of a succession of chords (6'30"), the full and clear recitation of the poem appears (7'10"). The importance of this also lies in the dramatic shift of the musical context since the unexpected appearance of the dramaturgical voice 'alters the significance of the context, redirecting the listener's attention to center on indicative meanings associated with the perceived utterance' (Smalley 1996: 86). The communication of semantic/poetic meaning by the dramaturgical voice casts a new light on the entire work, and its presence at that specific temporal point signifies closure.

***Mon Rêve familial* (2013)**

Format: stereo

Voice: Antoine Sallustrau

After finishing *Sie Liebten Sich Beide*, I further pursued this ongoing project of composing pieces based on various poetic texts. In total there were another three poem pieces composed before this present work. While being engaged in composing these pieces I had the opportunity to explore different ways of manipulating the sound of speech/voice and realized the potential that this sound source offered. In other words, I explored multiple ways of inserting and blending semantic meaning, dramaturgical voice and electroacoustic transformations of vocal sound within musical structures. This research was also particularly influenced by certain musical examples from the repertoire. In particular, for the articulation of vocal processes in this piece I was greatly inspired by Natasha Barrett's work *The Utility Of Space* and Francis Dhomont's *Engloutissement*. Therefore when it came to composing *Mon Rêve familial* I had already acquired a certain experience which resulted in being much more confident in the way I imagined the formal aspects of its composition.

In the case of *Mon Rêve familial* the intention behind the structural approach was to follow a complete recitation throughout the piece. This poem, in contrast to *Sie Liebten Sich Beide*, has four stanzas so it is considerably longer. Because of this, I was drawn to the idea of composing it in a 'discursive' way. The recitation of the poem would be spread throughout the entire piece with each stanza signaling a new development in the musical unfolding. In contrast to the previous piece, the dramaturgical voice is heard at the beginning, introducing the first stanza that is clearly read, unprocessed. This in effect establishes the dramaturgical voice as a clear

identity from the start and, combined with the semantic/poetic meaning, provides a hint about the context of the entire work.

Every time the dramaturgical voice appears with the recitation of a verse, it signals a new development in the musical articulation. This structural idea enabled me to focus in a more detailed manner on the interplay between spoken verse and the musical elements. In addition, there was a more conscious and elaborate crafting of different types of vocal processing, such as layering, filtering, reverberation, granulation, and spatialisation. Once again, and as in *Sie Liebten Sich Beide*, the fragmentation of the voice results in the ‘dissolution of semantic meaning through deconstruction and processing’ (Lane 2006: 5). However, in *Mon Rêve familial*, besides the intended signification of breaking up the semantic meaning, the transformation of the voice has a more prominent aesthetic and structural role within the musical context. For instance, in section 3’34” – 5’18”, the various vocal spectromorphologies become prominent elements in the unfolding musical structure. These ‘new voices’ originating from the transformational processing of the dramaturgical voice result in the breaking up of its fixed identity. Multiple new identities come to the surface that are merged and juxtaposed, creating a web of vocal articulations that create a sense of ambiguity in order to signify and support the concept of dreaminess. The variety of vocal spatial motions is also a significant factor for this suggestive illusory state.

Apart from the voice, the sound material present in this piece came from various sources: violin, the crackling sound of a cello bow rubbed gently on the strings, two wooden sticks struck inside a very reverberant hall, etc. The selection of some of these sound materials such as, for example, the wooden stick sounds at the beginning of the piece, the glissandi of the violin, or the deep drone at the end, reflect

my intentions regarding the aesthetic goal I was trying to achieve. Several of these sound images, together with the heavy presence of reverberation within the piece, worked as a way to convey the notion of a dreamlike state in my mind. This ultimately gravitated towards the idea of dreaminess in relation to the piece, which in turn influenced a particular sensibility concerning the compositional aim of this work. This is especially relevant in relation to the final section (7'28" – 10'32") where a resolution or catharsis takes place. In this case, emotional catharsis takes the form of tranquility as a release of tension from the overall previous musical context. The slow recycling and morphological profile of the deep harmonic drone creates stasis insinuating a hypnotic effect. Parallel to the drone, the *anamnesis* of the wooden sticks signifies a sense of closure while a distant and 'dreamy' female voice appears in a direct association with the final verse's semantic content (*'And for / Her voice, it sings – distant and mellow, mild – / The music of dear voices heard no more.'*).¹⁶ The prolongation of this whole section creates a certain identity that attempts to heighten the notion of a dreamlike state.

¹⁶ This could perhaps be described, referring once more to Cathy Lane's list, as the: '*Accumulation of meaning by sonic association*. Semantic meaning of words is reinforced by the additional use of other sounds relating to the text, e.g. the sound of the object that is mentioned (the sea for the sea)...' (Lane 2006: 5) [Italics in original]

4. Conclusion

In this text I have attempted to give an insight into the core ideas highlighting the component parts of this compositional research. By elaborating on these components – such as evocation, topos, emotional states, anamnesis and catharsis – I have tried to present them as notions that exhibit the fundamental driving force behind my compositional aims. Knowing that some of these subjects, such as emotions or imagery, for example, can be highly indeterminate due to their nature, I have tried at least to focus on the application of some of these intriguing ideas that have been discussed within the literature in order to integrate them with my particular compositional approaches and creations. Furthermore, I believe that the discussion of each individual piece has provided background information as well as some analytical details of these core notions as an effort to promote a better understanding of the musical compositions. Finally, the issue of text and voice has been addressed and discussed as an additional part of this research project. The two pieces with voice were composed as an extended attempt to explore once again the notions of evocation, feelings, emotion and catharsis. However, this domain of text and voice is a compositionally vast area of exploration that has only been partially touched on in this submission.

In this compositional research I have sought to investigate the structural relationships of sonic materials that might eventually bring about a variety of phenomena that can be experienced and interpreted by individual listeners. Therefore, as a core belief I completely adhere to Smalley's statement:

The sounding materials within a composition cannot be solely or even primarily self-referential. The apprehension of musical content and structure is linked to the world of experience outside the composition,

not only to the wider context of auditory experience but also to non-sounding experience. (Smalley 1996: 83)

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: PROGRAMME NOTES

Reverie

Mainly concentrating on the sounds of far-east bamboo flutes and various percussion instruments, *Reverie* (daydream) is suggestive of an altered state of mind.

Pelagos

“...I gaze out over the sea and reflect upon my life, its heights and depths, its bliss and its sorrow, and often my past comes back to me like the sound of a lyre on which the master runs through every tone, blending discord and harmony in obedience to a hidden plan...”

Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion* (1799)

Another Day

“But what I now found giving some flavor to the insipid fare of daily life was the well-proportioned faces and figures that compassionate Nature still sends, here and there, like stars into our darkness (...)”

Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion* (1799)

Unfelt Unseen – Desolate Shores

Fleeing, eyes shut, I feel it contemplate
with the fierceness of a remorseful blight
my void soul. Flee – but where? And what wild night
can be tossed, tatters, on this crushing hate?

Stéphane Mallarmé, from *L'Azur*

Unfelt Unseen – Streams

Did I love a dream?
My doubt, hoard of darkness, ends in a whole stream of subtle branches...

Stéphane Mallarmé, from *L'Après-midi d'un faune*

Absence, Memory, Darkness

I had a dream, which was not all a dream
The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless earth;
Morn came and went – and came, and brought no day,
And men forgot their passions in the dread
Of this their desolation; (...)

George Gordon Lord Byron, *Darkness*, July 1816

This piece was commissioned by an anonymous donor via the University of
Birmingham Circles of Influence campaign.

Sie Liebten Sich Beide

They loved each other, but neither
Would admit to the other they could:
As enemies, they saw each other,
And almost died of their love (...)

Christian Johann Heinrich Heine, 1827

Mon Rêve familier

By Life. Her glance? A statue's glance. And for
Her voice, it sings – distant and mellow, mild –
The music of dear voices heard no more.

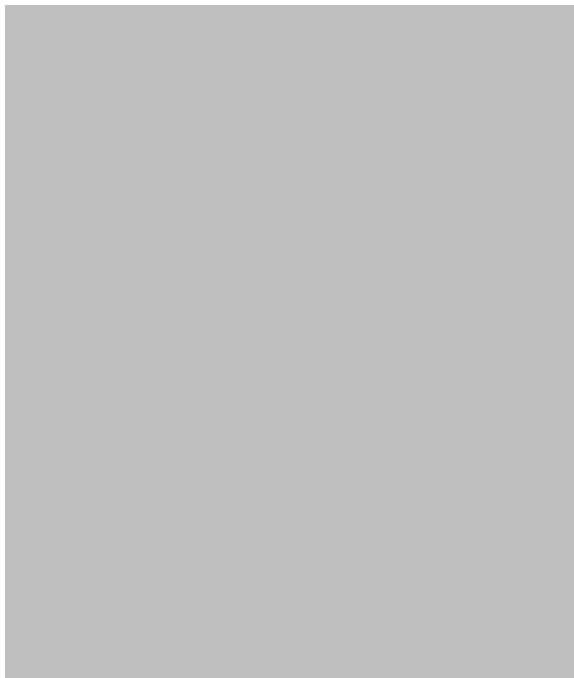
Paul Verlaine, *Mon Rêve familier (Poèmes saturniens)*, 1866

APPENDIX 2: POEMS AND ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

Sie Liebten Sich Beide

Sie liebten sich beide, doch keiner
Wollt es dem andern gestehn;
Sie sahen sich an so feindlich,
Und wollten vor Liebe vergehn.

Sie trennten sich endlich und sahn sich
Nur noch zuweilen im Traum;
Sie waren längst gestorben,
Und wußten es selber kaum.



Translated by A. S. Kline

English translation taken for website poetry in translation:

www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/German/Heine.htm#_Toc277059655 [Accessed

11 November 2014]

Mon Rêve familier

Je fais souvent ce rêve étrange et pénétrant
D'une femme inconnue, et que j'aime, et qui m'aime
Et qui n'est, chaque fois, ni tout à fait la même
Ni tout à fait une autre, et m'aime et me comprend.

Car elle me comprend, et mon cœur, transparent
Pour elle seule, hélas! Cesse d'être un problème
Pour elle seule, et les moiteurs de mon front blême,
Elle seule les sait rafraîchir, en pleurant.

Est-elle brune, blonde ou rousse? – Je l'ignore.
Son nom? Je me souviens qu'il est doux et sonore
Comme ceux des aimés que la Vie exila.

Son regard est pareil au regard des statues,
Et, pour sa voix, lointaine, et calme, et grave, elle a
L'inflexion des voix chères qui se sont tues.



Translated by Norman R. Shapiro (one hundred and one poems by Paul Verlaine)

APPENDIX 3: LIST OF PERFORMANCES

Reverie

Waves, Birmingham, November 2011.

Another Day

BEAST: Vanishing Point, Birmingham, May 2013.

Unfelt, Unseen: Desolate Shores

BEAST presents... Encounters, Birmingham, February 2013.

Unfelt, Unseen: Streams

BEASTiary, Birmingham, May 2014.

NYCEMF, New York City Electroacoustic Music Festival, New York, June 2015.

Absence, Memory, Darkness

BEAST at 30, Birmingham, December 2012.

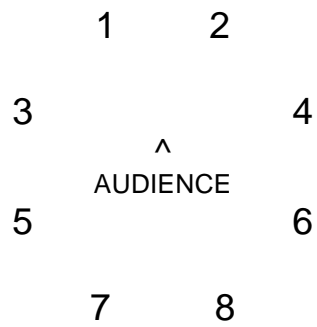
RedSonic Festival, London, April 2013.

Concert portrait & carte blanche Jonty Harrison, Musiques & Reserches, Brussels, June 2013.

Mon Rêve familial

BEAST@CBSO Centre: pioneers of sound, Birmingham, February 2014.

APPENDIX 4: SPEAKER/CHANNEL ARRANGEMENT FOR 8-CHANNEL WORKS



The “BEAST 8” 8-channel configuration. Both 8-channel compositions submitted in this portfolio were composed with this type of configuration.

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