

**ON DIALOGUES BETWEEN SOUND AND
PERFORMANCE PHYSICALITY**

*Compositional Experimentation, Embodiment,
and Placement of the Self*

Bofan Ma

PhD 2021

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**ON DIALOGUES BETWEEN SOUND AND
PERFORMANCE PHYSICALITY**

*Compositional Experimentation, Embodiment,
and Placement of the Self*

Bofan Ma

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
of Royal Northern College of Music and Manchester
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Portfolio Contents

i. Original compositions

offset ii – Nocturne !@#\$\$% (2017)

for accordion, score objects, and spatialised amplification/electronics

Complete set of scores (templates)	Score Set 1 (Stand A) Score Set 2 (Stand B) Score Set 3 (Stand C) Segments Page (Stand D)
---------------------------------------	--

offset iii – etude (2018)

for two to six performers

Open score template

offset iii (b) – etude for tuba (2018)

for tuba

Open score template

offset iv – backflash (2018)

for bass flute, contrabass clarinet, a page-turner, and audience members

Complete set of scores	Performers' Score Score 1 (Page-turner) Score 2 (Audience)
------------------------	--

offset v – set-off (2018-19)

for ensemble

Complete set of parts	Conductor, piccolo, oboe, bass clarinet, contrabassoon, brass (horn, trumpet, trombone), percussion (1 player), celesta, violin I, violin II, viola, violoncello, double bass
-----------------------	---

#enclosingenclosedenclosure (2019)

for flute

Text score

#insulative (2019)

for six performers and pre-recorded audio/fixed media

Text score

upfold, downfold, unfold (2020-21)

for a remote ensemble of more than three performers

Text score

#outtakes I (2020)

Video art/multimedia

#outtakes II (2020)

Video art/multimedia

#outtakes III (2021)

Video art/multimedia

ii. Recordings

offset ii – Nocturne !@#\$\$% 11'13"

Eldad Diamant – accordion/score objects
Bofan Ma – electronics

Recorded live at Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
12 December 2017
Produced by Ensemble+

offset iii – etude 06'36"

Hannah Boxall – voice
Simeon Evans – saxophone
William Graham – percussion
Aaron Breeze – piano

Recorded live at Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
12 March 2018
Produced by PRiSM

(#inlinewith-) offset iii (b) 07'19"

Jack Adler McKean – tuba
Bofan Ma – piano with video score
Steven Daverson and Isabel Benito Gutiérrez – video projection

Recorded live at Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
31 October 2019
Produced alongside The Incógnito Project

offset iv – backflash 19'41"

Jeremy Salter – bass flute
Jason Alder – contrabass clarinet
Flora Birkbeck – page-turner

Recorded live at Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
11 October 2018
Produced alongside The Incógnito Project

offset v – set-off 11'02"

RNCM New Ensemble
Mark Heron – conductor

Recorded live at Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
23 January 2019
Video footage provided by Sebastian Marshall and Freya Chambers

#enclosingenclosedenclosure 01'14"

Kathryn Williams – flute

Performance video extracted from *Coming Up for Air* – Kathryn Williams at *RNCM Remote* Livestream Series
8 June 2020
Produced by Kathryn Williams and Larry Goves

#insulative 30'07"

Vonnegut Collective

Recorded live at Victoria Baths, Manchester
3 July 2019
Produced alongside Kinetic Manchester

upfold, downfold, unfold 07'33"

CoMA Manchester

Performed/recorded in Spring 2021
Edited by Ellen Sargen
Produced alongside CoMA Manchester

#outtakes I 09'16"

Performed/recorded/edited in Spring 2020
Produced by PRiSM

#outtakes II 05'46"

Performed/recorded/edited in Summer 2020
Produced alongside The Incógnito Project

#outtakes III 07'57"

Performed/recorded/edited in Spring 2021
Produced alongside The Incógnito Project

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Abstract

This body of work consists of eleven original musical compositions of a varied format that encompasses live solo or chamber instrumental concert music performance, performance art, site-specific/responsive performance installation, digital production of audio-visual content, alongside an accompanying critical and reflective commentary. Created as part of my practice-led research concerning an entangled relationship between sound and performance physicality, this work connects to and extrapolates from an array of existing, heterogeneous theoretical and practical discourses on instrumental theatre, the involvement of the human body in sound-making, a normalised composer-performer hierarchy, technology, and an elusive interstitial territory between sound's multi-faceted articulations. This research, therefore, addresses issues surrounding compositional experimentation and embodiment, as well as sonic and human agency in music-making, drawing on features of autoethnography and a hybrid model of musical practice, in which the acts of composing, performing, devising, curating collectively afford an understanding of an emergent transnational creative identity.

The eleven compositions chronicle the manifestation of an expanding and expansive compositional vocabulary of my own. Through interrogating the cultural and historical significances associated with the musical score, and through foregrounding and recontextualising a range of peripheral and understated actions and objects found within a conventional instrumental performance practice, these compositions eventually outline a new compositional and artistic paradigm that is intrinsically shaped by my lived and living experience of being Chinese inside a Western society.

This research gives rise to a highly personal contribution to a growing area of scholarship that considers subjectivity, identity, and holistic ontological transformations as inherent facets of, and catalysts for an embodied practice of musical and compositional experimentation. It is an invitation for new ways of contextualising transnational encounters into the process of making music, thus normalising a multitude of resistances – especially those towards stereotyping and misrepresentation – as a mediating facilitator of compositional and artistic intentions.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1. Project outline

This commentary underpins a portfolio of eleven musical compositions created between 2017 and 2021. These compositions are framed within an overarching process of transformation between two interconnected series – *offset* and *#outtakes*. Drawing on features of instrumental theatre, they foreground normalised chamber interactions and the involvement of the human body in sound-making as music performance, either in a live setting or a pre-recorded technological format. Through making these pieces, I broadly examine, problematise, and put into a state of play an intricate entanglement between *sound* and *performance physicality*, whilst investigating a wider contextual understanding of this entanglement in relation to my own music-making.

I have chosen to document chronologically this holistic investigation through both the portfolio and this commentary, in order to detail the development of my artistic thinking and practice, alongside an expanding personal, artistic, and compositional vocabulary. This development comes as the result of my doctoral research, in which interrogation is made through practice, and through elements of autoethnography as I chart an evolving approach to compositional experimentation central to my original work.

1.2. Research aims

At the opening of the essay *I Have Something To Say, But I'm Not Saying It*, the artist-theorist Seth Kim-Cohen (2016) argues, “Music depends upon the before and after, the in-between, the how long” (p. 94). Extrapolated from comparing a declaration made by the composer John Cage (1973): “I have nothing to say and I am saying it” (as cited in Kim-Cohen, 2016, p. 95) with a parallel statement made by the playwright Samuel Beckett (1958): “I should hear, at every little pause, if it's the silence I say when I say that only the words break it” (as cited in Kim-Cohen, 2016, p.95), Kim-Cohen's argument delineates a triangulation between sound, silence, and what sound/silence articulates. And this articulation refers to

not only what is being heard, but an embodied process where the sonic information – be it projected or withheld – interacts with memory, experience, and contextual meaning. Through asking “if saying nothing is the same as remaining silent” (Kim-Cohen, 2016, p. 95), it then gives rise to a more ubiquitous – if not bolder – statement, “There is no singular source, no singular purpose, no singular plan. There is no singularity. Everything is articulated” (p. 113).

Similarly, this articulate and articulated nature of sound and silence is also what stimulates my interrogation of the sound-physicality entanglement. For me, an engaging musical performance often articulates a *dialogue* between sound and the means of making sound. This dialogue refers to a reciprocal relationship between the aural and the visual, and between sonic appearance and human/performative agency. It is, for me, the by-product of a holistic physicality through which sonic information is transmitted and understood, encompassing an entangled conversation between sound being made, sound being heard, sound-making action, object (both instrumental and extra-instrumental, and technological), and technology that is distanced from being an object.¹ It is conceived upon another hypothesis that, according to the artist-theorist Brandon LaBelle (2018), whilst sound itself is invisible, it affords an emergent interplay between the seen and the unseen, the visibility of subjectivity and an array of socio-political constructs, as well as the act of listening to “a poor acoustic whose dirtiness is reflective of the tussle that is public life” (p. 161).

Hence, for me, to decipher and to negotiate this elusive, multi-faceted aural-visual dialogue would be to harness it as a pivotal compositional parameter, to compositionally make visible the bodies, mechanics, strength, resistance packed within a musical/instrumental performance, and to engage this dialogue in a state of play wherein the embodied performative behaviours become a metaphor for my own social being and becoming. In short, I believe that it is to expand my

¹ For example, I get excited even when the performance of a music work is delivered solely through loudspeakers (e.g. in a showcase of electroacoustic compositions), knowing that they *perform* by moving the voice coil and the diaphragm attached in-and-out rapidly. Here I am by no means attempting to challenge or reappropriate the terms and connotations of electroacoustic or even acousmatic music. I am highly aware of the focus of such a practice being – to put it extremely bluntly – the quality/morphology of sound and not sound’s source or identity. My proposition lies mainly on the physicality intrinsic to the mechanical delivery of the sound, which does not intrude in any way an attentive listening experience these compositions were made to elicit.

vocabulary, to appreciate and facilitate my own agency within my music-making process, and to compare my own *saying nothing* and *remaining silent*.

In this sense, this commentary exists as a personal manifesto for a nebulous, diverse artistic practice that is afforded by a robust, continuing attempt to problematise and thus articulate the *in-between*. It documents how the sound-physicality entanglement leads to a broader aural-visual dialogue, which often acts for me as a catalyst for my engagement with other emergent mediums – technology, mundane objects, concert-hall rituals, my own resistance to appropriations and (mis-) representations. It therefore charts how these mediums help bridge the gap between myself, my artistic paradigm, my creative output, following my venture into previously unfamiliar territories such as theatre, open scores, multimedia. It also reveals where I posit my creative self; how my Chinese identity affords my holistic understanding of the context of, and the debates around (Western) experimental music and musical deconstruction; how I start to uncover and acknowledge a multi-layered history to my thinking and making. It is an honest yet rigorous personal reflection on the evolvment of my search for an embodied compositional practice of my own.

1.3. Background and research context

1.3.1. Beginnings

I was a member of the RNCM Experimental Electric Ensemble (EEE) when completing my master's degree in 2016. The ensemble was formed with a quest for alternative and collective ways to make and present sound. One of the main challenges we confronted at the time was to re-enact *Teatro Assente* – a twenty-three-minute audio track (from an album of the same title) made by two Japanese artists Taku Unami and Takahiro Kawaguchi (2011); and to deliver this carefully choreographed re-enactment under a live performance setting – behind a wall of screens and in a venue with all lights switched off.

It was the first time I stumbled upon the concept and making of sound theatre. The original Unami/Kawaguchi rendition bypasses any stylistic specification. In part it follows the idiom of *Musique Concrète*, where sounds captured in real life are presented, recontextualised and/or otherwise electronically

modified and prioritised as compositional materials. In the meantime, it depicts a vivid, yet surreal narrative and an almost visual imagery, where sounds of the *everyday* are decontextualised, juxtaposed, and eventually obfuscated.² The piece is therefore bound to the raw physicality of its own formation, or as the music critic Matthew Horne (2011) writes in his review of the album, “The room is filled by its contours, conjuring not just the view whence it was recorded, but how it felt, smelled” (para. 4).

The EEE’s re-enactment of the piece was hence built upon this discreet, highly organised sequence of sound whose origin was deliberately hidden. We employed a partially reversed compositional process, in which a number of pivotal sonic gestures within the source material were pinned down and re-sonified accordingly,³ incorporating spatialised amplifications of our instruments and extra-instrumental objects. These segments were then assembled to constitute several events. With added transitions in-between, the events gradually became scenes, before we managed to map out a complete performance trajectory wherein every bit of our physical movement nourishes the overall structure and the fidelity to the original (Figure 1.3-1)⁴.



Figure 1.3-1 Archive documentation of one of the EEE rehearsals (2016)

² Such as a person wandering inside an unlit warehouse, accidentally bumping into/kicking over random objects scattered around (e.g. a plastic bottle, a metal sheet, a button, a sack truck), whilst occasionally and abruptly playing an electric guitar, speaking random phrases into the microphone, or being suddenly interrupted by a metronome.

³ These include, to name a few, a sudden cluster of grumbles produced by a piano stool being dragged against a creaking floor and towards a microphone pointed directly at the floor; a string of choppy, granulated thump resembling an overhanging helicopter, which is made from a player tapping their fingers on the surface of a wooden desk that is attached with a contact microphone.

⁴ For example, creeping from one microphone position to another; the speed and volume of breathing; minding which part of the floor to step on (to avoid or to deliberately trigger its creaking).

This experience greatly boosted my curiosity towards problematising the interplay between what is seen and heard. Arguably the presentation of the EEE performance of *Teatro Assente* was akin to that of an electroacoustic concert, where the audience sits in a dark room surrounded solely by loudspeakers. However, I would like to think that it called for a more nuanced, if not quirky, mode of listening, given that the sounds delivered by the loudspeakers were, in fact, made live and through highly detailed chamber interactions.

In a sense, perhaps, an action's not being shown is not necessarily the same as its being *invisible*. I believe that a certain unexpected, transient moment of revelation of the *dry* (unamplified) signal during the performance of *Teatro Assente* (e.g. when a player creeps from one microphone position to another) helped communicate the involvement of the human body in sound-making. It was particularly when all the lights got switched back on, ensemble members took a bow, and the stage area – littered with instruments, props, cables and microphones – got exposed at the end of the performance would it quickly become more apparent to the audience that it was indeed real-time theatre. An imagined recreation of the unseen performance happened just now would prompt immediately when objects such as a crumpled-up piece of paper, a water bucket, a pile of pound coins left on one of the music stands come to display.

For me, sound's visibility here is simultaneously contributing to, and resulting from, the theatrical nature of the piece and the performance. Subjective memories and pre-existing experiences therefore facilitate, interact with, and contradict the holistic understanding of the sequence of events happening on stage. Hence, I began to wonder, if I too can somehow articulate this visibility of my sound; if I too can capture and embrace this elusive, emergent, subtle yet not superimposed manifestation of theatre in and through my work?

1.3.2. Layers and history

At the time I was also composing a piece for the *Hearing Art Seeing Sound* (HASS) festival in Armenia, collaborating with the Armenian/American artist Vahe Berberian. With the aim of each of us creating a new work that responds to the other's (Figure 1.3-2 and Figure 1.3-3), we exchanged extensively our artistic

ideals and struggles over a period of six months between 2015-16. One thing that has stood out to me till this day is Berberian's collocation of *layers* and *history*:

Art is more about decomposition rather than composition. It is about deconstruction rather than construction. It is about erasing rather than drawing. When you are working on a painting and you realize that there is something about it that does not please you, [...] take your brush, paint stick or pencil and go over it. Do it without hiding the fact that you are erasing it, because the traces left from whatever you are erasing are exactly what will give a sense of history to your work. The layers will create the history. (Berberian, 2013, para. 1)

It fascinates me how this notion of covering and burying, when read under a sonic and musical context, seems to parallel both Kim-Cohen's delineation of music's in-betweenness (2016) and LaBelle's metaphor of a poor acoustic (2018). It suggests a vertical, stratified manifestation of sound. A simple musical gesture is thus not only justified by its before and after, but a co-existence of its own surface and background. That said, to unravel this dichotomy is, for me, to think about how the repetitive process of erasing/revising on the manuscript (when a piece is being written) can be uncovered and disclosed through the performance of the piece. Perhaps it also means to identify my own musical equivalent of a brush, a paint stick, a pencil, and to feel confident in showing my process of using them.



Figure 1.3-2 *Maybe* (2016) - Vahe Berberian

What I also find compelling is the term *history* Berberian refers to. For me, it seems to connect to what the philosopher Jacques Derrida remarks when expressing his wary of the *metaphysical* concept of history:

I very *often* use the word “history” in order to reinscribe its force and in order to produce another concept or conceptual chain of “history”: in effect a “monumental, stratified, contradictory” history; a history that also implies a new logic of *repetition* and the *trace*, for it is difficult to see how there could be history without it. (Derrida, 2004, p. 50)

This *history*, therefore, implies to me an active and almost tangible interstice manifested within a chain of events. It could as well be in motion, advancing continuously whilst instigating newer events to be added back into the chain. It arguably shares a certain morphological characteristic of an *interstitial territory* commonly deciphered by urban scholars and ecologists, which is – to echo the sociologist Andrea Mubi Brighenti (2016) – “very much a phenomenon ‘on the ground’, a ‘happening’, a ‘combination’ or an ‘encounter’” (p. xviii) that is often surrounded by more institutionalised establishments, the “denial of recognition and the possibility of resistance” (p. xix).

For me, it could be what makes re-enacting *Teatro Assente* such a peculiar experience. The interstice lies in-between what the audience envisions what would be the EEE performance (after being exposed to the stage layout), what the EEE envisions what would be the original Unami/Kawaguchi rendition, what the audience of EEE performance might have experienced in the first place.

Analogously, if I were to speculate Berberian’s artwork in a similar way, the history to *Maybe* (Figure 1.3-2) is, I might imagine, also traced from where one starts looking at it. It would not seem insensible to me to wonder about the nationality of the half-visible, foot-bathing figure, and if the bucket was painted on top of all other layers: such wonderings are ingrained within the work itself.

Perhaps for Berberian, the layers and the interstices emerged amongst them synthetically denote his embracing the crude, his process of correcting mistakes, his complicated sense of belonging – an Armenian born in Beirut who migrated to the United States in escape of the Lebanese Civil War. They evince not only the history to a specific work, but also a self-aware disposition as to why tracing the history to the work matters this much.

For me, therefore, to disseminate the layers and the history to my music-making would be to somehow artistically integrate my communications with myself and with others in and through the creative process; to draw scenarios where stratified and contradictory information is projected and processed; to acknowledge the enigma of myself being a non-Westerner who confronts Western modes of thinking and practice on a daily basis.

1.3.3. Resistance and deconstruction

The genre-bending/meta-⁵ opera *Buenos Aires* (2014) composed by Simon Steen-Andersen to me seemingly addresses similar concerns. This scenic, theatrical work is set in-between a real-world recording studio and what the musicologist Sanne Krogh Groth (2016) describes as a “dystopian cyber-universe” (p. 699). Threading the five-scene piece together is a multitude of scrutiny around censorship, self-censorship, and resistance. From Joanna (the female singer main character) being asked by the recording engineer to intermingle her singing with frequently shouted swear words; her subsequently being put on trial due to using her real voice; her rehearsing with a group of cyborgs a rendition of Rossini’s *Mosè in Egitto*; the cyborg’s synthetic *speaking* via an electrolarynx and a keyboard; the real-time, far-reaching camera surveillance on stage – the resistance against a somewhat constructed sonic and visual narrative is evident throughout the piece.

What also strikes me is Steen-Andersen’s own appearance in the performance. He intervenes during the Rossini rehearsal, speaking to everyone on stage through the PA system with a clearly unsatisfied tone:

And don’t try to act. I want it to be real! [...] You are still acting, you know – I think we still need more resistance to make it 100% real what you’re doing. (Steen-Andersen, 2014, as cited in Groth, 2016, p. 699 & meier, 2015, 53:29-57:45)

This approximately five-minute passage, culminating in Steen-Andersen’s

⁵ Both terms have been used interchangeably to describe this work (by Steen-Andersen himself and by a number of musical critics). The work quite explicitly challenges the concept of *opera* and the legitimacy of communicating through singing. The opening scene even consists of a lengthy, humorous discussion between the main characters on the absurdity of an operatic singing voice, as well as the notion of *opera* as an art form.

intervention being shut off by the on-site producer over a phone call, for me, simultaneously emphasises and deconstructs his own role as the composer/creator. It momentarily gives the impression that there is an actor portraying him, hinting at the removal of the fourth wall,⁶ which somehow goes against the preconception that *Buenos Aires* is essentially an – albeit theatrical – piece of music created by a professional composer. It effectively normalises the existing hierarchy between the on- and off-stage, the process and production, the presentation and representation of the work. It sufficiently articulates the interdependence between the resistance and the real.

My reading of this is also more or less informed by the composer-theorist Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf's discourse on the act of deconstructive composition:

The aim of musical deconstruction is to bring to light contradictions, [...]. It is a matter of subverting one's own work [...]. The work of composing is itself – at least partially – directed against itself. The aesthetic purpose is to create a compositional “space in- between” [...], [where] something “unconstructable” comes into being, even if through construction. This “un” is an emergent product, it is supplementarity. (Mahnkopf, 2004, pp. 14-5)

Perhaps it is through enacting a live rehearsal of a live rehearsal on stage of a rearranged piece of music (of a certain historical significance) that the theatre (and the concept of theatre) in *Buenos Aires* emerges. Perhaps it is through comparing the emergent with the constructed that the alienation and deconstruction – both of the concept and of the work of composing – are articulated. Perhaps it is through articulating this alienation/deconstruction that the intimate relationship between Steen-Andersen himself and his work finally surfaces.

1.3.4. Experimentation and the expanded approach

Getting to know *Buenos Aires* provides me a gateway to some of the ongoing debates around experimental music – a term that has been explicated and redefined repeatedly since John Cage. Composers and theorists such as Michael Nyman, Benjamin Piekut, Jennie Gottschalk have all attempted in their writing

⁶ The fourth wall is a concept that suggests the boundary between actors and the audience. It is widely approached by theatre practitioners and in the realm of post-dramatic theatre and the domain of cinema and television production.

over the past decades to trace and elaborate an array of values, dilemmas, existing methodologies surrounding working this way. Specifically, Nyman (1999) proposes that the musical experimentalism is something binarily opposed to the *avant-garde*;⁷ Piekut (2011) examines the limits of Nyman’s opposition through the lens of five musical events happened in the 1964 New York City, and goes on to argue that the term embodies a much wider network, transcending any defining musical, stylistic, or genre features; Gottschalk takes the argument further, and opens her book *Experimental Music Since 1970* (2016) with: “It is, instead, a position – of openness, of inquiry, of uncertainty, of discovery” (p. 1). What stands out from all this, echoing also what the composer James Saunders (2009) tends to suggest, is that it is nearly impossible and meaningless to define this label (at least in a closed way). Composers and practitioners working in this field are encouraged to acknowledge this paradox,⁸ to locate a paradigm to which they can personally relate, and to foster accordingly a multi-faceted practice of their own.

The composer-vocalist Jennifer Walshe coined *The New Discipline* in 2016. In a written manifesto featured in that year’s Borealis festival, she calls for a new way of working that accentuates the bodily involvement in making and performing music,⁹ and a more versatile role of a composer that almost resembles an *auteur*:

The New Discipline is a way of working, both in terms of composing and preparing pieces for performance. It isn’t a style, though pieces may share similar aesthetic concerns. Composers

⁷ Here, according to Nyman (1999), the *avant-garde* refers especially to a group of early twenty-century – mostly European – composers (as opposed to those who follow an early, somewhat “unified Anglo-American experimental tradition” p. xvii), whose music could be described as being “conceived and executed along the well-trodden but sanctified path of the post-Renaissance tradition” (p. 1).

⁸ For instance, for Christopher Fox (2009), it implies “an approach to composing in which the composer attempts to create music to which s/he has an unprecedented relationship” (p. 26). For Michael Pisaro (2009), it “opens the entire process of creation to question and to investigation” (p. 76), meaning to consider critically “[...] the whole process by which the music is conceived, written, performed and heard [...] for lovingly creative innovation” (ibid.), and allowing music to arrive “[...] again and again at unexpected ways of sounding and of being” (ibid.). And for Luke Nickel (2017), it connects to a strong and inclusive community that “[...] celebrates an attitude of inquisition that allows for the dismantling of perceived hierarchies” (p. 7), through which experimentalism could potentially be located “in the acts of composition, transmission, preparation, performance, listening and dissemination” (p. 10).

⁹ Walshe acknowledges that works created with an emphasis on performance physicality, whilst being descended from what the composer Mauricio Kagel has established as *instrumental theatre* in the 1970s, has since been influenced by too much else for these works to be still labelled and generalised as such.

working in this way draw on dance, theatre, film, video, visual art, installation, literature, stand-up comedy. In the rehearsal room the composer functions as a director or choreographer, perhaps most completely as an auteur. [...] This is the discipline – the rigour of finding, learning and developing new compositional and performative tools.

[...] it is a *practice* more than anything else. And the concomitant: the New Discipline is located in the fact of composers being interested and willing to perform, to get their hands dirty, to do it themselves, do it immediately. (Walshe, 2016, paras. 3-4)

Walshe’s manifesto has since attracted critical responses from practitioners alike. David Helbich, Steven Takasugi, Edward Henderson (Bastard Assignments), Kara Feely and Travis Just (Object Collection), to name a few, have all discoursed how this *new* discipline may be relevant to their own work.¹⁰ In particular, Matthew Shlomowitz (2016) suggests that, in addition to composing for the body as Walshe advocates, the rigour lies also in emphasising and composing with the “broader, non-musical, context of music making” (para. 1). Marko Ciciliani (2017) subsequently outlines the notion of *music in the expanded field* from a similar standpoint. He delineates a compositional practice developed in recent years, in which musical ideas are expressed not only through sound, but with an expanded and expansive inter-media approach. It encompasses highly varied skill sets, which are – in most cases – acquired outside academia; often fragmented, heterogeneous, discursive references; a different parametrisation in which intertextuality, physicality, modes of listening/economy of attention, among others, are likely to replace the more conventional criteria used to decompose sound phenomena (ibid.)¹¹.

Hence, I believe it is of help to identify within my practice the prominence

¹⁰ Helbich (2016) advocates for a *self-performativity*, in regard to music’s conceptual nature and an active listening practice that transcends the thresholds of the duration of a musical piece. Takasugi (2016) calls for a normalisation of the *extra-musical*, whereby a piece of musical composition can indeed be theatrical, becoming *seen* instead of *watched*. Henderson (2016) discusses Bastard Assignments’ work in relation to the densely networked London experimental music scene, suggesting that their aesthetic concerns cannot be decoupled from the realities of their surroundings and economic circumstances. Feely (2016) and Just (2016) contextualise Object Collection’s practice into a broader questioning of *what is at stake*, both for themselves and for their audience, urging for a prioritisation of the value of making instead of gatekeeping a certain existing, seemingly outdated way of defining and understanding musical genres/practice.

¹¹ According to Ciciliani, this refers to the tradition – especially during the first few decades after World War II – of parametrising sound into abstract, interdependent features such as pitch, amplitude, duration, timbre.

of this thread of thinking. Admittedly, my work manifests around instrumental theatre and under the influence of certain elements from the so-called experimental music tradition. My investigation is, nonetheless, still driven largely by critical self-reflection and the transformation of my own creative voice. I tend to discover and problematise an aural-visual dialogue that surfaces when I scrutinise my own relationships with the score, the performing body, the format of musical performance, the use of technology and digital means of communication. The discovery is therefore made from a position of openness, with an expanding set of skills beyond what I had been trained for as a composer, through contextualising fragmented references and parametrising my creative tools, whilst disclosing my own resistance as I trace the history to the work I create.

1.4. Research questions

Aligning with the research context and objectives articulated thus far, my practice-led investigation revolves around the following four questions:

- 1) What is the aural-visual dialogue for me and how can I best approach it in my work?
- 2) What is the compositional *space in-between* for me and how might it facilitate my search for an embodied compositional practice?
- 3) How does the embodiment of myself impact the work I create – even when the work is not necessarily to be performed by myself?
- 4) How does my holistic interrogation of the aural-visual dialogue, alongside the emergent interstice, open up new possibilities for future creative practice?

1.5. Methodology: building a practice-led, (self-) collaborative research framework

I employed a hybrid methodology to address these questions, in which my own compositional, performative, and curatorial practice is afforded by features of autoethnographic research. It connects to a growing area of scholarship that considers artistic practice and the delineation of the creative process as primary research activities, drawing in and on a broad range of theoretical and practical

discourses that are concerned with the agencies of musical/compositional experimentation and a holistic subjective position-taking. In this sense, it foregrounds personal ontological transformations as the research means and process of data collection, by which – according to the anthropologist Heewon Chang (2008) – the collected autobiographical data is treated “with critical, analytical, and interpretive eyes to detect cultural undertones of what is recalled, observed, and told” (p. 49), and that “a cultural understanding of self and others directly and indirectly connected to self” (ibid.) could be gained as the result of a thorough and recontextualised self-examination.

That said, this research is essentially situated within an emergent *field of play*, in which my making of a sequence of compositional and artistic outputs is progressively informed by my continuing effort to speculate, decipher, and thus translate the generative and novel element of my work. And this field of play manifests upon – as concisely and collectively put by the artists/theorists Kathleen Coessens, Darla Crispin, and Anne Douglas (2009) – “the relationships and intersections between prior knowledge – artistic, cultural and scientific – cultural context and the individual and his capabilities” (p. 80), and “questions that go beyond the subjective but are experienced subjectively” (ibid.).

Hence, this research eventually revolves around the conception of a body of original musical work for live solo or chamber instrumental concert music performance, performance art, site-specific/responsive performance installation, and digital production of audio-visual content, incorporating a heterogeneous compositional method, collaborative context, and the subjective experiences of a flux of artistic, intercultural, and transnational encounters. It is also benefitted from my attending and/or organising live musical performances, conferences, new music festivals; co-founding a composer collective named *The Incógnito Project*; being part of the current operation of CoMA Manchester – a community-based new music ensemble, with whom I have been provided many opportunities to perform and present my own work.

Chapter 2 - Action, Reaction, and the Score: From *offset i* to *offset ii*

2.1. Introduction

The *offset* series consists of five interrelated projects, totalling five and a half pieces with varied instrumentation.¹² Discussed in this chapter is the making and development of *offset i* and *ii*, which is regarded holistically as the pilot study for all subsequent *offset* projects. It is where I start to map my interest in the sound-physicality entanglement onto a broader dialogue between my artistic intentions and decisions: allowing my ideas to determine my methodology, instead of compositionally describing my ideas using methods I have got used to. It is also where I begin to attribute the representation of my work to the performance of my work, to a certain extent normalising the gap between musical notation and the performative interpretation of notated music.

2.2. *offset i* – *Ballad %\$#@!* (2017-)

In 2017, I was invited by New York-based pipaist Chen Fan to collaborate on a piece to be presented in an event series lining up for Spring 2018. Over the course of making, however, I decided to bring the project to a halt, due to both its technical complexity and unfortunate cancellation of the events. Although the project has remained unfinished since, it still opened up many possible paths for me to get aboard later, effectively setting up the foundation for the rest of my investigation.

2.2.1. Theoretical and technical considerations

offset i is, therefore, the first project I undertook since formally starting my enquiry of the sound-physicality entanglement. Following on from my collaboration with the artist Vahe Berberian (Section 1.3.2), I wanted to explore

¹² *offset i* was, and remained to be, a half-finished piece to this day (Section 2.2). *offset iii*, on the other hand, include two self-contained pieces (Chapter 3).

how far I was able to translate his reading of layers and history into a musical context. How best could I compositionally enact the cycle between covering and burying through a live musical performance?

For me, this cycle also provided a pertinent analogy to the interplay between actions and stimuli – a notion widely acknowledged in the realm of physical theatre. It seems to echo what the actor-pedagogue Jacques Lecoq (2002) reiterates: “Reaction creates action” (p. 74), hinting also at a cyclic process identified by the director-theorist Jerzy Grotowski as “Stimulation – Impulse – Action – Contact” (Slowiak and Cuesta, 2018, p. 121). Hence, for me, to approach this interplay within the context of a musical performance would be to envisage a concert hall stage as merely a holistic enclosure, wherein all of the performer’s bodily interactions with the score and with the instrument are conceived as inherent components amidst the enactment of a musical work.

This realisation, therefore, led me to contemplate the function of a musical score from different perspectives. At the time, I was fascinated by a particular trend of new music that incorporates parametric notational systems to decouple a multi-layered bodily engagement in instrumental-playing and sound-making. Specifically, in Evan Johnson’s *Supplement* for solo bass clarinet (2004/07), a basic melodic line is often ornamented, and concentrically encrusted by an abundance of musical material and performance states that are required to be executed simultaneously (Figure 2.2-1).¹³

That said, in *Supplement*, as well as in much music that draws on saturated musical information, the compositional priority seems to be – by quoting what Johnson eloquently acknowledges in an interview with the musical critic/theorist Tim Rutherford-Johnson (2010) – to show “merely a set of instructions for producing sound”, to create “situations where there is an insuperable gap between what the performer sees, experiences, and projects and what the audience receives”, and “to shape [the gap] in productive and (for the performer) thought-

¹³ The composer’s own description of the piece is as follows:

“In concrete terms, the piece is a study in layered ornamentation, in concentric encrustations of material and of performative states that more often than not conspire to overwhelm and irretrievably distort that which is ornamented. There is too much material, too much reaction to and too much enthusiasm for that material; a basic melodic line is “supplemented” beyond recognition and beyond the capacity of a monophonic instrument to control it” (Johnson, 2004/07).

provoking ways” (para. entitled *What is musical material for you?*).

·18·

Figure 2.2-1 Evan Johnson: *Supplement* (2004/7, p. 18)
(Score excerpt reproduced by kind permission of the composer | ©Evan Johnson 2007)

Whilst I would also like to articulate a gap as such, I wondered at the time, if the performer’s spontaneous decision-making can be more openly exhibited to the spectators/members of the audience? For me, perhaps, a set of peculiarly and physically distributed musical scores – each representing an individual layer of material – would help make visible the stimuli to which the performer is answering, and thus disclose the mechanism by which the gap naturally manifests.

I also considered amplifying/preparing the instrument to be an effective way to establish further the interplay between sound and actions. Whilst the preparation interferes with the intrinsic, mechanical resonance of the instrument, microphones provide the flexibility of either reimbursing the potentially lost intensity of sound, or enhancing the sound’s fragile, destabilised quality, practically foregrounding the gap between what is played and heard.

2.2.2. Project overview

offset i, therefore, features a pipa that is amplified with an attached contact microphone and an additional condenser microphone placed at a specific location on stage (where the performer is bound to pass by regularly) (Figure 2.2-2). The

instrument is also prepared with a piece of cloth or cotton pad stuffed in-between its strings and soundboard.

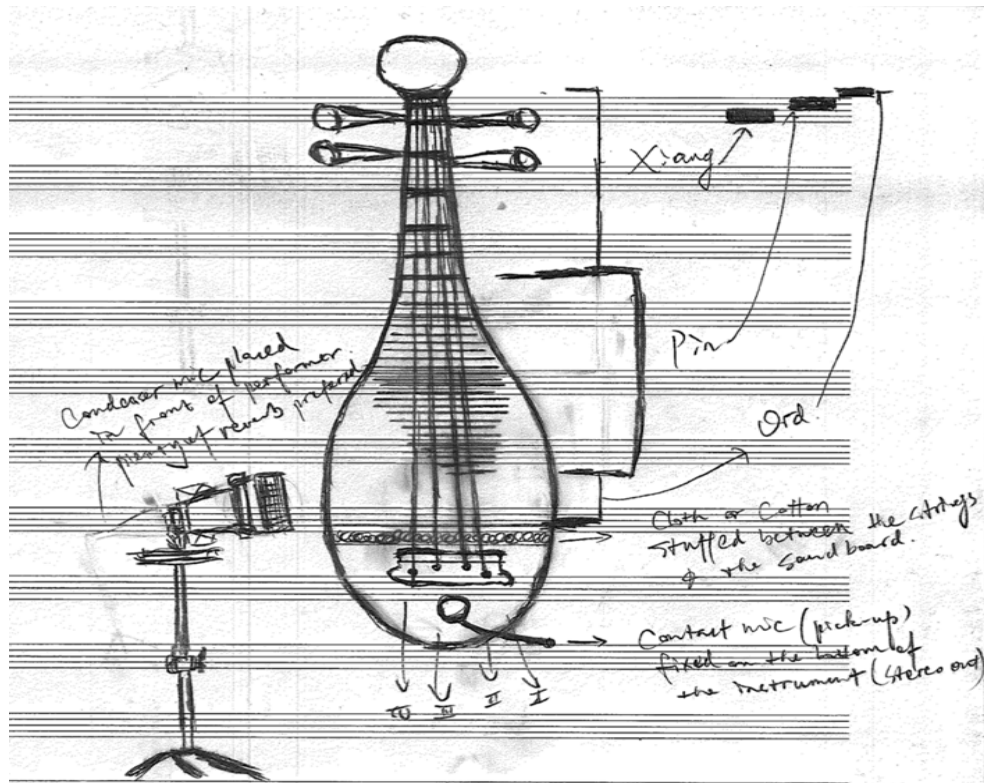


Figure 2.2-2 *offset i*: sketches of instrumental preparation and amplification

The fifteen-minute-long piece (timed by a stopwatch during performance) is structurally subdivided into three five-minute sections. It comprises fifteen independent layers of musical material, with each existing as a self-contained piece, or as a complete and unique line within the overarching structure. These lines emerge, evolve, and terminate over the communal timeframe, during which there can be as many as thirteen lines proceeding synchronously (Table 2.1).

The musical material for these layers (for the most part conventionally notated), are distributed according to strict proportional sequences of repetitions, modulations, and/or variations towards a pre-determined direction. Most of the sequences also come with a number of key entries/milestones, indicating either a significant change in the material in-repeat, or the introduction of a new variation (Table 2.2 and Table 2.3), all of which are to be played out across the fifteen-minute timespan. Throughout the performance, any of the (active) layers could be played in-between two key entries, and multiple layers can be willingly but not necessarily played altogether if possible.

Table 2.1 *offset i*: a preliminary timeline

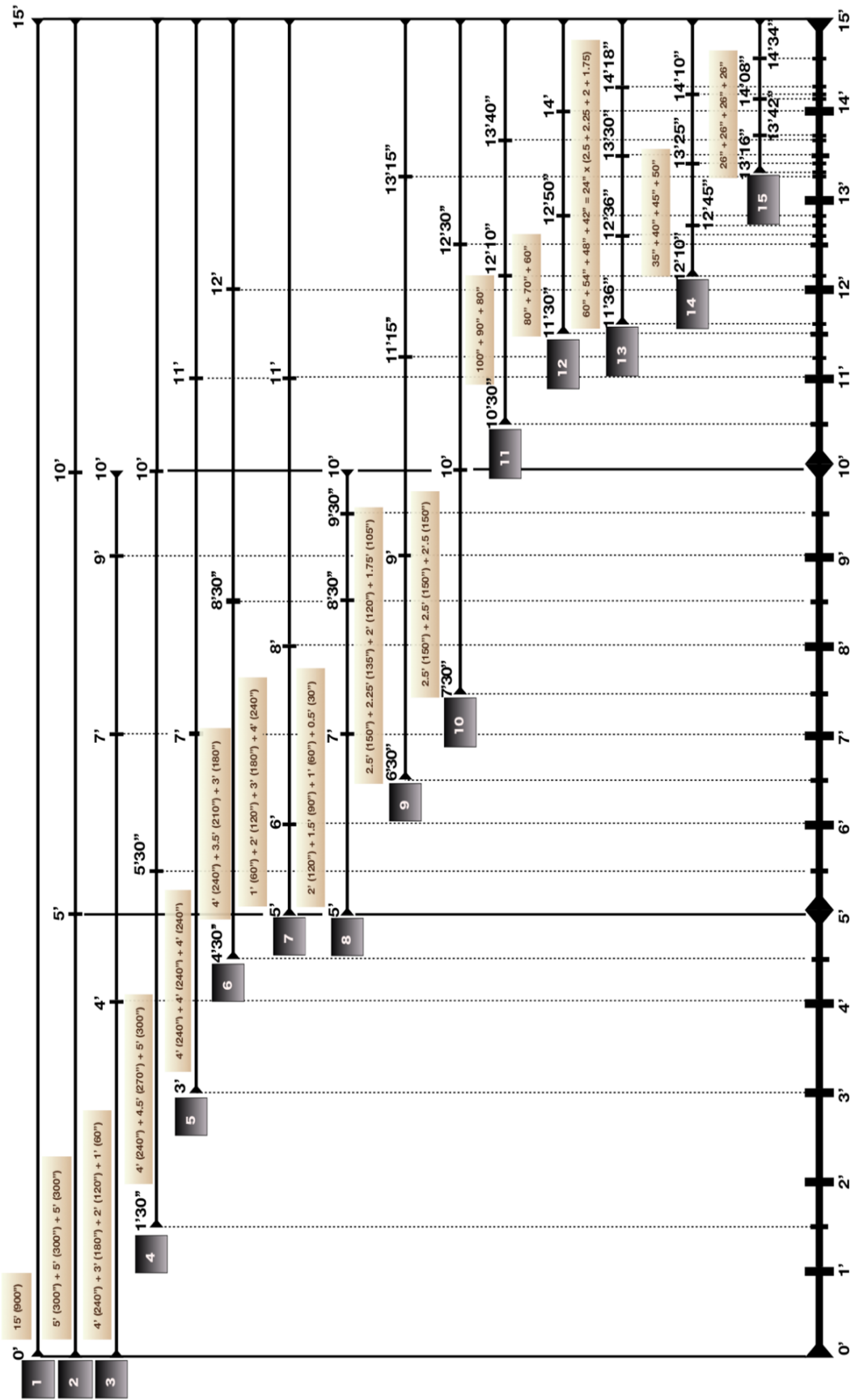
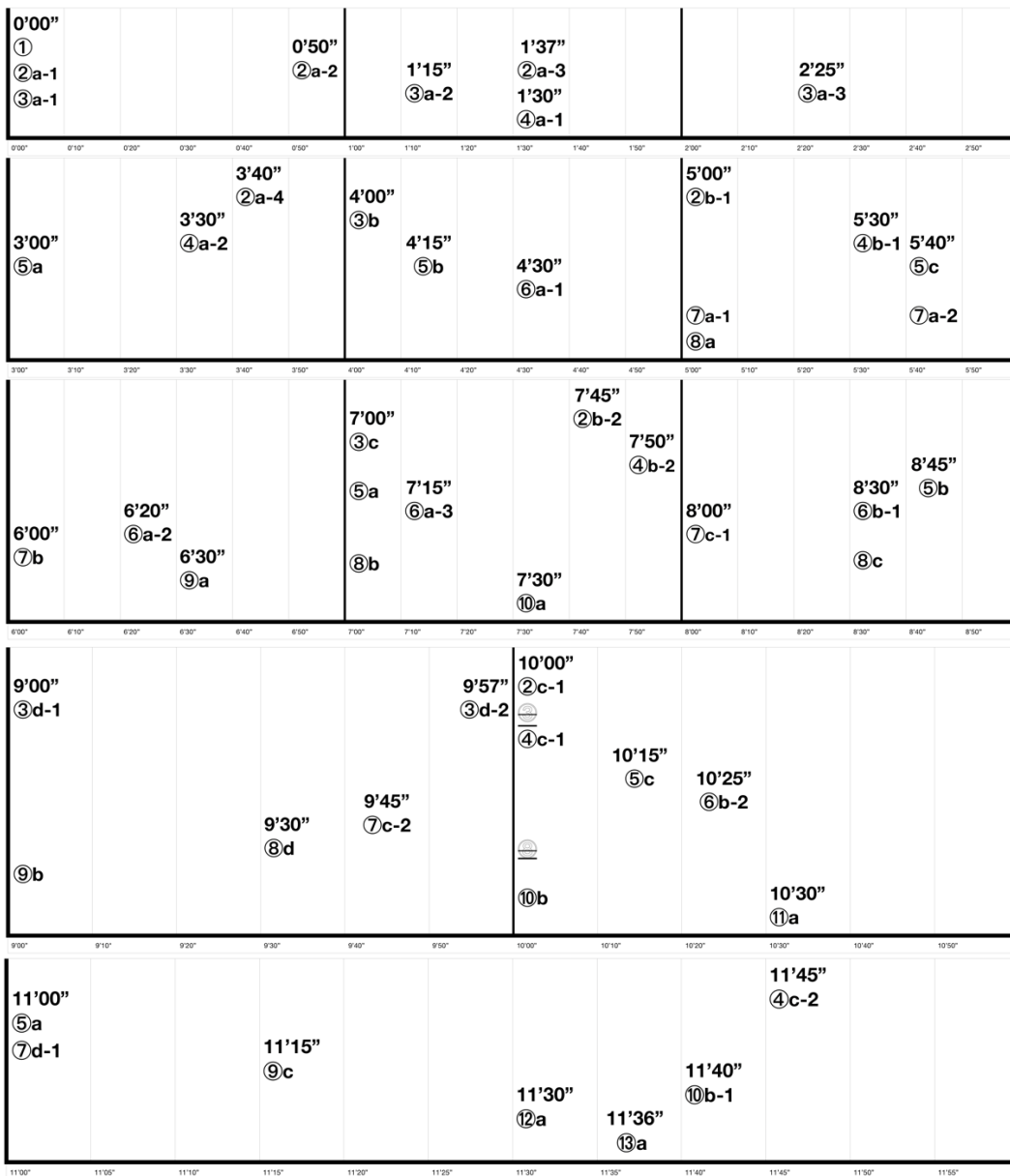


Table 2.2 *offset i*: preliminary mapping of the inter-layer connections; calculations for the duration of each layer; and the timings for introducing new variations on each layer

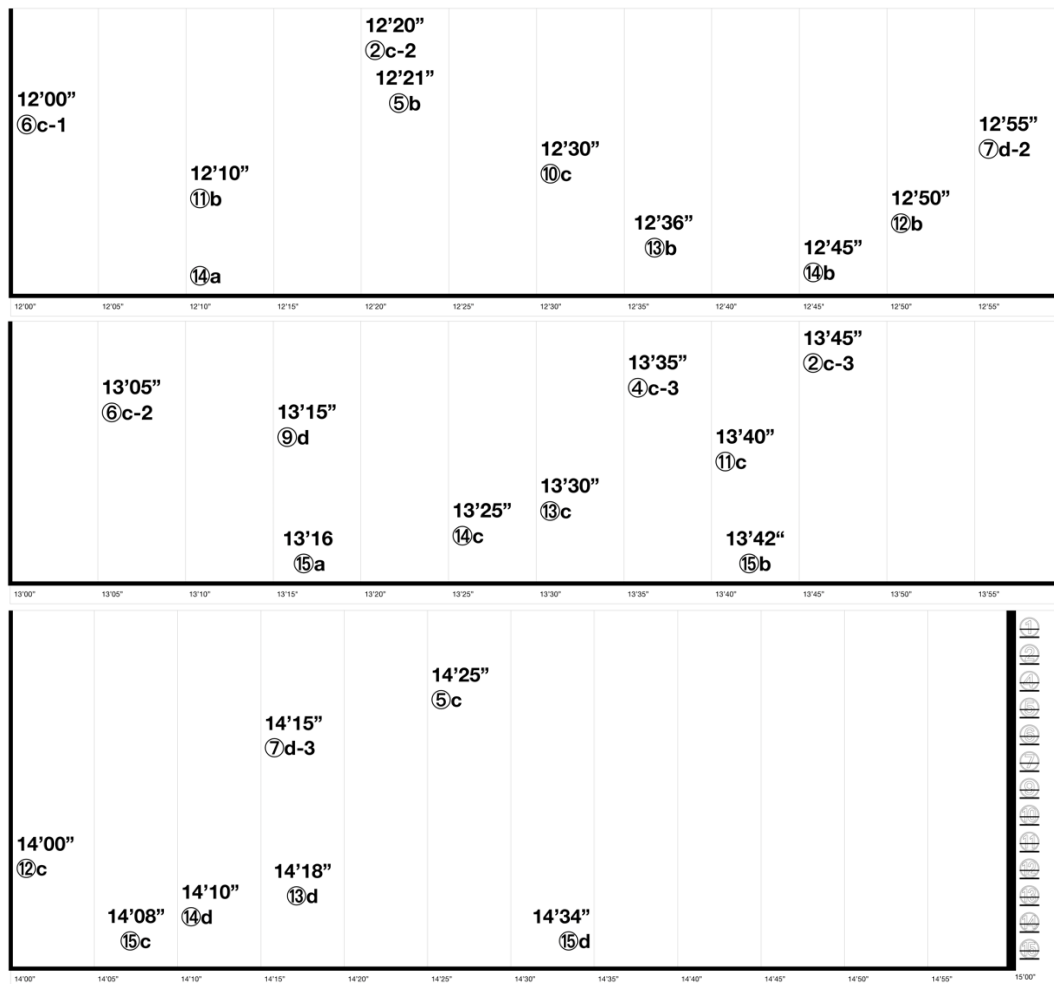
Layers ①②③④⑤⑥⑦⑧⑨⑩⑪⑫⑬⑭⑮		Sections
Layers compared by structural shapes	Layers compared by proportional/structural similarities <i>(summarised to assist with distributing musical materials to each layer during the compositional process)</i>	I 0'00"- 4'59" II 5'00"- 9'59" III 10'00"-15'00"
Non-subdivided ① 15' (900'')	In complete symmetry ③ 0'00'' - 10'00'' (4: 3: 2: 1) ⑦ 5'00'' - 15'00'' (1: 2: 3: 4)	Sections compared by general complexity Section I < Section II < Section III
Evenly proportioned (1: 1: 1) ② 300'' + 300'' + 300'' ⑤ 240'' + 240'' + 240'' ⑩ 150'' + 150'' + 150'' ⑮ 26'' + 26'' + 26'' + 26''	Even ② 0'00'' - 15'00'' (1: 1: 1) ⑤ 3'00'' - 15'00'' (1: 1: 1) ⑩ 7'30'' - 15'00'' (1: 1: 1) Shortening ③ 0'00'' - 10'00'' (4: 3: 2: 1) ⑧ 5'00'' - 10'00'' (4: 3: 2: 1) ⑨ 6'30'' - 15'00'' (10: 9: 8: 7) ⑬ 11'36'' - 15'00'' (10: 9: 8: 7) ⑥ 4'30'' - 15'00'' (8: 7: 6) ⑫ 11'30'' - 15'00'' (8: 7: 6)	
Proportionally shortening ③ 240'' + 180'' + 120'' + 60'' (4: 3: 2: 1) ⑥ 240'' + 210'' + 180'' (8: 7: 6) ⑧ 120'' + 90'' + 60'' + 30'' (4: 3: 2: 1) ⑨ 150'' + 135'' + 120'' + 105'' (10: 9: 8: 7) ⑪ 100'' + 90'' + 80'' (10: 9: 8) ⑫ 80'' + 70'' + 60'' (8: 7: 6)	In retrograde ④ 1'30'' - 15'00'' (8: 9: 10) ⑪ 10'30'' - 15'00'' (10: 9: 8) ⑨ & ⑬ (10: 9: 8: 7) ⑭ 12'10'' - 15'00'' (7: 8: 9: 10)	Sections compared by material similarities Section I ≈ Section II ≠ Section III <i>New variations are introduced</i>

⑬ 60'' + 54'' + 48'' + 42'' (10: 9: 8: 7)		<i>on all active layers at the beginning of Section III</i>
Proportionally lengthening ④ 240'' + 270'' + 300'' (8: 9: 10) ⑦ 60'' + 120'' + 180'' + 240'' (1: 2: 3: 4) ⑭ 35'' + 40'' + 45'' + 50'' (7: 8: 9: 10)	Standalone ① 0'00'' - 15'00'' (1) ⑮ 13'16'' - 15'00'' (1: 1: 1: 1)	

Table 2.3 offset i: sequence of key entries ¹⁴



¹⁴ ①/②/③ = Layer numbers
 a-1/b-3/c-2 = Key entries (a/b/c/d – variation, 1/2/3/4 – modulated variation)
~~①~~/~~②~~/~~③~~ = Layer terminations



2.2.3. Notation

I started from laying out all of my materials on top of a comprehensive timeline and within an all-inclusive panorama (Figure 2.2-3), which greatly helped me assess an overall pacing of the piece. However, it is far from sufficient to facilitate the active performer-score interactions I had aimed for. I therefore broke it down to fifteen sub-scores (Figure 2.2-4 and Figure 2.2-5), with each representing an individual layer. These sub-scores are also accompanied by a performance itinerary (Table 2.3) that sequentially indexes key entries across all layers.

Hence, this edition prescribes the performer, being seated on a swivel chair whilst exposed to a laptop/TV screen (displaying the stopwatch and list of entries), to constantly move amongst an area encircled by fifteen music stands, on which the sub-scores are in display. For me, it – to a large extent – helps enact instrumental theatre and a more explicit disclosure of performance stimuli.

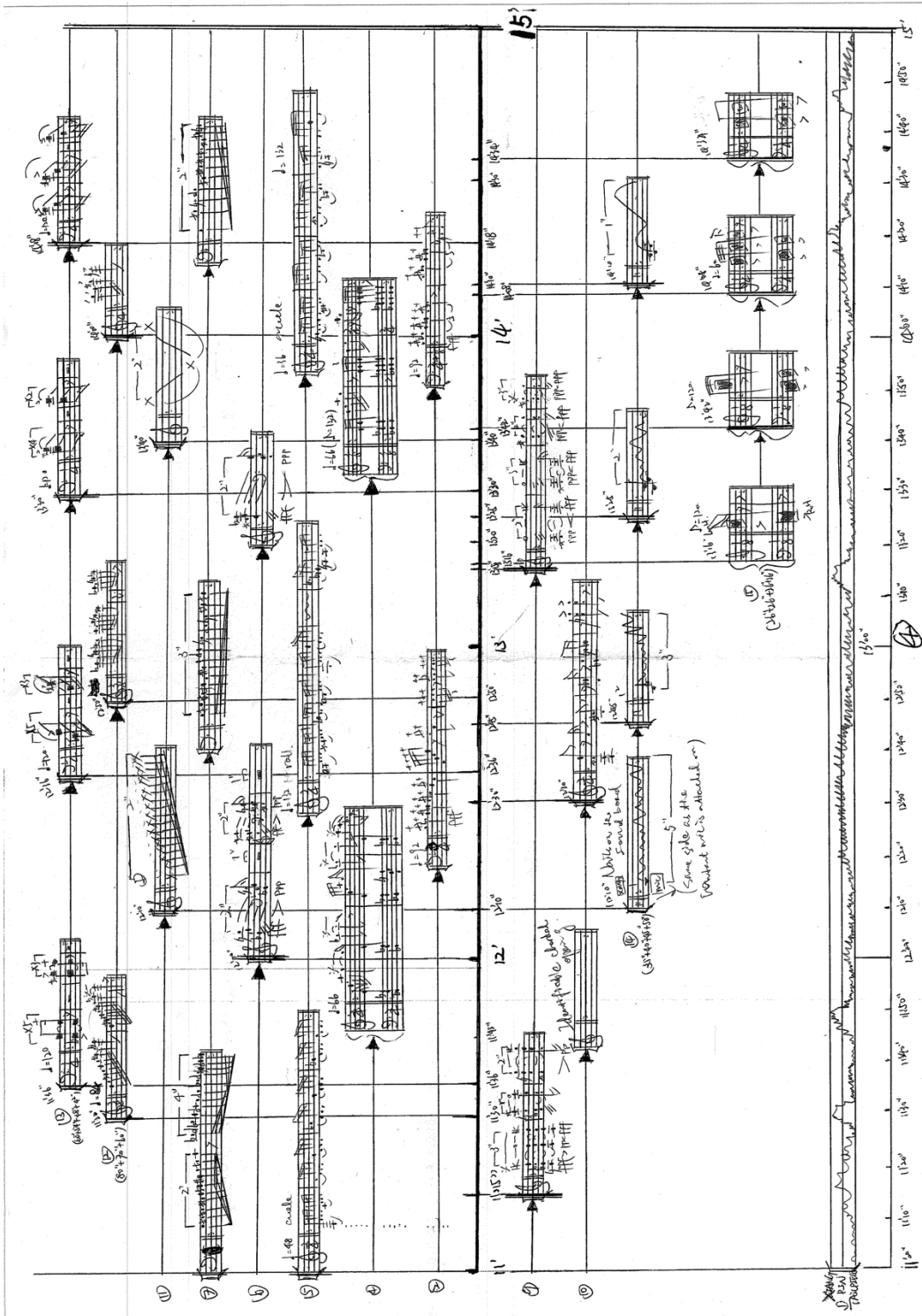


Figure 2.2-3 *offset i*: example of the initial all-inclusive panorama

However, it was at this point did I realise that this project had become too idealistically cumbersome. It struck me that I was constantly in-between pairs of contradictory ideals. I attempted to facilitate a mostly improvised instrumental performance through a precise, fixed notation mechanism and distribution of scores; I subconsciously juxtaposed spontaneous performative on-stage

movements with intricate actions of playing an instrument; I tended to draw forth unintended glitch through continuously polishing prescriptive performance guidelines. Perhaps what I had done was more to describe my aims rather than to enact them. Hence, I felt the need to discontinue *offset i* at this point: to trace what went wrong from the vantage point of a fresh yet still connected creative context. With this in mind, I moved on to *offset ii*.

④

Bofan Ma
马博凡
10.2017

01'30"
♩ = 66

④ a-1

≈03'30"

④ a-2

05'30"
(♩ = 66)

④ b-1

≈07'50"

④ b-2

The figure displays four musical sub-scores for layer ④, arranged vertically. Each sub-score is presented in a two-staff format (treble and bass clef).
 - Sub-score ④ a-1: Starts at 01'30" with a tempo of ♩ = 66. It features a piano (*p*) dynamic and changes in time signature from 2/4 to 3/4. It ends with a large black arrow pointing to the right.
 - Sub-score ④ a-2: Starts at approximately 03'30". It includes dynamics of piano (*p*), mezzo-forte (*mf*), and piano (*p*). It features a triplet of notes and ends with a large black arrow pointing to the right.
 - Sub-score ④ b-1: Starts at 05'30" with a tempo of ♩ = 66. It includes dynamics of piano (*p*), forte (*f*), and sfz (*sf*). It features a triplet of notes, a glissando (*gliss.*) marking, and ends with a large black arrow pointing to the right.
 - Sub-score ④ b-2: Starts at approximately 07'50". It includes dynamics of piano (*p*), piano-forte (*p < f*), forte (*f*), and piano (*p*). It features a triplet of notes, a glissando (*gliss.*) marking, and ends with a large black arrow pointing to the right.


Figure 2.2-4 *offset i*: the sub-scores (layer ④)

03'00"
 07'00"
 11'00"

⑤

Bofan Ma
 马博凡
 10.2017

♩ = 48 *accele.*


⑤ a 

**keep improvising with similar etude-like patterns
 dynamics ad lib.** ➔

≈04'15"
 ≈08'45"
 ≈12'21"

⑤

♩ = 132 *rall.*


⑤ b 

(keep improvising with similar etude-like patterns)
 (dynamics ad lib.) ➔

≈05'40"
 ≈10'15"
 ≈14'25"

⑤

♩ = 36 *accele.*

⑤ c 

06'59"
 10'59"
 15'00"

➔

(keep improvising with similar etude-like patterns)
 (dynamics ad lib.) ♩ = 132

X3

Figure 2.2-5 *offset i*: the sub-scores (layer ⑤)

2.3. *offset ii – Nocturne !@#\$\$% (2017)*

Whilst struggling to mitigate the issue of practicality in *offset i*, I was kindly asked to compose a piece for one of the RNCM's *Decontamination* events in December 2017.¹⁵ That specific event was – according to its curator Larry Goves (2017) –

¹⁵ *Decontamination* was a triannual new music concert series, curated by Larry Goves. The series discontinued in 2019.

themed as *New, Re-imagined, and Modified Instruments*, hinting at “the possibilities of a creative and performance practice untethered from restrictive instrumental tradition” (para. 1). Appearing on the same programme were works by, to name a few, Nam June Paik, Kelly Jayne Jones, Claudia Molitor, David Pocknee, and Eleanor Cully.

2.3.1. The transcription process

Eventually manifested as a piece for accordion, objects, and spatialised amplification/electronics, *offset ii* was created by means of a chain of transcriptions originated from *offset i* (Table 2.4). These transcriptions were mostly never actualised, but only conceptualised to help me identify and hence disengage elements that overcomplicated *offset i*. Not only did I wish to slim the pipa piece down, but I also wanted to envision how far an idea could evolve progressively, whilst taking into account different possibilities and restrictions a particular circumstance (e.g. the *Decontamination* event) might bring forth.

Table 2.4 *offset i* to *offset ii*: the transformation

	<i>offset i</i> – <i>Ballade %\$#@!</i>	(In process)		<i>offset ii</i> – <i>Nocturne !@#\$\$</i>
Instrumentation	Solo pipa	Solo guitar	Guitar duo	Solo accordion
Score presentation	Fifteen individual parts on fifteen music stands respectively	Fifteen individual parts on fifteen music stands respectively	Seven individual parts on seven music stands respectively for each performer	Three ‘Score Sets’, in addition to a Segments page on four music stands (numbered as A, B, C, D respectively)
Objects	None (apart from instrumental preparation)	None (apart from instrumental preparation)	None (apart from instrumental preparation on guitar 1)	Assorted objects (fixed on the bottom edge of certain pages in Score Set 1 and 2), no instrumental preparation
Amplification (instrumental)	Contact mic on pipa (muffled strings)	Contact mic on guitar (muffled strings)	Contact mic on guitar 1 (muffled strings), guitar 2 unprepared and unamplified	Contact mic on accordion plus a dynamic mic next to one of the music stands

Amplification (non-instrumental)	None	None	None	Three condenser mics paired with remaining three music stands
Additional electronics	None	None	None	Premixed sine tones
Speaker setup	Stereo PA (facing audience)	Stereo PA (facing audience)	Stereo PA (facing audience)	Stereo PA (facing audience), plus five monitors scattered within and surround the auditorium

Practical concerns were therefore what drove the entire transformation process. Replacing the pipa with a guitar was the first step taken.¹⁶ It is an instrument I could easily access without having to work remotely with a performer. That said, I suddenly realised how little a consideration I had given towards the performer in regard to sound production. My focus was mostly fixed on the image of one person playing against fifteen scores, instead of seeing it as merely an auxiliary act amidst the delivery of a physically feasible instrumental performance.

I wondered – what if I added a second guitar, halved the number of layers/music stands (seven instead of fifteen) allocated to each performer, whilst preparing/amplifying only one of their instruments? I would also make the two sets of layers largely identical to each other, so that the dialogue between acoustic and processed sound can effectively come into play.¹⁷ Supposedly the two performers played an identical phrase, whilst their performance gestures (e.g. movement of the hands) seemed to be the same, the resultant sounds would, contrarily, diverge. Analogously, the acoustic guitar player could manually muffle their instrument at times,¹⁸ on the purpose of producing an un-pitched, percussive

¹⁶ The two instruments share a similar range. Pipa is informally and regularly referred to as the ‘Chinese guitar’ (or ‘Chinese lute’, depending on context). Most of the playing techniques are interchangeable, or adaptable to a certain extent (for players of each instrument), despite the differences in the number of strings, tuning, and performance postures.

¹⁷ Specifically, whilst the sound of the acoustic guitar remains unprocessed and therefore unaltered, the amplified guitar would mainly project an un-pitched, percussive, low frequency noise. This is due to its strings being muffled, and the contact microphone being able to only pick up certain vibrations from the sound board and the surface of the instrument.

¹⁸ For example, the performer could stop/alter the vibration of the string(s) using their hand(s) or objects (e.g. a piece of cloth, paper, plastic card).

noise, and hence echoing the sound made by their amplified duo partner.

Whilst thinking this way greatly helped me regain a certain focus, I felt that this transformation could have gone much further – if I were to completely neglect *offset i*'s original instrumentation and structural organisations. There must be something more fundamental to be changed, in addition to the means of sound production and performative delivery.

I then distinguished the following features that underpinned *offset i*'s formation:

- 1) a solo instrumentalist;
- 2) a multi-(music)-stand stage setting;
- 3) a swivel chair;
- 4) a scoring system that entails any *cross-stand* movement;¹⁹
- 5) an interplay between instrumental and electronically processed sound.

Accordingly, should both 2) and 3) be ascribed to the score presentation, the project is essentially a conversation between the score, the soloist, and the act of playing an instrument. Since the score is of such a significant role, I would imagine, it could also function as a *duo partner* of the soloist, who both sends and receives cues during and throughout a performance. These cues are likely to convey information such as when/how to turn a page, what sound to make, and which stand to travel to. It also opens up possibilities whereby the score itself becomes a re-imagined instrument: every page-turn bears the potential to sound distinctive. It would resemble a variety of white noise, especially when under amplifications and/or preparations to some extent. The solo instrument, on the other hand, could as well be something versatile enough to both blend in and contrast this holistic sonority.

2.3.2. The overall performance setting

Composed for amplified solo accordion, amplified/prepared score objects, and

¹⁹ A *cross-stand* movement refers to the action of travelling amongst different music stands (in order to read scores/sheet music displayed on them). Here it refers specifically to such travels made on a swivel chair.

live-rendered electronics, the final form of *offset ii* features three sets of scores (labelled as 1, 2, 3 respectively). Score Set 1 and 2 are printed on various kinds of paper (each of a different weight) and are bound conventionally on the long edge. Most of the pages within the two sets are prepared further, with assorted objects/materials (e.g. paper clips, tin foil, metal plates, bubble wrap) also attached along their bottom edges (Figure 2.3-1).

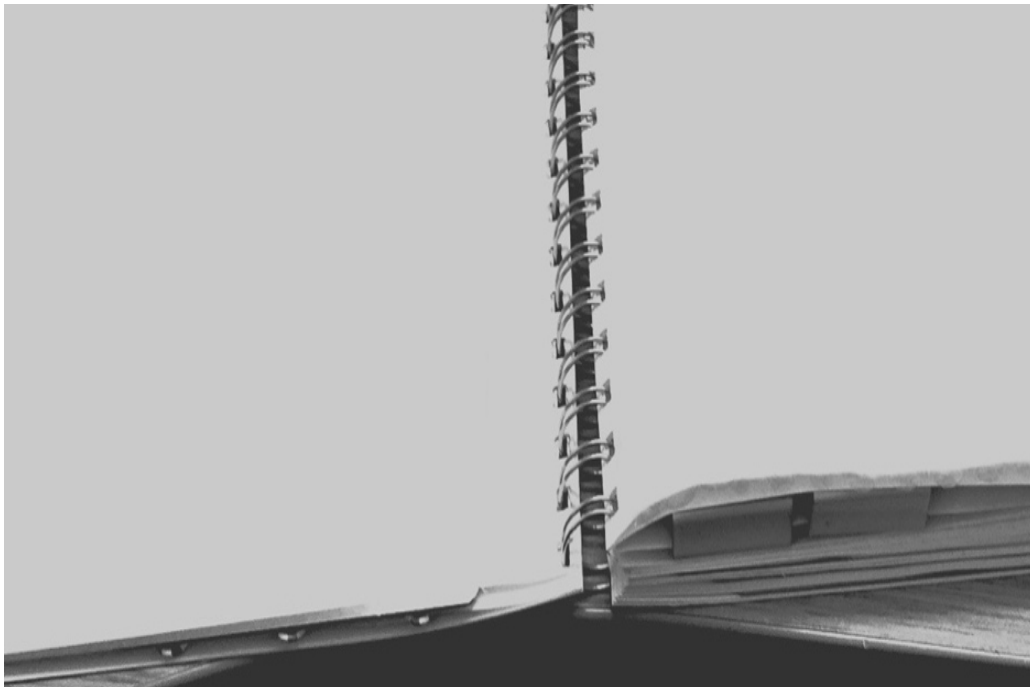


Figure 2.3-1 *offset ii*: score preparations

Score Set 3 is unbound, and put in a top-open, transparent punched pocket. Instead of being turned, every page here is to be pulled out, flipped, then left next to the pocket (or dropped, if not enough time).

These scores, plus an additional *Segments* page, are distributed respectively onto four (music) stands (labelled as A, B, C, D). These stands are ideally with a relatively rough surface area, optimising the friction against score objects placed on them. The performer moves with a swivel chair amongst a space encircled by the stands, responding to what the scores suggest. Also paired with these stands are four microphones of different makes (three condensers and one dynamic). The condensers are to pick up all sounds made when the scores are touched, and when the pages are turned/flipped. The dynamic, on the other hand, processes and transforms musical segments which the performer is cued to play into it. The accordion is amplified through a contact microphone. Fixed on the

instrument's bellow area, it is therefore able to capture any unpitched gesture, such as key clicks and bellow movements (Figure 2.3-2).

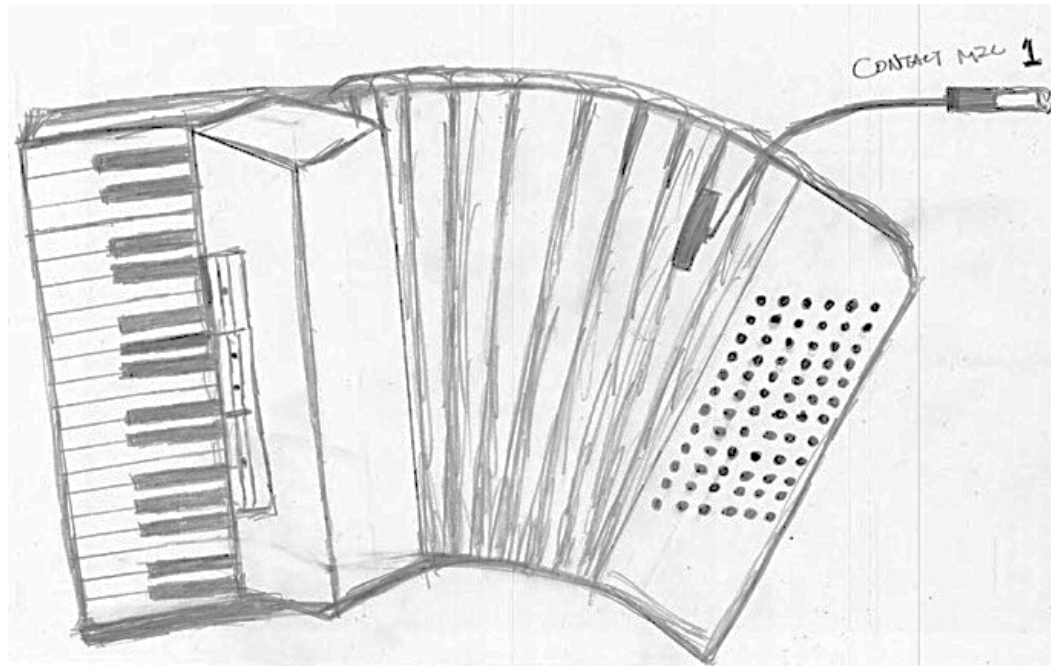


Figure 2.3-2 *offset ii*: accordion amplification

2.3.3. Electronics and audio mapping

The pre-mixed electronics primarily consists of complex layers of sine tones. The effect of vibrato caused by two close-by frequencies oscillating together blends in effectively with the general timbre of the accordion. Contrarily, different types of noise are also introduced gradually, in order to resonate with a variety of page-turn sound. These noises keep growing in intensity until the arrival of the final section, where they eventually engulf a sequence of hysterical improvisations the soloist carries out (Figure 2.3-8).

I decided to implement a seven-speaker setup (stereo PA and five monitor speakers, Figure 2.3-3) for the *Decontamination* performance, corresponding to the size/layout of the venue, and position of the audience. All of the microphone outputs and electronics are therefore mapped to remote and unpaired locations within and surround the auditorium.²⁰

²⁰ For instance, sound produced from Score Set 1 (or Stand A), comes out from Monitor 5 on the right behind the audience. All amplifications/electronics are rendered via Ableton Live throughout the performance.

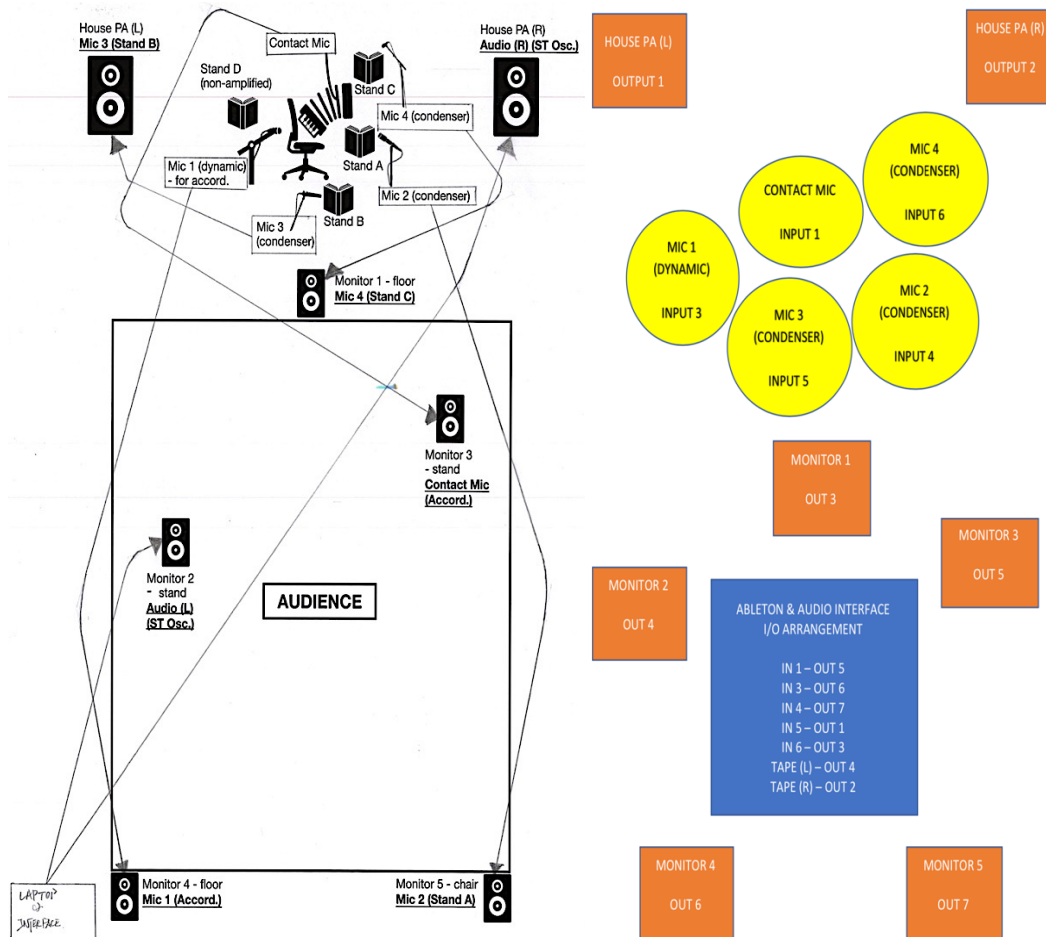


Figure 2.3-3 *offset ii*: stage setup and audio mapping

2.3.4. Notation

Following on from all of the above, *offset ii* is essentially enacted upon an interplay between everyday actions that are peripheral to a conventional instrumental performance practice (turning pages or shifting on/moving with a swivel chair), normalised instrumental actions that produce both instrumental and extra-instrumental sounds, as well as stylised electronic sounds. Hence, I wanted to design a concise, action-based notation mechanism, which can – as elaborated by the composer Juraj Kojš (2011) – “utilize images that suggest clear instructions at first sight and need no further explanation” (p. 67); frame both the beat and the second as tempo counting units; and “further tighten the relationship between score reading and music-making” (p. 68) through incorporating “body action graphics” (p. 67).

Drawing a preliminary timeline (akin to the earlier version of *offset i*, Figure 2.3-4), in this regard, helped me greatly to locate parameters I could later

work with. These include a general pacing, a collection of pivotal sonic/instrumental gestures (e.g. turning pages whilst opening/closing the accordion bellow, clicking random buttons on the instrument), and foreseeable shapes of pitched materials, among others.

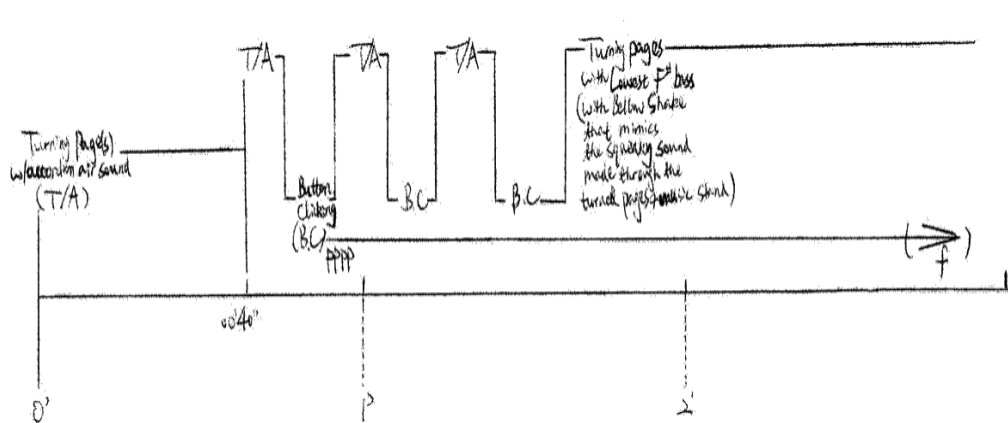


Figure 2.3-4 offset ii: preliminary timeline sketch

I then created symbols to graphically represent the three score sets, page-turn activities, relative states towards which the accordion bellow opens, and various instrumental techniques that produce unpitched sounds (Figure 2.3-5).

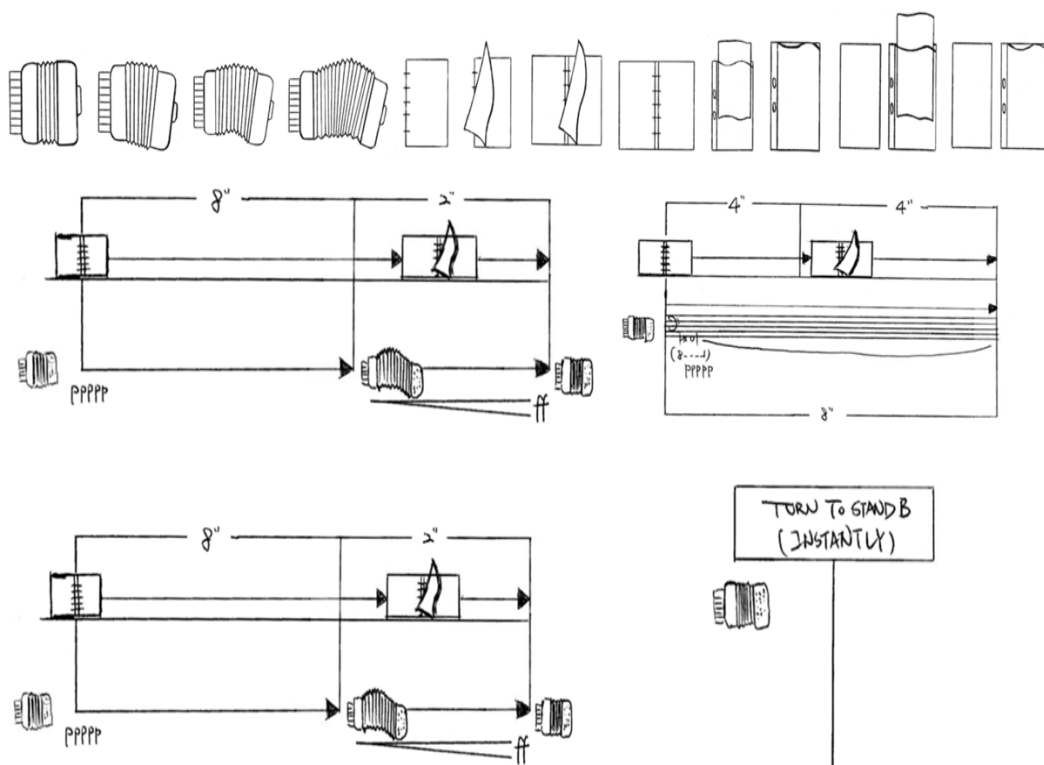


Figure 2.3-5 offset ii: symbol design (extent to which the accordion bellow opens, page turn/pull/flip in process and complete) and a trial notation system (manuscript)

Verbal directions (highlighted text boxes) are also used to convey actions not entirely representable over graphics (e.g. to travel between stands, to follow multiple scores at once, to buckle/unbuckle the shoulder strap). These elements were assembled afterwards to form an overarching notation system. The finalised scores are of a consistently hierarchical layout, therein every page is to display (from top to bottom): boxed text – timings – page-turn/pull/flip – accordion unpitched sound – bellow positions – accordion pitched sound – dynamics – electronics (Figure 2.3-6).

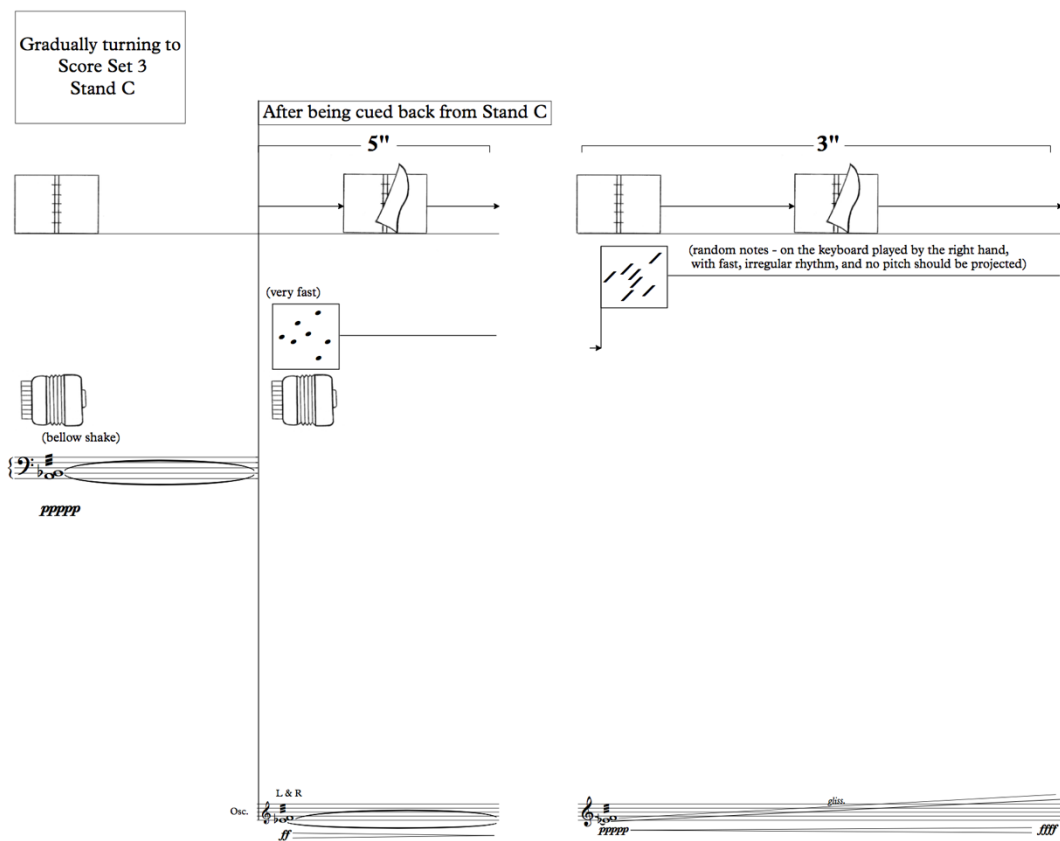


Figure 2.3-6 *offset ii*: excerpt (Score Set 1, pp. 16-17)

The performer is cued occasionally to play a certain passage into Mic 1 (Stand D). Under this circumstance, the corresponding passage is shown on both the score being looked at, and the *Segments* page. Guidelines regarding what to play *en route* are also provided (Figure 2.3-7). Unlike most of the other pages in Score Set 1, 2, 3, which are printed single-sided to facilitate page-turns, pages that enact such journeys should be adjoined with their previous ones. Specific page numbers for double-sided printing are thus also listed in the overall performance notes.

Gradually turning around to play into Mic 1
(pitch materials are also shown on Stand D)

Find the position in between
Stand A & B whilst being
cued back from Stand D,
so that both scores could
be reached by both hands, as
well as that the page turns
could be done simultaneously

(Score Set 2 Page 15)

5"

(Score Set 1)

(Score Set 2)

Figure 2.3-7 *offset ii*: excerpt (Score Set 1, pp. 44-45)

4"

(un-buckle the leather strap, if it was fastened earlier)

Free, loud, violent, hysterical improvisation, divided into an indeterminate number of segments - each containing a 3" - 25" session of playing instrument and a loud/swift page turn on either Stand A or B (or both). Rules regarding the improvisations and page turns are as follows:

1. All music materials should be as non-diatonic as possible;
2. Bellow movements ad lib.;
3. Turning around to play into Mic 1 should be done every now and then;
4. All page turns should be done within a second;
5. Remaining number of pages (on either set of score) is given;
6. The piece finishes instantly when both score sets have 0 pages remaining;
7. Noises are to be interrupted by every page-turning gesture.

12

(Score Set 1 Page 70)

(Score Set 2 Page 23)

3 - 25"

Noise

Figure 2.3-8 *offset ii*: excerpt (left – Score Set 3, p. 22 | right - Score Set 1, countdown of remaining pages in the final section)

2.4. Further thoughts and reflections

My enquiry of the aural-visual dialogue – through the making of *offset i* and *ii* – was framed largely within an attempt to animate instrumental theatre via incorporating peculiarly distributed musical scores and technical modifications of instrumental and extra-instrumental sounds.

On the other hand, these two projects also marked a significant shift in the way I compose music. I started to relate particularly to a sentiment expressed by the composer Aaron Cassidy (2002) that “virtually every stage of the compositional process, and indeed the compositions themselves and their performances, revolve around an effort to foreground a *practice* of experimentation – that is, a process that is driven by questions, rather than answers, hypotheses, rather than conclusions” (para. 2). That said, leaving *offset i* behind was a surprisingly easy decision to make. It was the first time I felt content to have an unfinished compositional project. Knowing that I was simply being too ambitious/idealistic effectively remedied my anxiety over those practical dilemmas I was not able to overcome at the time.

Similarly, the successful premiere of *offset ii* at the *Decontamination* event also encouraged me to uncover a more profound reasoning for how I deployed my materials – one that articulates the co-dependence between my subjective self and my musical preferences/compositional decisions. I therefore decided to continue to refine the same set of ideas in the following *offset* projects, allowing the significance of these materials to naturally emerge amidst my search for an embodied compositional practice of my own.

Chapter 3 - Openness, Ritual, the Mundane: Devising *offset iii*, *iv*, and *v*

3.1. *offset iii – etude* and *offset iii (b) – etude for tuba* (2018)

Not long before completing *offset ii* in late 2017, I met Professor Keeley Crockett – Professor in Computational Intelligence at Manchester Metropolitan University. We were introduced to each other through a project initiated by the RNCM Centre for Practice & Research in Science & Music (PRiSM),²¹ with an aim to create a new cross-disciplinary work to be premiered during British Science Week 2018.

3.1.1. *Silent Talker* and *iBorderCtrl*

Crockett’s research prioritises the development and practical applications of Artificial Intelligence (AI). She and her colleagues were in the middle of finalising a programme named *Silent Talker* when we first met. It is a camera-assisted Adaptive Psychological Profiling System that tracks and analyses visual non-verbal human behaviours (NVB) using AI algorithms. The system’s application is in two domains: lie detection and comprehension. It utilises artificial neural networks to determine one’s psychological states, through capturing and analysing patterns of subconscious, non-verbal micro-gestures exhibited from the face (Figure 3.1-1)²².

The system was later employed in the European Union’s Horizon 2020 (Grant: 700626) project *iBorderCtrl* (Figure 3.1-2), as a component to form an Automated Deception Detection System (ADDS) to be operational under a border-crossing scenario. ADDS serves to risk-assess an advanced traveller registration process. It gives an estimated level of deception via analysing a short, automated interview between the traveller and an avatar border guard (Figure

²¹ Entitled *8-cubed*, the project was centred around Science-Music collaborations. It brought together scientists from Manchester Metropolitan University and composers/musicians from RNCM. The project was set to explore how the two disciplines impact and interact with each other throughout the process of creating new music works.

²² Micro-gestures are very fine-grained NVB (e.g. one of the eyes opening slightly wider than it was a moment ago). They are gauged and therefore assessed over several facial feature channels for a specific time slot.

3.1-3). It then passes on a risk-score – both per-question and per-interview – to the *iBorderCtrl* integrated automated Risk-Based Analytics Tool (RBAT). All of the data collected, and risk estimated are subsequently fused, before the travellers are classified accordingly to facilitate the human border agent tasks.

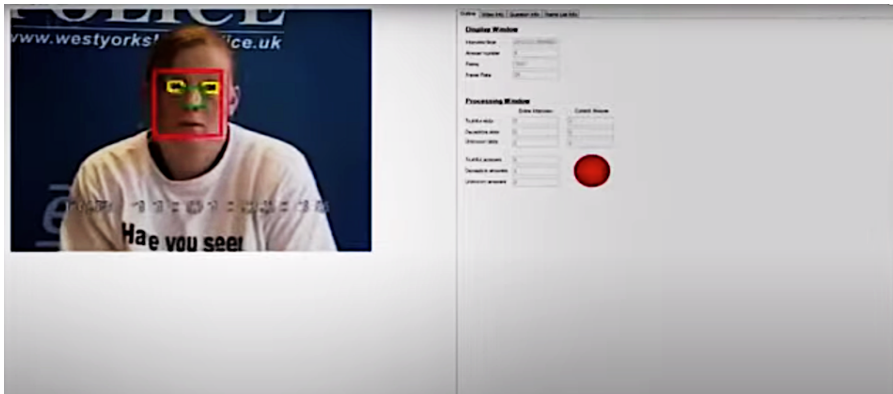


Figure 3.1-1 *Silent Talker* in operation
(Stuart, 2014, 43:04. Screenshot reproduced from Norman Sebek, 2016)

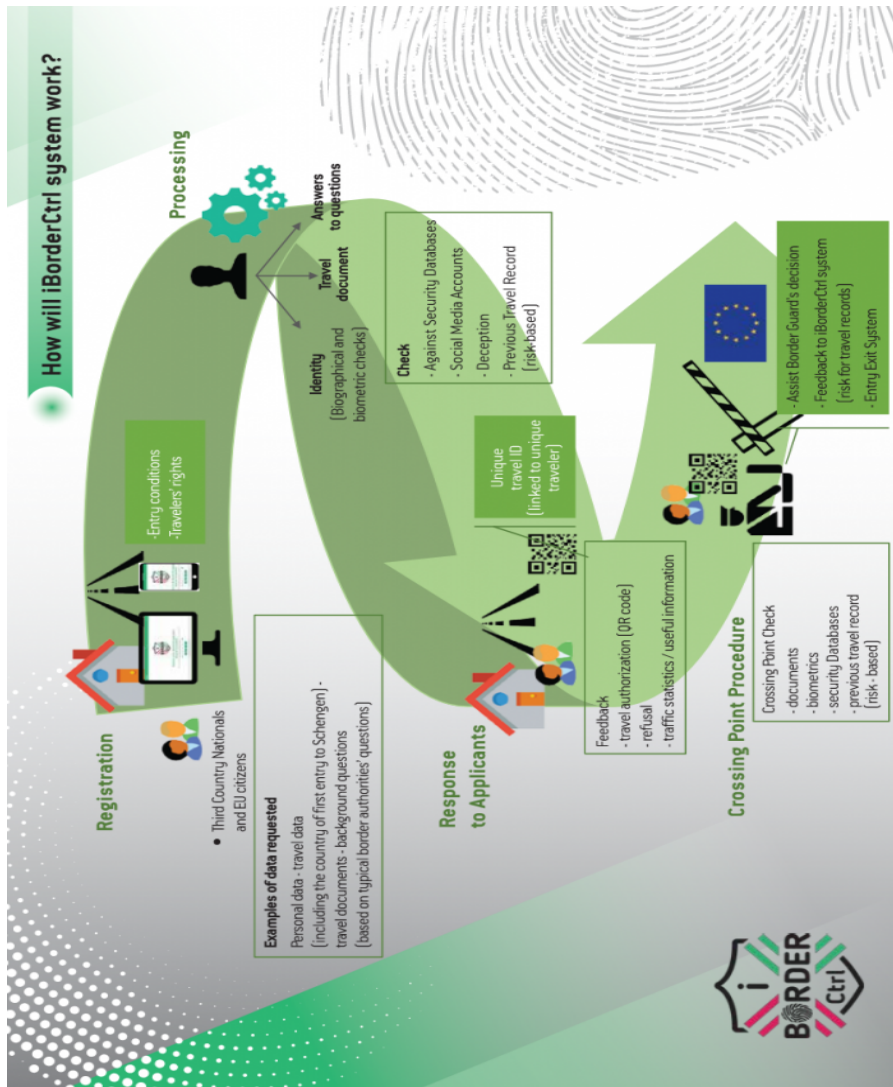


Figure 3.1-2 *iBorderCtrl*: system overview
(Reproduced by kind permission of Prof Keeley Crockett)



Figure 3.1-3 *iBoderCtrl*: Avatars displaying neutral, sceptical, and positive attitudes (Reproduced by kind permission of Prof Keeley Crockett)

3.1.2. The collaboration

Getting to know and understand Crockett’s research was crucial to our collaboration. I was intrigued by the vocabulary and logistics behind *Silent Talker*’s design and operation.²³ The nuance between the facial muscle movements examined and facial expressions in general (let alone emotions implied) was particularly interesting to me. Looking closely at how machines *see* and *perceive* an object – compared to how I see things with my own eyes – made me wonder how much more information there is intrinsically packed within a single action of making sound.²⁴ That said, could a parallel be drawn between a live music performance and a border-crossing point? What are the musical equivalents of the verbal (behaviours) and the non-verbal, when a performance as such takes place (Table 3.1)? Are there peculiar things that often get overlooked simply because they do not hinder a conventional instrumental practice? I therefore wondered if I could somehow compositionally capture, disintegrate, and reconfigure such performance gestures, essentially mimicking *Silent Talker*’s operation within the context of a live musical performance.

²³ For example, it was an enriching experience to be showed how the fifteen frame-per-second camera system simultaneously tracks multiple facial features/muscles, matches the results with an ever-growing dataset, before identifying significant occurrences; and how this whole process differs from facial recognition technology (not discussed in detail here).

²⁴ This question has also seemed to me to connect to a growing area of research in Music Information Retrieval (MIR), which – to broadly generalise – often deals with a computational way of analysing digital audio data and helps consolidate the groundwork for applications such as music genre classification/recognition, music source separation, generative AI/algorithmic music generation, among others.

Table 3.1 *offset iii*: comparing a border-crossing scenario with a live music performance

The collaboration		
<i>On those easily neglected nuances between types of expression</i>		
• A border-crossing scenario	↔	• A live musical performance
• Verbal expressions: responses to questions	↔	• The aural: sound
• Non-verbal behaviours: micro-gestures exhibited from the face/body	↔	• The visual: physicality/ways of playing/sound-making
• Synthesised information: credibility of the verbal	↔	• <i>Music</i> : eventual delivery of the performance

It also resonated with what I had been exploring through *offset i* and *ii*. In hindsight, perhaps what made *offset ii* eventually work goes beyond the mere presence of a swivel chair, a multi-stand stage setting, and prepared score objects. When these elements get bizarrely gathered and therefore used within a confined space (the stage) and time (duration of a performance), they implicitly give rise to, as well as foreground the performer’s subconsciously exhibited NVBs/micro-gestures. The significance is not in those cross-stand movements *per se*. Instead, it is in the performer’s quirky appearance when trying not to be entangled by microphone cables whilst moving with a swivel chair; when trying to shake the accordion bellow whilst pulling a page out of a punched pocket; and when double checking whether the (accordion) shoulder strap is securely fastened whilst operating page-turns across two music stands at once.

3.1.3. Decoupled performance parameters/criteria

I subsequently composed *offset iii* in 2018. It consists of a pair of two pieces: one for two to six performers on any instrument/voice type, and one for solo tuba.


Both pieces feature four decoupled performance parameters/criteria:

- 1) *Faces* – performers’ facial expressions;
- 2) *Looks* – performers’ body gestures/general physical appearances;
- 3) *Dynamics* – how loud the instrumental playing/singing is intended to be;

4) *Distances* – the imagined distance between the stage and the audience.

Each of the four parameters can be approached with a number of options listed in the performance notes (Figure 3.1-4). For example, *Faces* are represented by a selection of emojis; whereas *Looks* and *Distances* are verbal descriptions, both incorporating a metaphoric and playful vocabulary. The performers are invited to reconfigure their own parts by randomly selecting and combining options under each and every parameter, before sticking them onto designated boxes shown above and below notated music material. Once the parts are assembled, everything in display is to be followed and executed as strictly as possible throughout the performance.

1. Faces - facial expressions to be imitated



2. Looks - general physical appearances

Super Chilled	Super Tense	Silent Screaming	Super Sassy
Super Cringe	Super Light	Super Heavy	Awkwardly Positioned
Knackered	Overwhelmingly Cold	Just Won an Lottery	Super Thirsty
Clueless	Super Posh		

3. Dynamics - 'loudness' of the instrumental/vocal sound

<i>ppp</i>	<i>pp</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>f</i>	<i>ff</i>	<i>fff</i>

4. Distances - the imagined distance between the stage and the audience

As if playing in a small concert venue	As if speaking quietly on the phone	As if shouting from across the river
As if asking questions on a round-table meeting	As if whispering in someone's ear	As if singing along in a pop/rock concert
As if shouting in someone's ear	As if writing an outrageous email	As if chatting in a crowded pub

Figure 3.1-4 *offset iii*: the four performance parameters and ways to approach them

3.1.4. Notation and structural configuration

The ensemble version structurally comprises five sections: a prototype (*theme*); three avatars (reorganised prototypes, or variations of the *theme*); and a coda. Both the prototype and every avatar consist of five blocks of music material (Figure 3.1-5). These material blocks are either pitched or unpitched. The former, despite being written in concert pitch, can be played in any instrumental/vocal

register and projected by any technical means at the performer's discretion.²⁵ The latter, broadly represented by three indeterminate states (Low, Mid, High), can refer not only to pitch/register, but to any mechanism that embodies a relationship as such.²⁶ The piece lasts for precisely six minutes, during which a stopwatch should be used to facilitate ensemble coordination.

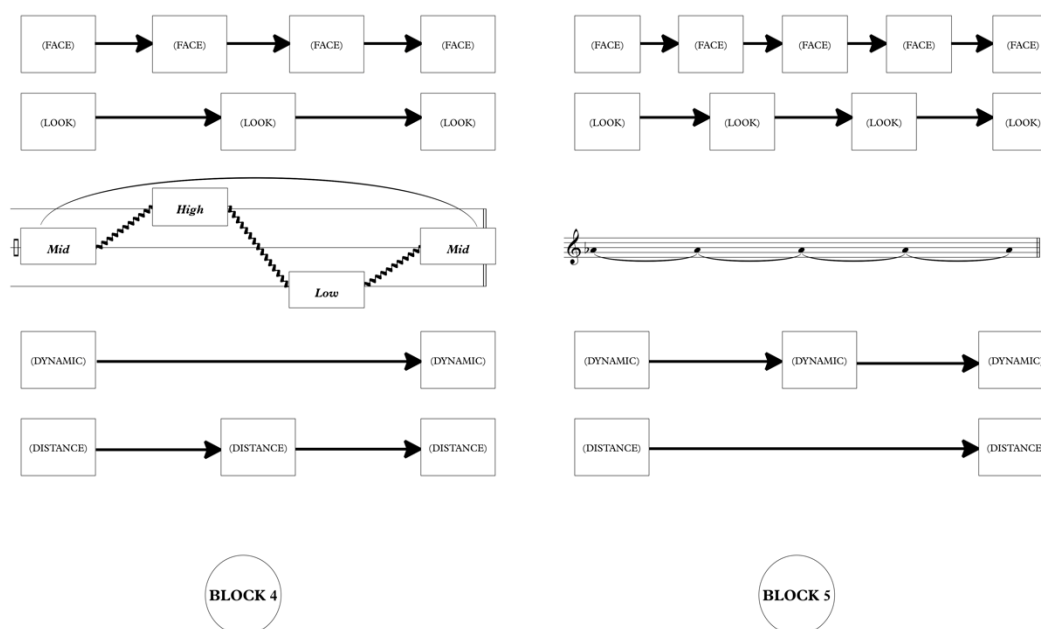


Figure 3.1-5 *offset iii – etude* (ensemble version): score template (Block 4 and 5)

The tuba version works in a slightly different manner. Contrary to having the musical materials grouped into several blocks, the score comprises a single *Trajectory* page for the tubist to follow during the performance. The page indicates no pitched material. Surrounded by the four parameters is an extended Low-High stave,²⁷ which outlines six indeterminate, unpitched, performance states: Extremely Low – Low – Mid-Low – Mid-High – High – Extremely High (Figure 3.1-6). Any pair of two neighbouring states are connected by various sort of lines (e.g. slur, dotted slur, smooth glissando, portamento), which can be interpreted from any angle and therefore realised by any technical means. This page also displays approximate timings, especially when two or more parameters

²⁵ For example, these pitched materials could also be whistled, hummed, sung, or more abstractly – associated with various kinds of unpitched (percussion) instruments (so long as the association stays consistent for the specific performance).

²⁶ For example, how high the instrument is held at; from where the hands start to drop towards the keyboard; state of spirits/mood; physical distance to the ground/floor (e.g. playing on a ladder).

²⁷ The *Low-High* stave here refers to the three-line notation system used to show unpitched materials in the ensemble version.

tend to change at once.²⁸ All of these timings are for navigation purposes only. The approximately five-minute piece is therefore not to be played with the assistance of a stopwatch.²⁹

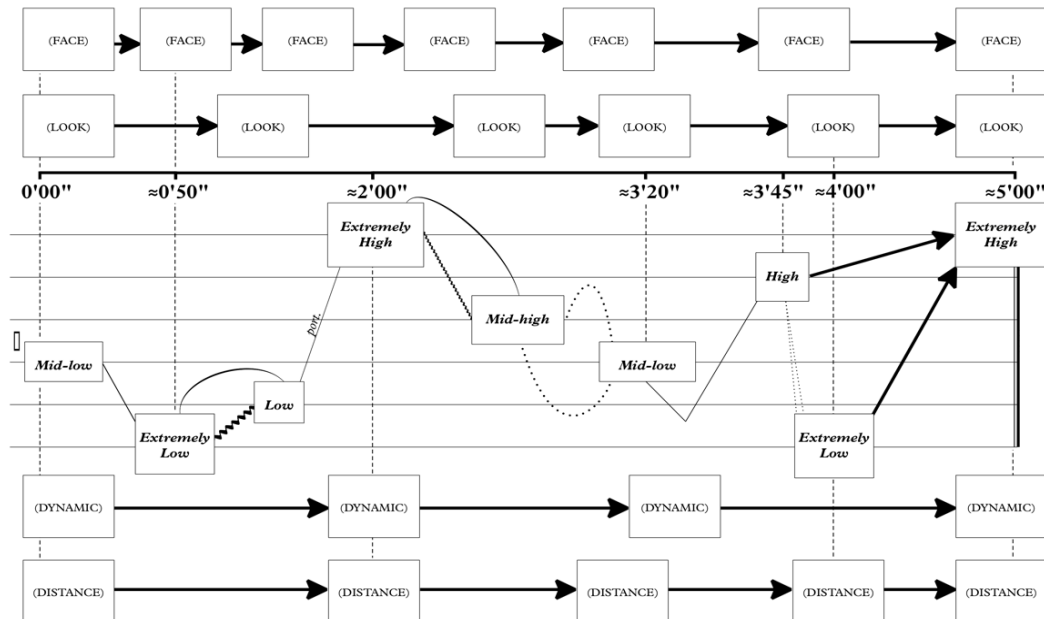


Figure 3.1-6 *offset iii (b) – etude for tuba: the Trajectory page*

3.1.5. Devising performance practice

I would argue that *offset iii* is, apart from being a musical translation of the mechanism and functionality of *Silent Talker*, also a case study for a *devised* music performance. The acts of score-assembly, and of improvising whilst interpreting random combinations of facial and bodily expressions are all beyond my own compositional control.

I worked closely with the performers: I tried out many possible ways to decipher my compositional intentions, actively participated in the experiment with different performance parameters alongside them throughout the rehearsal process. It was a thought-provoking experience, which – for me – seems to connect to a composer-performer collaboration framework (Figure 3.1-7)

²⁸ For example, when a new *Face* (facial expression) and a different *Distance* (imagined distance between the stage and the audience) are introduced at the same time.

²⁹ Although it is suggested that the piece lasts for five minutes, the exact duration is entirely dependent on a spontaneous decision-making, and the context of the performance. In other words, it is framed within a *subjective time* that the performer remains in control of. To some extent, playing in this subjective time is akin to interpreting metronome markings, where the duration of a performance varies significantly despite being given a specific meter (e.g. crotchet = 72).

proposed by the artist-percussionist Jennifer Torrence (2018):

APPROACHES TO COMPOSER-PERFORMER COLLABORATION

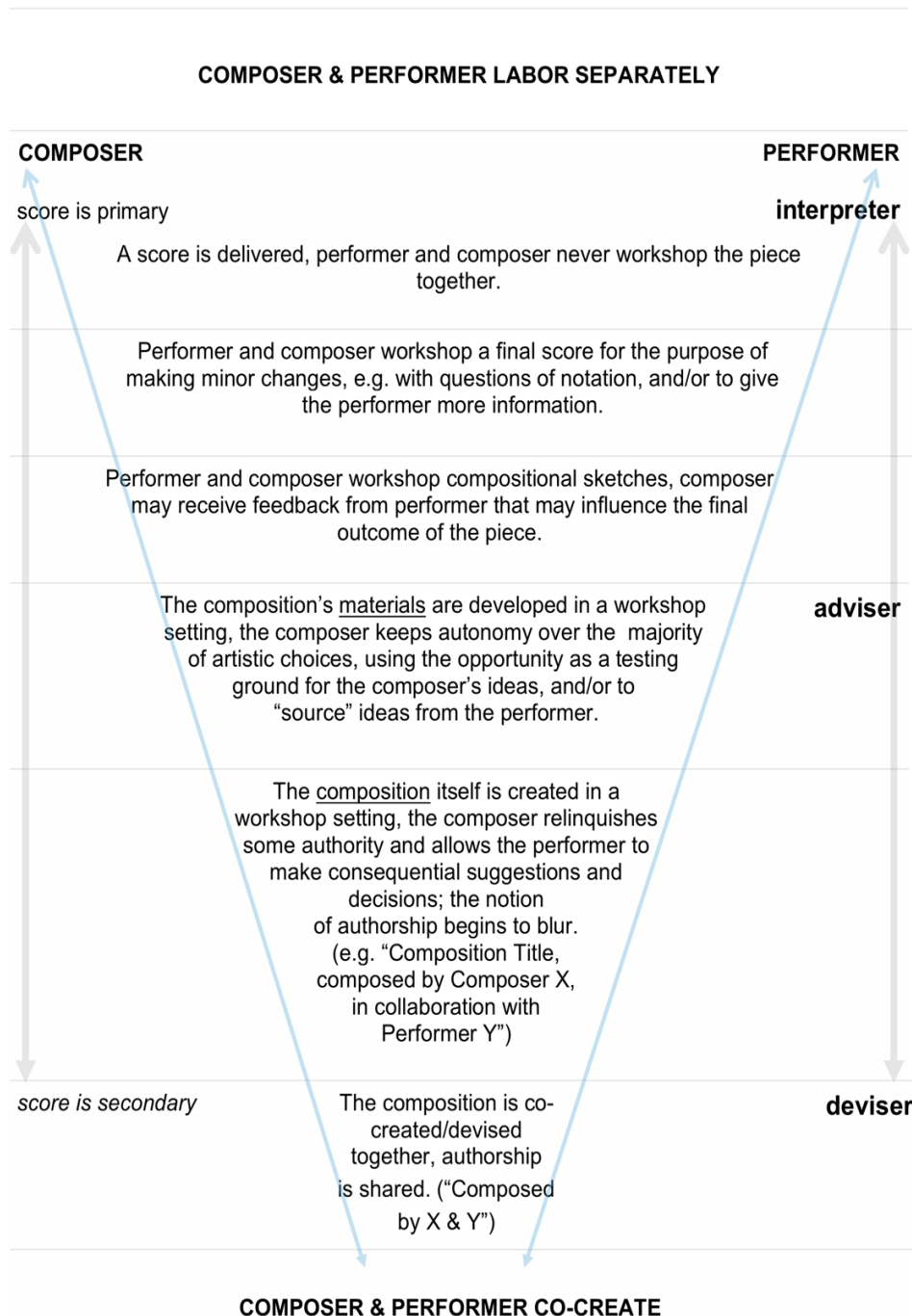


Figure 3.1-7 Jennifer Torrence (2018): an interpreter-adviser-deviser model for composer-performer collaborations
(Figure reproduced by kind permission of the author | ©Jennifer Torrence 2017)

Whilst this interpreter-adviser-deviser model provides me with a more nuanced reading of my own interactions with performers, I would argue that the rise of the

deviser does not always necessarily render the *score* secondary. In *offset iii*, for example, the collective effort of devising the performance is coupled especially with the making of the score, and the inclusion of the rearranged score in the performance. That said, for me, to normalise the concept of the score would also be regarded as one of the preconditions for a hybrid devising practice. A score that manifests as something other than a note-to-note, prescriptive, notational description of compositional ideas could as well facilitate, enact, and embody the deviser's creative input.

The underlying implication of a score being the epitome of the composer's authority, to some extent, also suggests to me a further rethinking of the mundane, encultured rituals associated with attending a live concert (for example, the expected silence in-between movements, the invisibility of a page-turner, the applause). Hence, I believe that this rethinking of the process can contribute to the expansion of my vocabulary, allowing my reflections to be articulated in and through a networked composer-performer collaboration.

3.2. Finalising the *offset* series

3.2.1. *offset iv – backflash* (2018)

offset iv was commissioned by flautist Rosalind Ridout for her MMus flute recital at the RNCM. It is openly scored for bass flute, contrabass clarinet, a dedicated page-turner, and members of the audience. It is arguably the acoustic twin of *offset ii*, which foregrounds the action of page-turn as the stimulus for a mostly improvised instrumental performance.

The piece features two specially designed score sets: Score 1 for the page-turner, and Score 2 for audience members. They display barely any notated music material and can thus be modified and rearranged to suit any specific event where the performance takes place. The two instrumentalists play off-music: they improvise in accordance with the adjectives, fonts, colours, shapes etc. presented in two mood boards inside a separate performers' score (or – to some extent – performance notes, Figure 3.2-1 and Figure 3.2-2). They as well react to (nearly) all page turning activities occurred within the performance venue as a whole, on the edge of two opposing sides of the stage area (Figure 3.2-3).



Figure 3.2-1 *offset iv*: Mood Board A (Performers' Score, p. 4)

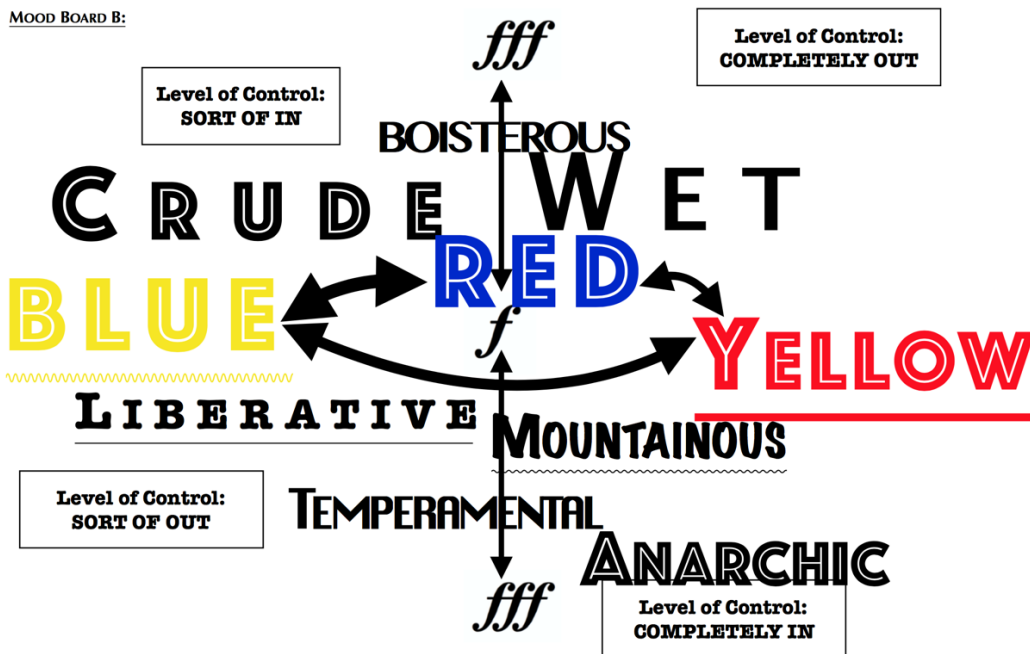


Figure 3.2-2 *offset iv*: Mood Board B (Performers' Score, p. 5)

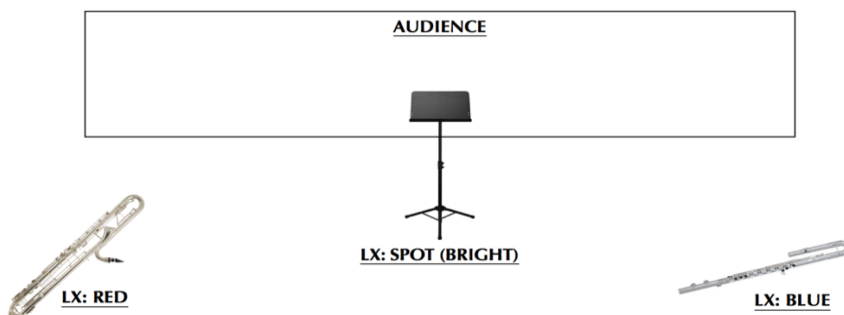


Figure 3.2-3 *offset iv*: stage setup

The dedicated page-turner therefore stands under the spotlight (centred on the stage) and operates page-turns on Score 1 as suggested (Figure 3.2-4). Every page-turn is accompanied by a simulation of page-turn sound made on either or both of the instruments, as if the pages are – again – prepared, and the page-turns are instrumentally amplified (Figure 3.2-5).³⁰

offset iv - backlash (2018)

1

SCORE 1
(PAGE-TURNER)

offset iv - backlash (2018)

SCORE 1
(PAGE-TURNER)

From here onwards:

Only numbers of remaining pages are shown, choose to or not to synchronise your page-turns with the audience member's, the length of staying still on each page is also at your own discretion.

Stay still for 40" - 80"

then

Turn this page extremely slowly
(More than 30")

30

Figure 3.2-4 *offset iv*: excerpt from Score 1 (left – p. 1 | right – after handing out Score 2)

SIMULATIONS OF PAGE-TURN SOUND - BASS FLUTE

TURNING

1. **"A Piece of 200gsm Paper"**
Flutter on air (tzzz...), with a flickering resonance on the lowest C.
2. **"Paper Clips"**
Very smooth alternations between an airy hiss and an in-throat flutter/growl' (all into the hole on the lowest C) - e.g.: shhh - growl - shhh - growl - shhh....
3. **"A Metal Plate"**
A continuous, 'dirty' throat flutter with a high palate on either the lowest C, or any multi-phonetic within the lowest octave. (Visit <http://www.bassflute.co.uk/06-multiphonics/multiphonics-fingering-chart.html#firstoctave> for possible fingering charts, accessed April 2018)
4. **"Tin Foil/Plastics/Bubble Wrap - Dry"**
Very exaggerated, irregular circular mouth movement around the hole, as if chewing something very loudly, with a kiss on the hole every now and then, also with randomised fast key clicks.
5. **"Tin Foil/Plastics/Bubble Wrap - Wet"**
Same as the above, but with occasional blowing into the hole (whilst moving fingers).
6. **"An iPad Pro with Millions of Scratches at its Bottom"**
A continuous, super grainy, throaty, grumbling croak, like an utterly satisfying, endless burp made into the hole, along with irregular changes of fingering (speed ad lib.).
7. **"A Super Aged, Thick, Solid, Sound-proof Wooden Door"**
Breathe a super unstable stream of air into the hole, on the lowest C, whilst humming a slowly ascending gliss. (starting at as low as possible), with a soft and smooth quality, and an imagined directionality towards the unknown.

RELEASE

An airy, very resonant tongue ram (fully into the hole)

(on the lowest C)

ppp

fff

Figure 3.2-5 *offset iv*: bass flute simulations of page-turn sound (Performers' Score, p. 2)

³⁰ Each performer is provided with a list of viable ways to produce such sound on their instrument, collected from a series of workshops in which we attempted to recreate all of the amplified page-turn sounds recorded from the performance of *offset ii*.

Guidelines given on Score 2 make use of a playful and elaborated vocabulary. Almost every page is different to the others in some way. Variable page turning speed and intensity are enacted implicitly through contrasting fonts, colours, transparencies, phraseologies used (Figure 3.2-6).

Now it's your turn to be in control of the performance.

The clarinettist is watching you and your hands.

Turn this page over with a speed that you feel comfortable with, listen to how the musician responds to it, but try to be sensible as they may run out of air if the page-turn is THAT slow.

When you have had your fun, pass it on to the person close or next to you.

Enjoy.

Figure 3.2-6 *offset iv*: excerpt from Score 2

The performance of *offset iv* is, therefore, generally monitored and paced by the on-stage page-turner. They are encouraged to attentively observe the venue in all respects, and contextualise the speed, intensity, assertiveness of their page-turn activities with all of their surroundings. The duration of the performance is also largely ascribed to this instantaneous decision-making, especially considering that the participation from audience members is not always predictable (e.g. two neighbouring members of audience are separated by a row of vacant seats, someone accidentally closes Score 2 when passing it along).

For me, *offset iv* enacts a highly fragile, eerily ritualistic performance installation. It sabotages the representation of a page-turner as someone peripheral to a concert of Western classical music. It also places the score as a centrepiece of the performance, whereby the score no longer serves to *describe* the sound I

imagine, but rather becomes a mediator who advises and devises the performance alongside the page-turner, instrumentalists, and audience members.

3.2.2. *offset v – set-off* (2018-19)

A conclusion to the *offset* series, *offset v* was commissioned for the conductor Mark Heron and RNCM New Ensemble with a fixed fourteen-instrumentalist line-up.³¹ It articulates a subtle and interactive conductor-ensemble relationship, whilst continuing to interrogate elements such as page turning, performance posture/physical appearance, as well as improvisation.

The piece does not incorporate an overarching full score, but a whole set of individual parts including one dedicated to the conductor. That said, unusually the conductor's part does not contain the music for the players, but instructions for page-turning and pacing of the performance, and specific conducting gestures for the players to respond to.

Hence, I made use of a hybrid notation system to facilitate ensemble coordination. I designed a collection of action-based graphics to convey unconventional gestures to be exhibited by the conductor (Figure 3.2-7). Since many of these graphics correlate closely the conductor's arm movements with ensemble members' instrumental playing, their appearance on the instrumentalists' parts is thus flipped to mitigate the difference in perspectives. These graphics are also paired with conventionally notated, instrument-specific musical materials, and verbal/text instructions, so that all musicians know how to follow the conductor and navigate different sections (Figure 3.2-8).

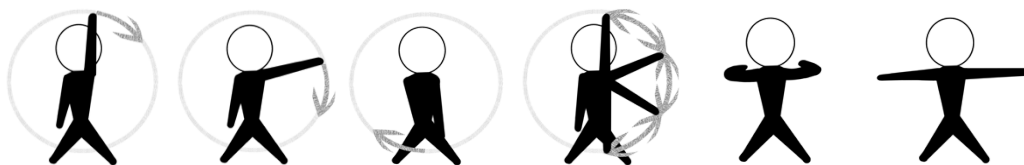


Figure 3.2-7 *offset v*: examples of graphics representing conducting gestures

³¹ Full instrumentation is as follows:

Piccolo, oboe, bass clarinet, contrabassoon, horn, trumpet, trombone, 1 percussionist, celesta, and string quintet (violin I, violin II, viola, violoncello, double bass).

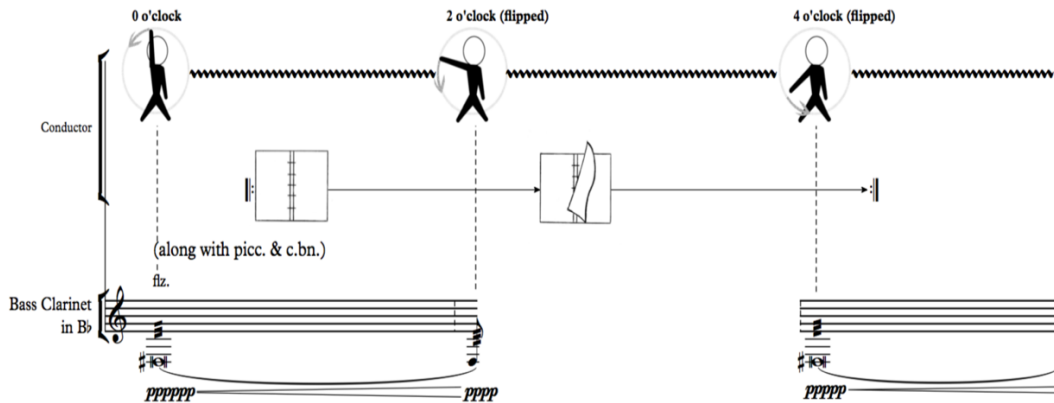


Figure 3.2-8 *offset v*: example of instrumental parts (bass clarinet, p. 1)

Structurally, the piece contains five consecutive sections: Intro – I – II – III – Outro. Throughout all five of them, all of the instrumentalists (whether playing or not) pause and freeze whenever the conductor does a page-turn, before resuming to action once the page being turned is released completely.

The Intro commences at whenever the celesta player is ready to repeatedly play a mesmerising two-bar passage (Figure 3.2-9), regardless of the performance context (e.g. pre-performance introduction, ensemble tuning-up, conductor entering the stage). The conductor, after being settled on the stage, starts to operate page-turns at a pace holistically assessed for the specific performance, without making any eye contact with any of the players (Figure 3.2-10).

Figure 3.2-9 *offset v*: Intro (celesta's opening sequence)

(THIS PAGE SHOULD ALREADY BE OPEN PRIOR TO THE START OF PERFORMANCE)

INTRO - peripheral, as if anecdotal, whilst aggressively peaceful
0'00" - c. 1'30" (4 pages)

(Celesta starts playing without being cued, it will carry on repeating itself until Section III)

Give the celesta c.15", stand still, hands off the score.

then

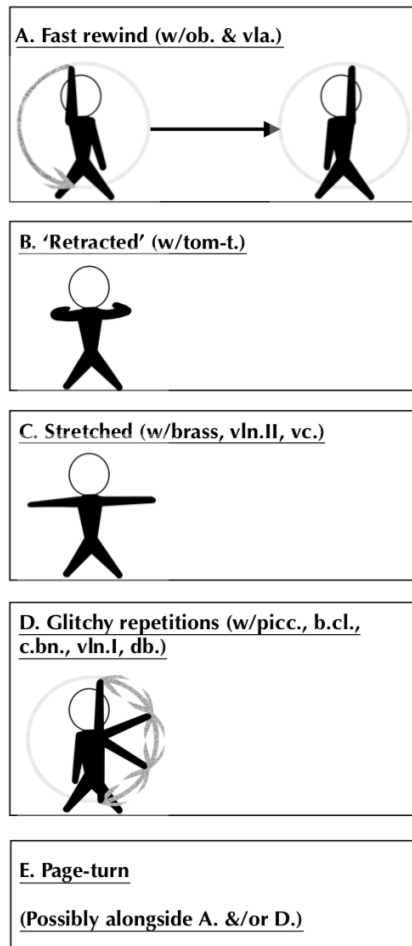
Turn this page over (speed ad lib., make sure the action is clear enough for the performer to see, whilst not making any eye contact).

(1 of 4)

Figure 3.2-10 *offset v:* Intro (conductor's part, p. 1)

Section I sees the conductor slowly completing a linear, clockwise circle using the two arms. The circle is subdivided into seven stages,³² each triggering a group of musicians playing their corresponding music material (Figure 3.2-8). Section II is of a similar fashion. The conductor repeatedly but randomly executes five performance gestures for the instrumentalists to react to accordingly (Figure 3.2-11). Both sections are shrouded by the celesta's persistent repetition of the opening sequence, which stops eventually at the beginning of Section III.

³² These stages are roughly shown as: 0 o'clock – 2 o'clock – 4 o'clock – 6 o'clock – 8 o'clock – 10 o'clock – 12 o'clock.



(2 of 7)

Figure 3.2-11 *offset v*: Section II (conductor's part, p. 12)

Section III is, contrarily, conceived as an improvised, yet highly stylised build-up towards the ultimate climax of a mock late romanticist symphony. It encompasses truly affectionate, expressive conducting and instrumental playing, all facilitated by sympathetic verbal directions elaborated for each individual performer (Figure 3.2-12). After reaching the climax, the Outro enters with the celesta player repeating the opening sequence for four times at an extremely low volume. The conductor neither turns any page, nor carries out any further action before the celesta finishes. The performance ends afterwards when the conductor closes the back cover of the part, as well as when the audience starts to applaud.

Truly affectionate and expressive playing:

Now imagine you are performing the most important part that helps build up to the ultimate climax of a Mahler, Tchaikovsky, or Rachmaninoff symphony. Notes and rhythm don't matter, as music is so tolerant and the passion, strength, and anticipation being accumulated alone are sublime enough to convey your musicality.

Be it improvising or not, follow - or be in counterpoint with - the conductor, the beating, the rubato, the dynamic contour, go with the flow, give it a bass drum rumble, a vibraphone drizzle, a snare drum roll, a tam-tam splash, a blanket of blah-blah-blah created with your kitchenware, or even hammering it out like what you would do in Mahler 6 - nothing can be wrong, as long as everyone can see and hear your devotion towards this great making of art.

Figure 3.2-12 *offset v*: Section III (percussionist's part, p. 2)

Technically speaking, *offset v* was not composed through a rigorous collaborative devising process. Whilst my desire for a more distributed authorship may have been compromised by the project's creative context (e.g. limited rehearsal time, size of the ensemble, availability of musicians/instruments), I would argue, I eventually bypassed it through compositionally outlining a framework wherein many dialogues, experimentations, and inputs from the performers can be engendered and thus facilitated in the rehearsal room.³³ In a sense, *offset v* is not a devised piece of composition *per se*, but a highly collaboratively devised performance that maps my compositional intentions onto the hybrid interpreting-advising-devising spectrum.

3.3. Further thoughts and reflections

The *offset* series as a whole, therefore, demonstrates a gradual process in which I expand my creative vocabulary by means of confining my compositional materials. Through conceptualising my own relationship with musical notation,

³³ These include, to name a few, how does the conductor interpret the graphics, how to execute the conducting gestures (especially in Section II), how many seconds should a page-turn last for, in what mood/state of mind is the conductor whilst turning the page, whether or not should the musicians play orchestral excerpts in Section III, what does pause/freeze mean to each individual.

the score, page-turn, and the mundane under different collaborative context, I began actively searching for, as well as answering to an emergent aural-visual dialogue that mediates a multi-faceted *conversation* between the way I want my sound to be heard, my creative subjectivity, the manifestation of instrumental theatre, and a redistributed compositional and performance agency my work started to afford.

In this regard, the *offset* series is also a catalyst for many other creative outputs I have produced throughout the years. For example, in late 2018, I designed *#rulingwheels\$1* for the national *Being Human* Festival. It is an interactive, audio-visual installation that features multiple amplified swivel chairs for the audience to sit on and listen to, as well as a looping video score displaying an animated chair dancing alongside a sequence of oddly phrased, swivel-related hashtags, which essentially help transfer the performance agency entirely to the audience members themselves (Figure 3.3-1).



Figure 3.3-1 *#rulingwheels\$1*: installation setup at the national *Being Human* Festival, November 2018

It also gave rise to a joint project that I co-developed with the composer-producer Tywi J.H. Roberts, and the saxophonist Simeon Evans in 2019.³⁴ Entitled *Dying Archon #rulingwheels\$1*, the project frames the swivel chair installation into a short performance study using Virtual Reality (VR) technology. The performance is interspersed with Evans improvising on an amplified swivel chair, in response to either a virtual flute player (video recordings of Roberts playing the flute), the swivel chair animation, or a live surveillance camera feed from the audience's perspective (the only means by which Evans could gauge his real presence on stage) that are respectively projected onto a number of screens distributed within the programmed virtual space (Figure 3.3-2) – all to be blanketed under the electronic sounds generated/processed from both the amplification of the chair and the data unpacked from the VR headset's inbuilt accelerometer that tracks Evans' head movements.



Figure 3.3-2 *Dying Archon #rulingwheels\$1*: project devising

³⁴ The project was later premiered in the *Virtual Reality+* event during the 2019 PRiSM *Future Music Festival*.

Chapter 4 - An Evolving Paradigm: *#enclosingenclosedenclosure, #insulative, and* Other Collaborative Works

4.1. Connecting practice with the self

I travelled to Darmstadt, Germany in summer 2018, and attended the *Darmstädter Ferienkurse* as a student composer.³⁵ One of the highlights from the two weeks for me was a workshop entitled *Collective Composing* led by the composer-oboist Catherine Milliken. The workshop called for active participations from eighteen artists and practitioners from across the globe. Each participant was involved in the three-day project simultaneously as a composer and a performer, regardless of their primary creative skills. The workshop, as its title suggests, prioritised a collaborative way of working. It utilised group exercise, instrumental and physical theatre improvisation, conversation-based questioning and problem solving etc. as pivotal compositional activities. These activities culminated in a twenty-five-minute performance study built from scratch over three three-hour sessions, which was eventually presented in a public showcase to all other course attendees.

4.1.1. *Found in translation*

The only thing the ensemble was given towards devising the performance was a theme of *Found in Translation*. The theme was anecdotally inspired by *Lost in Translation* (2003), an award-winning romance film directed by Sofia Coppola that depicts a love story between two Americans who were coincidentally stuck in the same hotel in Tokyo, which emphasises – as summarised by the film scholar Homy King (2005) – “what is mimicked without understanding, what escapes translation” and “Sensations of incomprehension, of loss of control, of forgetting even the time of day” (p. 48).

However, contrary to describing what tends to get *lost* when words’

³⁵ *Darmstädter Ferienkurse*, or Darmstadt Summer Course (for New Music), is a biennial event/gathering organised by *Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt* (IMD). Established since 1946, it attracts contemporary, experimental musical practitioners and scholars from across the globe, with a mixed format of musical festival, conference, masterclass, creative workshop/competition, among others.

complex, contextualised meaning transfers amongst inherently different languages/cultures, the *Found in Translation* project aimed to thematically, musically, and creatively articulate how this missing context would shed new light on customary rituals, induce alternative modes of listening, uncover distinct values and merits in the otherwise mundane objects or behaviours. It seems to me that the term *translation*, adopted within this context, deviates from its common usage and linguistic features. It – according to the linguist Attila Imre (2012) – “pervades our lives, it is omnipresent and indispensable in all fields of activity” (p. 1054). For me, it connotes an approach to creating music, in which peculiar phonetics used in verbal communication are treated as compositional stimuli and materials. These materials are therefore recreated, transformed, and responded to by instrumental and performative means.

The project seemed to be a success, given how much was achieved over merely nine hours of working together. I found several instances within the final presentation of the collectively devised piece particularly captivating. For example, its opening sequence featured two workshop participants – positioned centre stage – engaging in a *silent* conversation using only facial expressions and hand/body gestures. The conversation was dubbed in real time throughout the sequence, initially by two duos improvising against each other, who were subsequently replaced by a solo instrumentalist and the rest of the ensemble respectively (Figure 4.1-1). The dubbing incorporated both instrumentally simulated speech, as well as a collective jabbering, encompassing random vocalisation and short, inconsequent phrases in any language at each ensemble member’s own choosing.



Figure 4.1-1 Collective Composing workshop: opening sequence (screenshot from video documentation of the project showcase)

The final section took shape upon a similar idea. Instead of not including anything spoken, the two centre-staged performers conversed with each other in their native languages (Spanish and Mandarin Chinese in this instance). They were initially followed by two performers standing close by, who – not able to speak/understand either of the languages – listened intently for words or syllables that sounded distinctive to their ears. Each of them was equipped with a handheld tape recorder, with which the sounds were mimicked, recorded, and played back on loop for a set period of time. The looped playback was subsequently joined by two other instrumentalists, each of whom improvised upon a motive aurally transcribed from one of the recorded phrases, as though they were musically carrying the conversation onwards (Figure 4.1-2).



Figure 4.1-2 Collective Composing workshop: finale (screenshot from video documentation of the project showcase)

4.1.2. New meanings

I enjoyed how this articulation of the *omnipresent* act of translation seems to feed directly into my own practice. The collective composing workshop did not only give me an opportunity to step further inside the devising process, it also encouraged me to confront and thus normalise the fact that I speak English as my second language; that I am seen as ethnically different in the context where my music-making often takes place; and that my music-making is inevitably ascribed to my being Chinese, no matter how much this may not be tangibly evident in the surface of my creative output. In hindsight, perhaps the gradual confinement of my compositional material and the initial expansion of my vocabulary through the making of the *offset* series, as I have discussed in Chapter 2 and 3, can also be

translated as a holistic process in which I strip down multiple layers of resistance and embellishment piled on top of my true artistic voice over the years of living abroad.

Analogously, perhaps my interest in the interplay between the seen and heard mirrors my anxiety over making a phone call: I feel safe when I am able to see the other end. I tend to get self-conscious under scenarios where I might – unknowingly or not – cause any misunderstanding. Similarly, I like how even the most matter-of-fact words, objects, gestures etc. tend to bear a certain extra cultural or linguistic significance; how this added implication gradually becomes their default meaning under specific circumstances whilst remaining alien to an outsider.³⁶ And perhaps the normalised, parametrised chamber interactions my music calls for are rooted in a daily occurrence of me not being familiar with certain local, vernacular ways of speaking the English language, or of me not recognising references to pop culture amidst casual conversations.

For me, to identify and to understand context is always an enthralling concept. I see the act of translation as a fundamental part of my everyday routine, so long as I am living somewhere other than my home city in China where the language being predominately spoken, the local cuisine, and other ritualistic norms, are dissimilar to what I have been accustomed to.

Hence, I start to believe that my music-making mirrors my own relationship with the mundane: how I tend to compare/comprehend something with my accustomed usage of it. It questions how much of a context is translatable, resembling a kind of communication where contextual information is simultaneously obfuscated and alternatively stressed. For me, it manifests as a metaphor for a dynamic process of subjective position-taking, in which – as elaborated by the artist-theorist Catherine Laws (2020) – “subjectivity is produced in and through discourses (of any kind, and always embodied, whether linguistic, musical, or whatever), but the subject has the potential to be articulate (in

³⁶ For me, this seems to connect especially to what the philosopher Elke Brendel (2014) identifies as an entanglement between the context of utterance, the context of assessment, the stakes or consideration of error-possibilities, and the subjective belief in a proposition. The entanglement manifests on top of the truth conditions of knowledge ascriptions which are determined by “objective features given in the situation in which the knowledge claim is made” (p. 101), regardless of the subjective “willingness to attribute or deny knowledge” (p. 116).

whatever way) within that discourse and to articulate things *differently*, creating new meanings” (p. 13). And, I would argue, this process of positing/articulating subjectivity also gives rise to my creative identity, which is conceived upon an emergent intersection between my own sense of self, the socially constituted characteristics of the community/group/practice my self is framed within, and the reciprocal affordances and resistances amongst them (Laws, 2020).

That said, whilst I am not necessarily telling stories through my music-making, I am keen musically to capture, and make use of, the different ways that facts and stories can be told and interpreted; that the act of translation becomes a performative metaphor; that the divergent overtones articulate more than the factual content that is being told.

4.1.3. Intertextual considerations and theoretical references

It also seems to me that my music-making progressively embraces an indexical and intertextual quality. My reading of it is especially linked to the composer Marko Ciciliani’s discourse of *Music in the Expanded Field* (2017), and his articulation of new sets of criteria with which sound phenomena could be alternatively parametrised in music created from an expanded, intermedia approach:

[I]ndexicality is an element that merely points to something outside of the work itself, something that can be either musical or non-musical. Intertextuality additionally refers to the content of the destination being invoked. When, for example, Frédéric Chopin opens his *Études* op. 10 with arpeggios in C major, he is creating an indexical reference to the opening of J. S. Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book I. He points to this particular work he admired, but does not attempt to evoke the particular time, culture, or context in which Bach composed this work; thus it is not intertextual. However, when Public Enemy open their song *Bring the Noise* with a sample of a phrase by Malcolm X, this is an intertextual reference, as it points to the entire political movement that Malcolm X represented, in addition to its sonic and semantic qualities. (pp. 29-30)

Ciciliani also correlates the application of this indexical/intertextual feature, alongside its “focus on music’s potential to function as a signifier, to evoke additional meaning, and to convey a particular content” (p. 30), with two

Germany-originated trends in making and approaching new music: *The New Conceptualism* and the *Diesseitigkeit* (or worldliness) movement.

The former is nowadays widely associated with the work of the composer Johannes Kreidler.³⁷ It follows what the philosopher Harry Lehmann has theorised as the digital revolution, outlining a broader paradigm shift in new music, in which digitisation to a large extent solves many of the technical dilemmas in music-making, and the question of music's *relatedness* (or its *Gehalt-aesthetic* nature)³⁸ gradually gains more significance (Lehmann, 2010; Harry Lehmann, 2019). It also renders – as the musicologist Karl Katschthaler argues – the Romantic notion of *absolute music* increasingly tangential (2018, p. 19), as the barrier between sound phenomena and the extra-musical world is likely to be dismantled in an era where technology continues to advance; as the ease and efficiency of getting information and making connections improve rapidly; and as the online and digital means of production and consumption become greatly entwined with the everyday. This interest in the aesthetics of the everyday is also shared by a group of theorists and practitioners under the heading of the *Diesseitigkeit*, namely the composer collective *stock11* – Michael Maierhof, Maximilian Marcoll, Hannes Seidl, Martin Schüttler, among others (ibid.).

I, too, resonate with an interpretation of this phenomenon of conceptual music put forward by the composer-musicologist Martin Iddon (2015):

Nevertheless, conceptual music perhaps ought, at least on first impression, to be either a contradiction in terms or too obvious to need mention. The relative semantic 'weakness' of music – its difficulty in depicting specific 'things' in ways which are generally communicable without commentary which goes beyond the musical – ought either to mean that it signifies nothing specific enough to be considered a concept or that, by the same token, music (especially in its more abstract, non-texted forms) deals with nothing but the deployment of ideas and concepts. (p. 37)

What seems more interesting to me is that Iddon tentatively places this argument ahead of a robust, discursive analysis of *Fremdarbeit* (or *Outsourcing*) – a part

³⁷ This is particularly associated with a public lecture Kreidler gave at the 2012 *Darmstädter Ferienkurse* entitled *New Conceptualism in Music* (Kreidler, 2012).

³⁸ Here, according to Lehmann, *Gehalt* is a variant of the German word *Inhalt*, which translates as *content* in English. Instead of articulating content's tangible representation (for example, a figure visible in an artwork), *Gehalt* outlines a more abstract manifestation of it, which is mediated from and accessible through experiencing and interpreting an artwork.

lecture, part instrumental piece of music composed by Kreidler (2009).³⁹ To put it into perspective, Kreidler's piece sets out to interrogate the notion of authorship and a globalised exploitation in music-making. Its performance consists of an integral opening speech addressed by a moderator (often the composer himself), declaring that the composition process of the piece involved a ghost composer from China and a cheap Indian programmer, both were asked to provide musical materials for Kreidler, in imitation of Kreidler's own musical style.⁴⁰ Iddon's subsequent analysis of *Fremdarbeit* is therefore focused on the triangulation between the piece's seemingly fictional discourse, its production of recognisable, marginalised colonial stereotypes, and its troubling articulation of music's autonomy, which is, conversely, a "heritage of the nineteenth century [that] conceals the stereotype" (Iddon, 2015, p. 49).

4.2. #enclosingenclosedenclosure and #insulative

These intertextual references helped greatly consolidate my understanding of my music as a facilitator that mediates my own encounters with the world. I would also take it further by assuming that the indexical/intertextual quality of my music serves a purpose similar to that of emojis and hashtags – two anomalies entrenched in today's digital culture and the grammar of many online discourses.

Having grown up in the age of search engines and social media, I believe that my articulation of my surroundings and my consumption of information are intrinsically afforded by what the media ecologist Jeff Scheible (2015) generalises as a redefined cultural logic of punctuation. This logic is arguably tethered to networked computing, key words, quotations, textual condensation and proliferation, and a "structurally fetishized" (p. 132) narrative desire whose effect "throws us out of the regime of right and wrong or good and bad – and into a loop

³⁹ The piece is scored for flute or clarinet, violoncello, keyboard, percussion, and speaker.

⁴⁰ Specifically, it is claimed that Kreidler spent a small portion of the commission fee on hiring X. Xiang, and R. Murraybay to generate and organise his compositional materials. Xiang was asked initially to compose in a style somewhat identical to Kreidler's, based on a set of existing Kreidler's pieces. Meanwhile, Murraybay was asked to write a software, which – after being trained by the same set of pieces – algorithmically makes music, again, in Kreidler's own style. Xiang was then asked to use Murraybay's software to aid the compositional tasks he was initially assigned. The plausibility of the story has remained debatable since. It has attracted a growing number of written discourse, especially on the story's validation of the concept of the piece, as well as the piece's autonomy and its political/aesthetic representation.

of floating signification” (p. 134).

Hence, I consider that my music translates and signifies many features of this logic. In a sense, I place many socially and culturally constructed narratives within the concert music paradigm under the umbrella of an imagined hashtag.⁴¹ I tend to articulate a mundane object within a context remote from one that nourishes its mundanity. I aim to facilitate diverse – if not polarised – interpretations, feedback, and opinions to my discourse, without giving away explicitly where my own opinion lies, as I envisage its manifestation to be emergent and afforded by the resistances towards and against it.

For me, this thread of thinking marks my own paradigm shift. Therefore, my creative outputs since 2019 are embodied with this evolving, context-dependent dissemination of my compositional material. I frequently appoint the title of my work with a hashmark, aiming to figuratively enact a *poor acoustic* (LaBelle, 2018) around my music, in which the stylised representations of a breath, a perfect cadence, a bow, become normalised and thus integrated into the existing ambient environment where myself is enclosed within.

4.2.1. #enclosingenclosedenclosure (2019)

#enclosingenclosedenclosure was composed for flautist Kathryn Williams, as part of her *Coming Up for Air* project. The project consists of an expanding volume of musical compositions written for and/or commissioned by Williams, each limited to a single breath cycle (an inhale and an exhale). Emerging from Williams’ recovery from her long-term, asthma-related respiratory conditions, the project holistically interrogates the physical restrictions around flute performance, as well as the visibility of breathing difficulties – particularly for players of wind instruments – within a wider socio-political context. It also articulates – according to Williams (2020) – a triangulation between musical practice, overcoming and healing from physical and psychological traumas, and a multi-faceted resilience developed from undertaking challenging performance endeavours afforded by a hybrid, embodied, collaborative music-making, whereby she was enabled to “heal

⁴¹ These include, to name a few, the subtitles of the first three *offset* projects (*Ballade*, *Nocturne*, *Etude*), the centre-staged page-turner, the overlay between dynamics and imaged distances between the performer and the audience.

the disassociation of performing in a body which was a site of crime and transform into a more fully inhabited being” (p. 122).

#enclosingenclosedenclosure was, therefore, conceived amidst the processes of both Williams’ and my own artistic growth and personal transformations. It manifests as a set of five one-breath solo flute pieces, all framed within a communal performance trajectory: from an interrupted, staggered inhale (from the flute) on the G4 to a long exhale that gives rise to a multi-ponic based on the C Major triad, accompanied by a sustained, artificial smile whilst taking a slow bow until the exhale finishes. The five pieces can be performed either individually or sequentially in any combination or order. They are distinguished from different physical actions executed alongside the chain of inhale segments:

- 1) a complete, steady-paced circumambulation of the performance venue;
- 2) a sequence of facial imitation of a collection of free choice emojis;
- 3) a visible, projected process of composing and posting a tweet of forty-characters or longer, typed on a laptop using either end of the flute;
- 4) a sequence of creepy stares directed at a row of audience members (or more, if in a small and intimate venue);
- 5) a combination of staring and imitation of emojis.

Hence, for me, *#enclosingenclosedenclosure* continues to address my own resistance towards an encultured concert hall enclosure and the seemingly disembodied rituals cultivated by this enclosed environment. To a certain extent, it normalises a *right*, appropriate occasion where a performer smiles at the auditorium or takes a bow. It poses an array of questions concerning what constitutes a musical cadence, given that the cycle of an inhale and exhale also naturally embodies a cadential characteristic. I would argue that it also channels Williams’ articulation of resilience, through enacting a somewhat reciprocal relationship between the emergent threshold of a single inhale of hers and heavily context-dependent information: the size of the venue, the number of emojis she decides to imitate, the unintended typos occurred whilst rushing to complete the

tweet, the instantaneous response from the stared-at audience member who might as well have been holding their breath alongside Williams herself.

4.2.2. *#insulative* (2019)

#insulative, on the other hand, continues to make similar enquiries. The piece was commissioned through Kinetic Manchester – a multi-disciplinary event initiative, for the second instalment of their 2019 *SPACE//SENSE* Festival. That event was specifically aimed at exploring the physical space, spatial perceptions, and sensory phenomena within Victoria Baths – a mostly disused, grade II-listed bathing institution in Central Manchester (Figure 4.2-1). The piece was, whilst being collaboratively developed alongside the Vonnegut Collective (a Manchester-based ensemble specialising in new music and improvisation) for the Kinetic event, conceived in a format that leaves abundant space for any future re-enactment under other site-/instrument-specific context.



Figure 4.2-1 Manchester Victoria Baths (main swimming pool)

Hence, I consider the project to be almost a site-responsive performance installation. It is openly scored for six performers on any instruments, incorporating text notation as merely the outline of an overarching structural framework. Mostly improvised, it is loosely paced around a twenty-seven-minute backing track, consisting of a collection of field recordings of a number of ambience sounds (coffee shop, road traffic, raindrop, kitchen appliance etc.). Throughout the performance, the track is played back from the performers' phones, which are connected to six Bluetooth speakers scattered discreetly within the performance venue.

The six performers are encouraged to prepare the following material for their part prior to the first rehearsal:

- 1) a smile;
- 2) eight non-smiley faces (or imitation of eight free choice emojis);
- 3) eight interchangeable instrumental sounds or gestures to accompany the transitions between prepared faces/emojis (in no particular order);
- 4) temperamental instrumental sounds or gestures to accompany any physical movement within the performance space (e.g. creep, walk, jog);
- 5) sustainable gestures with an intense and intricate physicality of instrumental playing, which project no or almost inaudible sound;
- 6) loud, aggressive, sustainable instrumental playing;
- 7) instrumental simulation of three contrasting environments (that are also flexible in dynamics): a vibrant pub, a busy restaurant kitchen, a construction site.

Performers 1, 2, 3 (referred to as P1, P2, P3 hereinafter) also collectively work as a trio, and they are given a three-chord cadence transcribed specifically for their instruments (Figure 4.2-2 and Figure 4.2-3).



Figure 4.2-2 *#insulative*: three-chord cadence (original)

Figure 4.2-3 *#insulative*: three-chord cadence (transcribed)

That said, the premiere version at the Victoria Baths comprised a string trio (P1 on violin, P2 on viola, P3 on violoncello), trumpet (P4), bass clarinet (P5), and percussions (one player – P6). It was devised through two days of highly intensive workshops and rehearsals.

Over the course of devising, we collectively determined approximate positions around the main swimming pool (namely 1a, 1b, 2a, Figure 4.2-4) for the six players to move amongst during the performance. We brainstormed alongside each other about how the abstract parameters, as listed in the performance notes, could be interpreted and thus responded to (e.g. transitions in-between two imitated emojis, physically intense yet inaudible playing, three simulated environments). We also started each day with group meditation, so that everyone could arrive at a relatively relaxed state that facilitates the bodily engagement with any expressive performance physicality. We played a bit of an improvised, sound-passing game,⁴² which to a great extent enhanced the communications between everyone involved. A big chunk of time was also spent on collectively solving a number of logistic and technical issues.⁴³

I participated in most of the preparatory activities during the rehearsal

⁴² For example, one player initiates a new round via randomly producing a sound on their instrument, followed by their immediate neighbouring player attempting to recreate the sound, before passing it along in a similar fashion. All decisions regarding technical execution are made spontaneously. A round finishes when the sound being produced becomes too remote/unintelligible from the original.

⁴³ These include, to name a few, the venue being too big or too dark for anyone to be seen; instrument getting in the way of facial expressions; Bluetooth connectivity; speakers running out of battery.

period, including group meditation, warm-up improvisation, demonstration of facial expressions. It helped me greatly to understand everyone's doubts and practical concerns when performing the piece, which in turn resulted in an efficient and constructive process of solving problems.

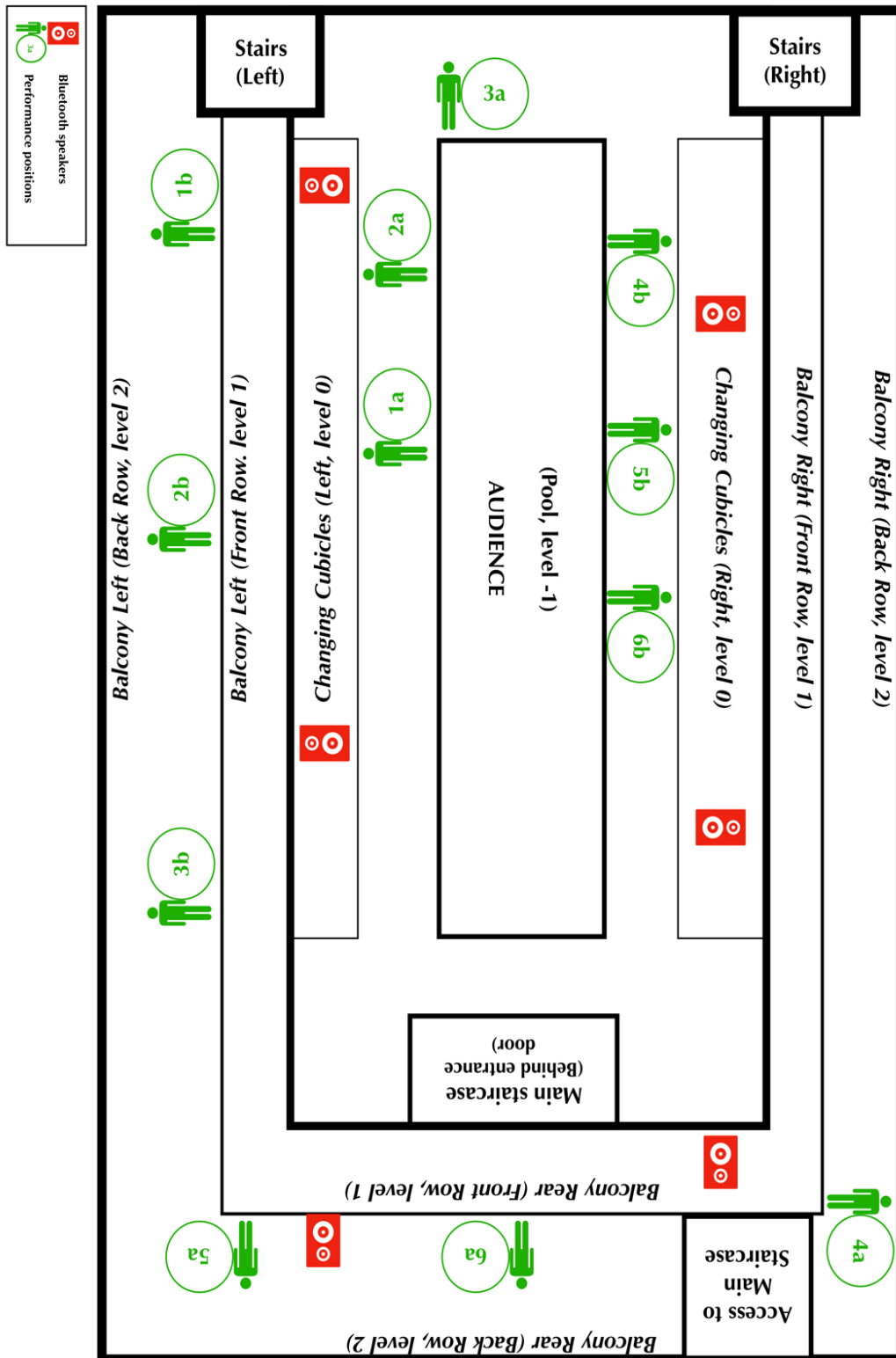


Figure 4.2-4 #insulative: stage layout (Victoria Baths)

Structurally, the piece contains five sections. The *Intro* starts when the interval of a concert, or of the particular music event within which this piece is programmed, is due to finish. It sees P1, P2, P3 initially engage in conversation with random audience members. These conversations gradually turn to a stop, and the three performers start to display an artificial smile. It is followed by the *Exposition*, where all six performers slowly and sequentially take their position b whilst instrumentally responding to just one other person at a time (either the person's facial expressions or physical movement/journey from position a to b). The process therefore somehow resembles an echo chain. The section culminates with P6's journey (in this case going down the main staircase) whilst the other five respond to their movement in *tutti*. All responses are only taken when the person being responded to is visible. The *Episode* comes up next. It is a sequence of alternations between silence and explosion (juxtaposed with both loud and aggressive playing, and physically intense yet inaudible playing). The succeeding *Development* begins with the three chords' first appearance, which precedes a chaotic overlap of all three simulated environments and responses to movements as seen in the *Exposition*. The subsequent *Stretto* is akin to the *Episode*. It is a sequence of alternations between silence and the three chords (juxtaposed with physically intense yet inaudible playing). The performance is then complete with the *Outro*, which features the trio playing the cadence in full repeatedly, and a sequence of P4, P5, P6's extremely *quiet* face-making and instrumental playing.

4.3. Participatory making: becoming a *performing* composer

Besides the shift of my compositional focus, the development of my artistic paradigm also brings me closer to the performance aspects of my work. For example, being inside the audience whilst acting also as one of the videographers for the *SPACE//SENSE* performance of *#insulative*, proved to be such a refreshing experience for me. Despite not having explicitly informed the crowd (prior to taking a bow at the end) that I am Bofan Ma, the fact that I always, subconsciously or not, pointed my camera towards a location where the next set of actions would occur, alongside my being with one of the very few – if not only – Chinese-looking faces within the venue, effectively gave away my role of involvement in the performance. It brought me a unique type of self-

consciousness, in addition to the one I already felt from seeing my work performed. I had to constantly try to balance my composer's integrity against a more playful, rather childish, side of myself. The former desired to document the entire performance and hated to miss capturing any single moment on camera, whereas the latter would love to misguide the other audience members, looking deliberately at *wrong* places every now and then, pretending to know nothing about the performance – just as someone who randomly showed up to the event out of interest.

I would hence argue that my being knowingly seen/acknowledged as the composer of a work (during its performance) is in itself a performative act – decoupled from the fact that I composed the said work. Thus, my compositional practice becomes automatically embodied with my presence as a composer, as visibly/identifiably Chinese, as one who knows my work well.

4.3.1. The Incógnito Project (2018-)

I founded the composer collective *The Incógnito Project* in late 2018, aiming to articulate this peculiar notion of a *performing* composer. The collective is currently jointly operated by Zakiya Leeming, Isabel Benito Gutiérrez, and myself, drawing on a hybrid model of practice as an ensemble, a commissioning body, an event initiative, among others. Since 2018, we have produced and presented a series of events, either online or in real life, that frame new and existing musical compositions – both by ourselves and by others – within a performance context where the boundary between concert hall and theatre is deliberately obfuscated.

For example, the *New Music Manchester Festival 2019* saw us presenting a programme that holistically questions the notions of migration and inter-cultural communications, in which the tubist Jack Adler-McKean and I collectively re-enacted *offset iii (b)* under an almost nostalgic theatrical setting that was afforded by a projected, partly animated video demonstration of the score-making process, and my playing on the piano of a rendition of Schumann's *Von fremden Ländern und Menschen (Of Foreign Lands and Peoples)* from the *Kinderszenen* suite (op. 15) (Figure 4.3-1).

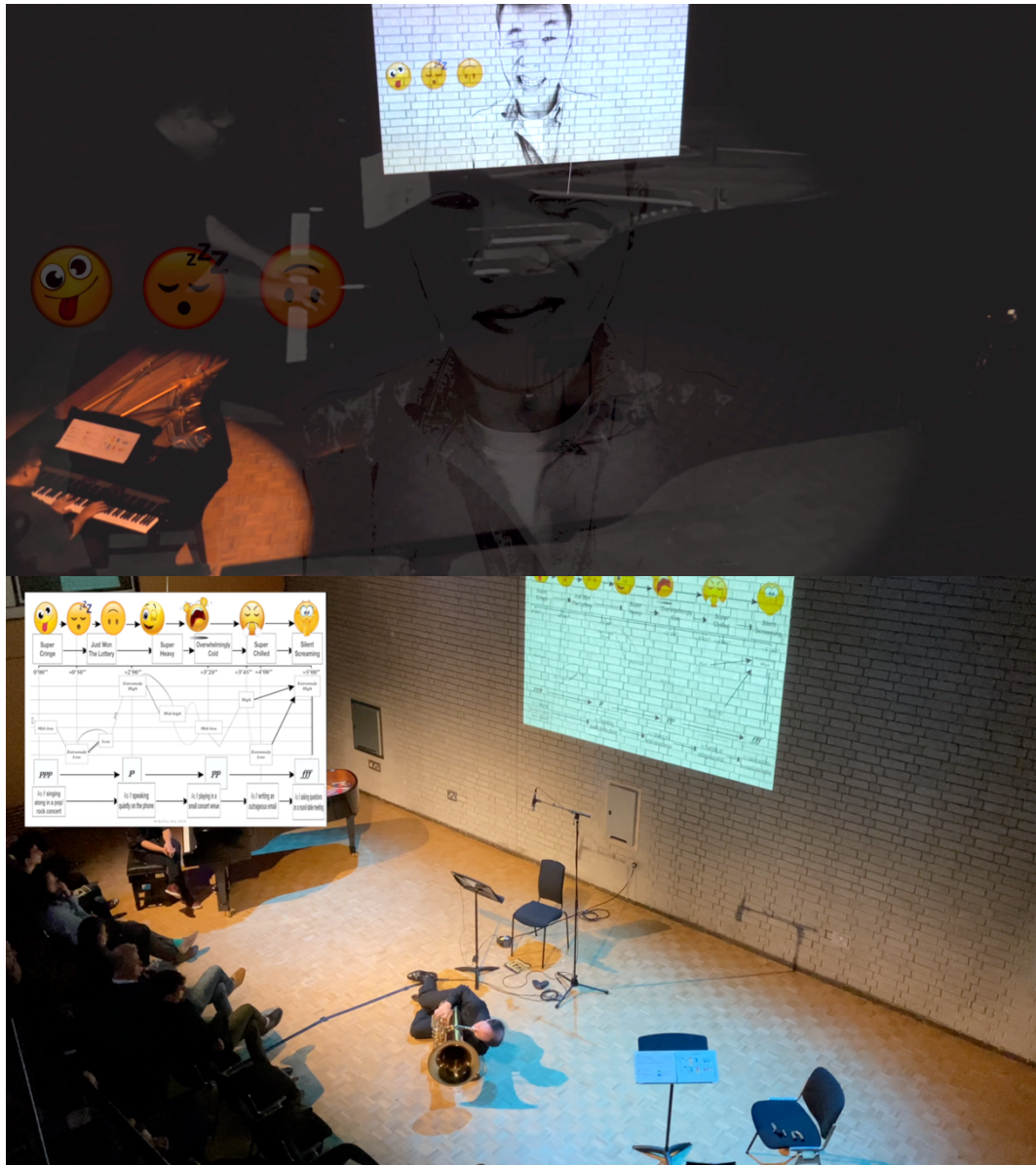


Figure 4.3-1 *INCÓGNITO #2* at *New Music Manchester Festival 2019*

4.3.2. CoMA Manchester (2020-) and *upfold, downfold, unfold* (2021)

Similarly, I became actively involved in the current operations of CoMA Manchester – the Manchester sector of the international Contemporary Music for All network⁴⁴ – alongside the artistic director Ellen Sargen and other committee members Shaun Davies and Stephen Bradshaw since early 2020. The ensemble features active participations from many non-professional, community-based

⁴⁴ CoMA (Contemporary Music for All) is an internationally renowned, community-oriented organisation dedicated to making new, innovative, experimental music accessible to all-ability musicians and music enthusiasts. Established since 1993, it has a far-reaching instrumental/vocal ensemble network both inside and outside the United Kingdom, alongside a growing collection of musical works commissioned/created specifically for them.

musicians, and it is particularly keen to explore repertoires that facilitate deep listening, open score, improvisation, and collective music-making.

In particular, I composed *upfold, downfold, unfold* for the ensemble, and jointly performed/assembled the piece alongside the members for the piece's digital premiere in the RNCM *PLAY* Festival in March 2021. The piece is openly scored for a group of more than three players playing remotely. Being presented in a pre-recorded technological format, it requires no collective rehearsal or experiment throughout the preparation process. It invites the ensemble members to each capture and produce a five-to-six-minute silent video of a discreet, mundane event using any video-recording device available. The players then send the produced footage to each other, before musically/sonically dubbing the footage received by any sound-making means. The piece is therefore conceived in its final form as an audio-visual collage of all the superimposed videos, in which the day-to-day sonic appearances are translated, reimagined, and creatively recontextualised (Figure 4.3-2).



Figure 4.3-2 *upfold, downfold, unfold* (Premiere version at RNCM *PLAY* Festival)

Chapter 5 - A Virtual Composer-performer: The #*outtakes* Series

5.1. Project background

It would be an understatement to say that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted my creative practice. The lockdown restrictions imposed in the United Kingdom and beyond since March 2020 have rendered live music-making – one of the paramount premises to my investigation – inaccessible. Nearly all of my current compositional and performative commitments have had to take place within my one-bed flat in South Manchester, channelling through the absence of an adequate studio space, chamber interactions, as well as a live audience.

On the other hand, this global crisis, having emerged originally from my home country, also profoundly foregrounds a variety of issues surrounding being Chinese in a Western society. With the novel coronavirus being repeatedly appointed with a nationality identical to my own, being personal becomes a political matter, more so than ever before. Whilst this political matter is not necessarily articulating or being articulated by – arguably – ideologies, it is about my own resistance towards biases, stereotypes, and misrepresentations.

As I have touched upon in the previous chapters, this being personal-political is also what drives my growth as an artist-practitioner. As much as it is challenging for me to negotiate a stay-at-home environment, the ongoing circumstance provides me an opportunity to approach and critically reflect on my work with more space and mindfulness. It allows a self-collaborative framework to further crystallise, therein I am able to truly compose, perform, produce for, by, and with myself, which eventually renders all the technical constraints extraneous.

5.1.1. Contradictory information and absurd discourses

Shortly after returning from my Christmas visit back home in January 2020, there arrived the unsettling news of the initial outbreak in the city of Wuhan – home to some of my friends and close family members, whom my parents had planned to visit in late January during Chinese New Year.

The fast-escalating situation attracted a great deal of my attention at the time. The sense of uncertainty was especially heightened when it was announced that – with a notice of merely eight hours – Wuhan was to enter a strict lockdown on 23 January. It was an unprecedented scenario, coinciding with the most celebrated, festive occasion of the year for all Chinese – domestic and overseas, as well as *Chunyun* – the largest annual seasonal travel rush in the world. Indeed, there was fear, panic, stress, and unsolicited rumours everywhere. On top of having constant communications with friends and family members, I since became completely absorbed in any news coverage and written/broadcast analysis of the unfolding event, through media outlets both inside China and in the West, hoping to grasp a relatively comprehensive view of the crisis as a whole.

For me, the following two months were, for the most part, incongruous. Admittedly, I had got used to reading disparate journalistic discourses and commentaries on China-related affairs prior to 2020. However, I was still astonished to have observed a discernible partisanship across the early reports made by mainstream Western media, especially in regard to the wet market where the outbreak reputedly started, the holistic development of the (then) epidemic, the Wuhan and later national lockdown, and the potential social, political, and economic impact the spread of the novel coronavirus might bring forth.

This sentiment became particularly relevant when a controversial article – *China is the Real Sick Man of Asia* (Mead, 2020) – got published in *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) on 3 February. It was when the infection rate, as well as the number of reported cases/deaths, seemed to gradually plateau in China. The article, being evidently an attempt to politicise the outbreak, also comes with a short video montage – entitled *Opinion: A Communist Coronavirus* – embedded in the webpage of its digital release. The montage is captioned as: “Wonder Land: The coronavirus is a metaphor for two political ideas that are incompatible with the realities of the modern world: China’s Communist Party and isolationism” (ibid.) (Figure 5.1-1). It juxtaposes footage of residents in Wuhan chanting “*Wuhan jia you* (hang in there Wuhan)” from inside their own homes,⁴⁵ with an

⁴⁵ The gesture is to some extent akin to the weekly *Clap for Carers* initiative happened on every Thursday evening in the United Kingdom through March to May 2020, in which residents across the country opened their windows or stepped outside their front door to give a round of applause to all carers and essential workers.

arbitrary claim that the footage demonstrates how these residents' voices are controlled by the communist regime – precisely what the citizens of Hong Kong and Taiwan have been feared of and therefore fighting against.



Figure 5.1-1 Screenshot taken from the digital release of WSJ's article *China is the Real Sick Man of Asia* (Mead, 2020)

Apart from affixing the virus with an ideological stance, the article went instantly viral also because of its insensitive title. The controversy is predominantly ignited by, and attributed to, the usage of the allegedly derogatory term *the sick man of Asia*, which has been historically tethered to China's (then Qing dynasty's) 19th Century fall to the colonial West and later to the Japanese Empire since the two Opium Wars. Although strong oppositions were expressed by both Chinese communities and government officials, the counter arguments – defending the value of freedom of speech and journalism – successfully resulted in the title remaining unchanged since (Tracy, 2020).

This WSJ article is one out of many similar discourses made public throughout that peculiar period of time. I find the trend of trivialising the gravity of a bursting health crisis that has the potential to develop into a global pandemic – for a mere purpose of deprecating the credibility and sustainability of a political system/economic entity out of a certain geopolitical interest (thanks to an intensifying U.S.-China trading relationship at the time) – simultaneously exhausting and transfixing. And the peculiarity is articulated even further, for me,

by the meticulous use/mentioning of certain discrimination-inducing terminologies, such as *the sick man of Asia*, *The Chinese/Wuhan Virus*, *Kong Flu*, whilst purportedly separating the term *Chinese* from the nation's administrative establishment and thus declaring no racist intent (Abbas, 2020; AlAfnan, 2020).

Such discourses then inevitably stimulated an already heightening Chinese patriotism, as the domestic spread of COVID-19 appeared to have been put under control, and as the spread of the virus internationally appeared to have worsened rapidly. Media outlets back home tended to vigorously praise the success and effectiveness of the state's handling of the crisis, through advocating values of efficiency and equality, whilst calling out Western media's racism-inciting – if not racist *per se* – propaganda that serves to deflect public's attention from their governments' own failure in recognising and thus being more prepared for the severity of the crisis at an earlier stage (ibid.).

5.1.2. Stay-at-home: a metaphor

It has been absurd to be in the middle of all this, to say the least. Through February to April 2020, the nation-wide lockdown in China got lifted step-by-step, whereas the situation in Europe and in the United States deteriorated drastically. England went into its first lockdown at roughly the same time as my family inside China were allowed to travel again.

The absurdity then was, for me, especially mirrored in the daily message exchange with my family, therein the tones projected by the two sides seemed to have swapped gradually. I started to become more comforting, consciously avoiding exhibiting my own distress. And it was just as how my parents acted earlier when I was more vigilant, attempting to forewarn them with every piece of information I could get hold of – be it factual or arbitrary – from thousands of kilometres away.

It also seemed to me that we were subconsciously influenced by the underlying motives of the polarised, heavily one-sided discourses we were exposed to. Biased or not, these discourses served their purpose of getting factual information across to their targeted audiences who have no first-hand experience of events happening afar. That said, my initial vigilance was, to some extent, due

to being confident that I was more critically informed. On the contrary, being consistently reminded by the news that face coverings were still not made mandatory in England as of late March, and that the number of reported Sino-phobic and racially discriminatory incidents skyrocketed across the Western world, my parents had every right to urge me not to step outside my front door.

I revisit the WSJ article (Mead, 2020), with particular regard to the content and the caption of the embedded video montage. I am inclined to question if I can somehow sympathise with referring a world jeopardised by a raging, deadly virus as the *Wonder Land*. I am intrigued by the subtle distinctions between *fact* and *truth*: whether by having a Chinese identity I automatically fall victim to the political ideas that are considered incompatible with the realities of *a* modern world, whose definition is suspiciously coupled with a specific mode of thinking. I therefore contemplate if my own experience of all this, as bizarre yet captivating as it is, can be contextualised into such realities.

For me, the novel coronavirus is not a metaphor. Instead, it is a catalyst for all sorts of metaphors for the chain reaction it elicits. Perhaps, arguably, I could only go as far to conceptualise this world full of metaphors as the *wonder* land. It is this wonder land, to push my argument further, that complements the *realities* of the world in which the freedom of speech often comes with its own agenda.

I would thus like to artistically enact a metaphor for my own existence within this seemingly standstill yet highly temporal lockdown environment: my staying at home is far from motionless. The dichotomy between the inside and outside, for me, manifests also as an apposite analogy to the bulging rivalry between China and the West. I sit on my sofa, yet I cannot sit on my sofa as someone without a Chinese identity. I receive contradictory information. As much as I would like to posit myself into as neutral a standpoint as I possibly could, I am not able to process that information without any of my own preconceptions.

In this regard, my stay-at-home could be metaphorically considered as a forum in which I confront and negotiate with my ontological positions and artistic paradigms. It substantiates a virtual stage in the form of my living space, therein I both perform my work and am scrutinised for my work. It is an emergent interstice where I allow myself to challenge the representations of myself. It

encapsulates all the elements I have interrogated through the earlier phases of this investigation: (my) sound's articulation, its visible association with the performing body, its ubiquitous dialogue with contextual meaning, its own physicality.

5.2. The #*outtakes* series: commentary

The #*outtakes* series is, therefore, an artistic and compositional response to my own lived and living experience of all of the above. It consists of three pieces in the format of multimedia, or video art, encompassing a creative process wherein selfie-taking, vocal and instrumental improvisation, audio recording/mixing, furniture rearrangement, filming, audio-visual production, among others, function as compositional activities. Although these pieces are conceived across a timespan of thirteen months (May 2020 to June 2021), digitally premiered/released under separate headings and circumstances, they are still regarded as three interconnected units, episodes, or musical movements that nourish the series' conceptual manifestation as well as its overarching structural completion.

5.2.1. #*outtakes I*: "So... Where should I look at?"

#*outtakes I* was composed as part of the *Together Apart: Composing in the age of Zoom* project initiated by PRiSM. In quest of the hybridity between composing and performing amidst the flourishing of technology and digitalisation, the project was featured in PRiSM's virtual *Future Music* Festival in June 2020.

Throughout the course of the project's development, I was privileged to be mentored by the composer-vocalist Jennifer Walshe, whose artistic practice is often embodied with – to broadly generalise – creative application and enquiries of AI and machine learning, the rigour of braving identity politics through making music and performing arts, and the pursuit of *The New Discipline* (Walshe, 2016) which I consider to be a critical piece of writing referential to my research as a whole.

I started to develop the piece shortly after England came to a standstill. As online meetings began to constitute the new norm, nearly all of my social interactions with other people have become regulated by the temporal

performance status of everyone’s computer and home broadband. My impression and understanding of the people I talk to has also been largely reliant on the quality, positioning, field of view of their webcams, the types of microphones they use, the lighting conditions of their office space – all to be confined within a number of well-defined squares, each occupying merely a small portion of my computer screen. And this quasi-claustrophobic phenomenon seems to me an uncanny parallel to my daily encounter with journalistic discourses, in which preconditioned, fragmented voices and images are persistently thrown at me.

Indeed, the square I am enclosed within on a conference call is not the true representation of the real space I am in either. The top of my head is not really trimmed flat as I move closer towards the camera. My voice does not echo itself as I speak into the microphone. I believe that, when I talk to someone face to face, the movement of my mouth and my facial muscles is, for the most part, synchronised with the expression I make and the words I pronounce – a relatively rare occurrence for a meeting taking place remotely. In short, I, too, continuously project uncoordinated aural/visual information that I can neither hear nor see. I can merely gauge my virtual presence when attending a conference call, presuming that my bandwidth is behaving as adequately as everyone else’s.

#outtakes I is, therefore, loosely framed within a grand online gathering, or a collage of several virtual meetings that I set up for myself to attend across multiple devices that I possess, and with a collection of profiles/accounts registered under the same name of Bofan Ma (Figure 5.2-1).



Figure 5.2-1 *#outtakes I*: video conferencing with myself (8:15)

Also appearing in the gathering are a pair of guest protagonists – a rubber chicken, and a bunch of mandarin oranges. They hint at the notable features of my Chinese origin: the colour of my skin, the language I speak (Figure 5.2-2). Interspersed with a certain erratic underwater footage recorded from when I accidentally capsized a kayak out at sea in summer 2019 (Figure 5.2-3), the gathering is a digital enclosure of an assembly of what could be viewed as my representations, as well as the claustrophobia triggered by a mutual stare between my representations and the real me sitting behind the desk.

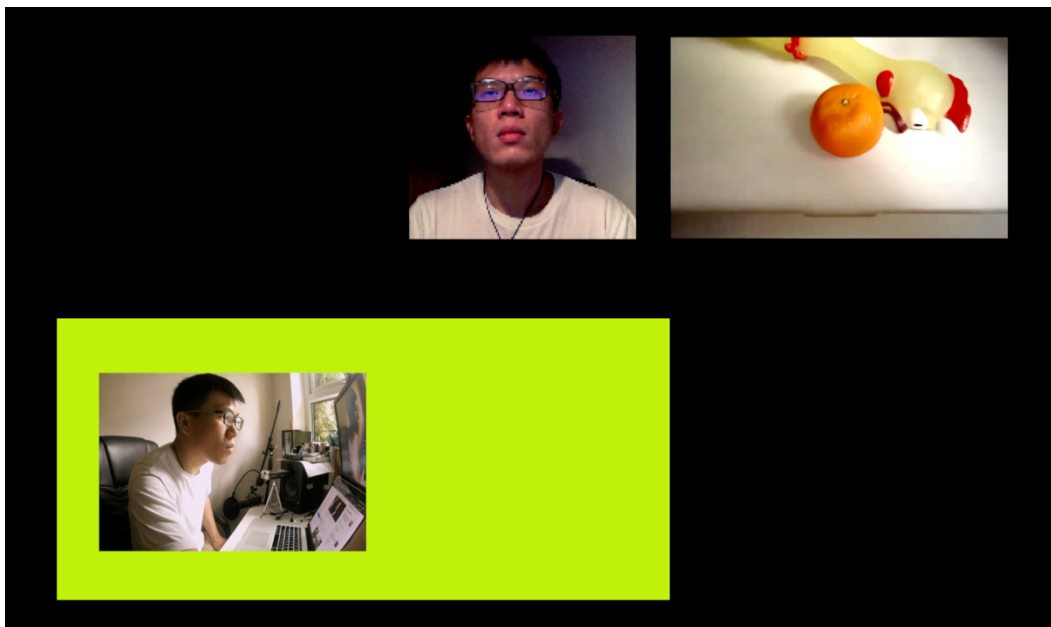


Figure 5.2-2 #outtakes I: guest protagonists (3:09)



Figure 5.2-3 #outtakes I: underwater footage (2:30)

This self-confrontation is also metaphorically enacted by the interplay between sounds and images, especially throughout the section in-between 03:28

and 07:43. The section is threaded primarily by three sets of materials:

- 1) the juxtaposition of the rubber chicken screaming intermittently and a highly pixelated recording of myself mouthing it, in which the synchronisation between the two becomes progressively more temperamental;
- 2) an almost stream-of-consciousness monologue engulfed by a sweep of convoluted feedback loop, resulting from leaving all microphones and speakers open amidst the multi-device conference call, during which I seem to tell a story about killing a huge spider;⁴⁶
- 3) fragments of me freely improvising on my guitar and melodica, whereby I deliberately incorporate unusual, or rather quirky, way of playing these instruments.⁴⁷

For me, mouthing the chicken arguably symbolises the disparity between the realities of being Chinese and the socially and politically constructed imagery around it. My dubbing of the chicken is – akin to Wuhan residents cheering each other up – a voluntary choice. However, with the recording of my dubbing of the chicken being manipulated, and with all the ambient, less synchronised transients being cut out to match the sound of the chicken, I become automatically disembodied from the image of myself – precisely as if being mechanically controlled by the chicken. That said, by going deliberately against such synchronisation, I allow my resistance against this imposed narrative to become articulate.

The monologue and its resultant feedback loop also hint at an obfuscated boundary and a reciprocal affordance between the inside and outside. For me, the

⁴⁶ Full text transcription of this passage is as follows:

“I just... Killed a spider. I feel guilty about it. But... It’s huge. There are loads of trees outside my house. Hmm... Well, think about it, it’s quite interesting. But it’s fucking scary. I don’t know how there are so many spider webs inside my room. And this does make me jump – just like a four-year o[ld] – I don’t know if you can hear that? But... Argh. I don’t know how to get rid of it. But in the meantime, I feel like there is an ecosystem within - there’s an echo chain, which is quite obvious... Apparently. Ugh.” (04:43 – 06:25).

⁴⁷ These include, for example, rubbing the guitar against the leather armrests on my swivel chair instead of plucking the strings in a conventional manner, or playing the melodica whilst hiding my face behind it.

spiders are neither welcome nor invited in, yet they are able to find their way of penetrating the physical separation between my flat and the adjoining trees. Similarly, being solely dependent on the technical activation of microphones and the transmission of audio data, the sound/silence dichotomy becomes further indeterminate. With all microphones activated, even some of the most negligible sounds such as a soft breath can quickly surge to a piercing, perpetuate screech, profusely alienating the intimacy and the non-intrusive nature the original breath tends to bear. In this sense, *#outtakes I* essentially makes visible an interplay between my voice being heard and what I really tend to say; between the image of myself and a more credible, unmuted, offline version of myself; between my discourses and the emergence of my subjectivity.

5.2.2. *#outtakes II: an alienated train ride*

#outtakes II was composed for one of the virtual *IN)cógnito* series that I curated alongside my colleagues at The Incógnito Project. It was made during summer 2020, when restrictions on travelling inside the country were temporarily loosened, and when the three of us at the collective were allowed to meet up again and devise new work in real life.

I tend to envision the piece to be an interlude between the other two *#outtakes*, in a weird sense – analogising it to the stereotypical *second movement* of a classical three-movement musical work that serves to bridge two comparatively more ferocious, rugged, and meatier musical structures. It is, therefore, characterised by extrapolating the metaphors enacted in and through *#outtakes I*, preserving energies and prolonging tensions to be released in *#outtakes III*, whilst embracing a more impromptu and inarticulate attribute.

#outtakes II is also closely connected to *Listen to Me* – a multimedia concept piece jointly devised by The Incógnito Project, therein a conversation about discomfort, distance, and discovery is framed within the context of a speech lesson happening simultaneously online and in a discreet location inside the Delamere Forest in Cheshire. The concept piece reflects the collective's shared interest in the new norm, our attempt to interact with each other through barriers and concealments (e.g. face covering, inadequate Wi-Fi signal, inability to

execute apical/alveolar trills), and our contending and overcoming of these convoluted glitching narratives (Figure 5.2-4).



Figure 5.2-4 The Incógnito Project: *Listen to Me* (2020)

That said, *#outtakes II* is set within an emblematic, fantasised train ride, in which my playing of a digital piano, a guitar, an egg shaker, and a pair of Tibetan cymbals are superimposed onto a rail service – bound for Delamere – departing Manchester Oxford Road station (Figure 5.2-5). It is, echoing *Listen to Me*, conceived upon a peculiar state of mind that dwells on the stay-at-home environment and a digital enclosure, even though the body is allowed to be physically outside of such environment. In other words, it questions if by stepping out of the Zoom square I become more distant from my virtual habitat and thus more connected to the realities of my surroundings.



Figure 5.2-5 *#outtakes II* (3:22)

In this sense, the format of video art proves to be oddly pertinent. It highlights for me a multi-layered alienation of the realities emerging from lockdown conditions that are intrinsically afforded by a mutual resistance between technology and liveness (Oram, 2015). For example, even without the travelling restrictions being lifted, my virtual presence can still be easily recontextualised to be inside a train, a nightclub, a concert hall, thanks to the algorithms that help distinguish the background of my living room from the appearance of myself, and thus enable me to virtually relocate with the blink of an eye. Similarly, by microtonally detuning the recordings of a series of cadences that I improvised on a perfectly in-tune digital piano, I am instantly filled with nostalgia – just as when I suddenly become able to picture in my head the figures of a bunch of enlivened spam senders, as I read their ridiculously fabricated names out loud.

5.2.3. #outtakes III: “This is an evolving paradigm”

#outtakes III was composed in Spring 2021 as part of a newly assembled *IN)cógnito* programme to be released later in the year. It was developed in parallel with the write-up of this commentary, coinciding also with the concluding stage of my interrogation of the sound-physicality entanglement. If I were to consider the function of my words to be to articulate those deep-seated artistic intentions and reasonings beneath the surface of my music-making, then *#outtakes III* is an attempt to consolidate my textual and musical discourses into an almost self-contained, audio-visual chapter of this holistic disclosure of my research findings.

In this regard, *#outtakes III* is, for me, one of the most straightforward projects (in my portfolio) to delineate through words. It revolves around a holistic process of translating, enculturating, alienating, and *de-* and *re-* contextualising a draft-in-progress (as of March 2021) of the outline and the aims of my research (Sections 1.1 to 1.2). The draft underwent a sequence of machine translations (Google Translate), drawing in and on various indeterminate logistical and grammatical traits of a diverse, yet randomly selected group of languages,⁴⁸

⁴⁸ The whole sequence is as follows:

English (original) – Chinese (version) 1 – German – French – English 2 – Chinese 2 – Hebrew – Japanese – Finnish – Turkish – English 3 – Georgian – Chinese 3 – Greek – Arabic – Thai – English 4 – Chinese 4.

before returning to both English and (Simplified) Chinese, which were then deployed as pivotal compositional materials for the piece.

Automated statistical machine translation tools such as Google Translate have been notoriously known for both reflecting and projecting biases and controversial societal asymmetries ingrained within the database these algorithms had been trained upon. The biases tend to surface particularly when the translation process involves languages that are considered gender neutral and/or heavily reliant on a synthesised comprehension of contextual information (Prates et al., 2020)⁴⁹.

I have long been fascinated by this phenomenon, considering the entangled ethical, agentive, and performative ambiguities a machine translated piece of discourse seems to naturally possess. If the biases were entrenched within the dataset, I wondered, who is it to blame – given that the algorithm is merely a disembodied performance tool that exploits the dataset? Being a native speaker of one of the notable gender neutral, tense-free languages, I have also been interested in a nuanced analogy between these unintended biases, and the mistakes I am most prone to make when undertaking my own translation process from Chinese to English: who is it to take ownership of the culturally and contextually informed linguistic inaccuracies and epistemological misrepresentations?

Indeed, this is a paradoxical question that is far beyond my own capability to even dare to settle. For me, however, it merely offers an alternative way of problematising the aural-visual dialogue central to my artistic enquiries. There seems to be a quirky state of play afforded by the multi-layered conflict between a disembodied mechanical interpretation of my text, my own embodied resistance against such interpretation, and a recontextualised decision-making as to how this interpretation could be deemed useful. The dialogue is therefore articulated by a process of normalising the emergent logistical and grammatical miscalculations associated with my own discourse that I believe that I am no longer held responsible for.

⁴⁹ For example, in the case of mapping sentences from Hungarian to English, Google Translate would tend to automatically assign gender pronouns to job titles, if no specific gender information is contextualised within the sentences: “*nurse* and *baker* are translated with female pronouns while *engineer* and *CEO* are translated with male one” (Prates et al., 2020, p. 6365).

Hence, *#outtakes III* is conceived entirely within this playful framework, in which my dubbing of the recordings of me reading the machine translations of my words is superimposed onto orchestrated MIDI transcriptions of the recordings (Figure 5.2-6). That said, I chose the direct translation to Chinese from the original English text (Appendix D-i) as the main source material for the background layer of the piece as well as the MIDI transcriptions. I then extracted few sentences from the last two versions of the translated text (one in English and one in Chinese, Appendix D-ii and D-iii respectively) as materials for the foreground layer that, for me, reflects and articulates most effectively the idiosyncrasies of the piece and of my practice as a whole (Figure 5.2-7).



Figure 5.2-6 *#outtakes III* (0:38)



Figure 5.2-7 *#outtakes III* (4:08)

Curiously enough, this process of translation somehow encrypted an emergent *dialogical* attribute to my original text – something that is supposed to be solely personal and non-imposing. The resultant discourses – as highlighted in the foreground layer of the piece – feature many usages of *you*, and when I read them out loud, I felt like I was really communicating my evolving artistic paradigm – one that eventually maps the aural-visual dialogue onto a multidimensional conversation between my subjective self, my pursuit of the sound-physicality entanglement, my musical practice and outputs, and my audience.

That said, there was indeed a peculiar sense of liberty when I said that “when I see and hear the sound on stage, I want to be cute” (01:11-14). Similarly, when *the natural limitations of sound* articulate themselves from the intersection between *my silence* and *my fingerprints*, the idea of John Cage being *an American songwriter* – to me at least – does not seem absurd anymore. By reflecting upon the rich experiences and encounters that my research has afforded to me thus far, perhaps, a *messed-up* story is precisely what *this enjoyable trip* – one that navigates *resources, goals, plans, odd sites* – is about. And I am glad that I have been part of this process.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

I often find it difficult to articulate my creative identity. For years I had referred to myself as a Chinese composer, before finally acknowledging the many, often problematic connotations behind this label. Being a creative practitioner from China in the United Kingdom is an interesting matter. It encloses a network of many nuanced, sometimes paradoxical attributes. And this network cannot be represented simply by a nationality-based pronoun. It means being of an ethnic minority, being entitled to get away with speaking broken English, being from somewhere culturally and politically opposite to the West, being different. It also elicits automatic presumptions, of me being different, of the style of music I write, of me taking advantage of this being different and thus marketing myself within the sector of *diversity* in the broader Western new music scene.

Hence, I have felt – at least partially – an institutionalised expectation for me to articulate, express, and celebrate my being Chinese through things I say and make. There is seemingly an urge for my Chinese identity to be stressed stylistically and in an audible manner, given that it is also tethered to me being a composer, to writing music. That said, I felt compelled at first (and – on a certain level – obliged) to construct every piece of mine on pentatonic scales and harmonies. I, too, was inclined to name my pieces after the English translation (often literal translation) of concepts found in Oriental/Eastern/Chinese philosophy or Buddhism, even though I am not a Buddhist myself.

However, making assertions this way is not as straightforward a task as it might have seemed, to say the least. It is indeed a privilege, for me, to have been cultivated in a society and environment so different from where I am now, and to have been able to extensively experience such a difference first-hand. I am in awe of my Chinese heritage, and of all of those stylistic features I am entitled to, given the colour of my skin, as well as the culture and languages I am most familiar with. But I too have noticed how much of a shift in perspective, through which I correlate these stylistic features to my practice and my general understanding of my practice, has been afforded by my being away from China over the years. The longer I trace back to my origin from a great distance, the more I realise that my

understanding of it is far from sufficient. Perhaps, by holistically claiming that my music celebrates Buddhist thinking and/or Chinese philosophy (something that I used to do), I was – to a certain extent – articulating my being Chinese for the sake of articulating it. And I have subsequently been surprised at how long it took me to arrive at this realisation.

That said, being ethnically different is neither a stylistic choice nor a performative act. It is, rather, an ongoing encounter. What needs articulating is perhaps not the fact that I am Chinese, but how being an expatriate Chinese citizen enriches my vocabulary and the way I compose music. It surpasses an either-or position-taking, availing me a good vantage point to overlook the supposedly negative, that I am physically remote from the East, that I am still not entirely familiar with the West, that I sit in-between many binary oppositions and ideological disparities. It goes far beyond promoting myself with a certain buzzword or writing music that *sounds* exotic.

For me, this ongoing encounter is also – as the anthropologist Tim Ingold (2006) would say – a convoluted wayfaring. It transcends a vast network of destination-to-destination links that often encloses the lives in modern metropolitan societies, just as those tangled trails of inhabitants being overridden in the colonial project of occupation:

Indeed nothing can escape the tentacles of the meshwork of habitation as its ever-extending lines probe every crack or crevice that might potentially afford growth and movement. Life will not be contained, but rather threads its way through the world along the myriad lines of its relations. But if life is not enclosed within a boundary, neither can it be surrounded. What then becomes of our concept of environment? Literally an environment is that which surrounds. For inhabitants, however, the environment comprises not the surroundings of a bounded place but a zone in which their several pathways are thoroughly entangled. In this zone of entanglement – this meshwork of interwoven lines – there are no insides or outsides, only openings and ways through. (p. 53)

Whilst I acknowledge that a great portion of sociological discourses on the *in-between* are derived from exile and diaspora, it is by no means what I tend to articulate. For me, it instead is a state of mind resulting from a chain of voluntary choices that are afforded by my curiosity towards the interstitial territories along

point-to-point connections. It manifests upon a pursuit of neutrality, of a multitude of active resistances against alienation and an imposed subjective position-taking. It marks where I depart from the unchangeable facts of my history, whilst intently facilitating the history's continuous, advancing force, embracing the flux of experience my factual history brings me to. In this sense, I resonate strongly with a sentiment expressed by the science journalist Angela Saini (2019):

Wear your identity lightly. Don't be sucked into believing that you are so different from others, that your rights have more value, that your blood is a different colour. There is no authenticity except that of personal experience. (p. 291)

I also acknowledge that part of my being and my vocabulary is predominately informed by the digital age I am in, and by social media and other keyword-driven online activities. I am fluent in using hashtags and emojis, and I am, therefore, comfortable in applying an appropriate grammar when using them.⁵⁰ I enjoy them being both precise and vague, being highly dependent on context and indexing, enabling polarised interpretations simultaneously, whilst – most of the time – preserving my actual opinions as well as emotions. I enjoy how they tend to afford to me an emergent communication with my compositional ideals, in which I am able to say what I want to say without saying them. Although I do not see myself as a talkative person, and I tend to stay quiet under many social circumstances before being ready to speak, my creative outputs are able to facilitate those conversations for me, and hence let me embrace the in-between I am truly after.

Therefore, I believe what this research inherently entails is an overarching shift in the focus of my artistic practice and the unfolding of my creative identity. I started from striving to identify and consolidate a rather tangible interpretation of my own of the entangled interplay between my sound and the physicality articulated in and through my sound. However, it had become increasingly evident that this interplay is constantly problematised by a convoluted network of many emergent, dialogical processes that are greatly entwined with my holistic ontological growth as an artist and as an ordinary individual.

⁵⁰ Such as the elimination of space in-between words, the use of acronyms and normalised quotations.

In this regard, the formats and practice of multimedia, instrumental theatre, concert music performance, installation, performance art, the emphasis of sound's and silence's articulations, the dichotomy between the ambient/mundane and the stylised, the triangulation between composer, performer, and the score, the redistributed performance agency, the coexistence of the inside and outside, the reciprocal relationship between technology and liveness, for me, are all merely normalised features of a reconsidered, context-dependent, broader aural-visual dialogue that in itself demands no concrete definition.

If I were to admit that one of my main original research objectives was to sift through a collection of compositional artefacts that are central to a supposedly robust and unequivocal approach to musical experimentation and my future creative practice, then my conclusion here would essentially render that objective futile. Whilst the filtering process to some extent helped me bring a number of projects to fruition (e.g. *offset ii* and *iii*), what it eventually achieved was to make me realise that I am surrounded by an abundance of conversations that I had previously not paid proper attention to. It invigorates me to embrace the convoluted, the messy, the ambiguous, and to willingly accept that this being convoluted is intrinsically afforded to me through – as proposed by the sociologist A.J. Loughlin (2018) – the very act of being a rational subject:

As rational beings, therefore, we must settle questions, however provisionally, for ourselves instead of entrusting their settlement to others on our behalf. [...] our cynicism should be saved for those who seek to act on our behalf, without our accepting or perhaps even comprehending their judgments. Our trust, on the other hand, is best placed in our own capacities to understand the world, in the reality of the objects and people that stand before us but who need not *remain* at a distance if only we would choose to exercise our rational capacities and, through knowing them as they really are, bring them into our personal sphere. (p. 172)

As a result, it is my hope that my musical practice over the past four years, as demonstrated by my portfolio and as detailed in this commentary, can offer a certain new, alternative, and inviting way of understanding the variety of appeals and challenges surrounding compositional embodiment, and the intricate correlations between musical experimentation, visibility of subjectivity, and the socially and politically constructed narratives around the self. I would also like to

articulate, through my personal experience of working this way, that confronting, normalising, and thus exploiting an array of resistances towards and against stylised and institutionalised expectations is, in fact, a catalyst and an invitation for new, robust, compelling, and original musical and artistic work that innately embodies and projects rich aural and visual information. I believe that it is an essential part of my (still) evolving paradigm, and I look forward to seeing where it brings me to next.

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**Appendix A -
Complete List of Creative Outputs
(from September 2017)**

- 1) *offset i – Ballad %\$#@!* (2017-) – for amplified pipa
- 2) *offset ii – Nocturne !@#\$%* (2017) – for accordion, score objects, and spatialised amplification/electronics
- 3) *offset iii – etude* (2018) – for 2-6 performers
- 4) *offset iii (b) – etude for tuba* (2018) – for tuba
- 5) *offset iv – backflash* (2018) – for bass flute, contrabass clarinet, a page-turner, and audience members
- 6) *#rulingwheels\$1* (2018) – interactive installation
- 7) *offset v – set-off* (2018-19) – for ensemble
- 8) *#enclosingenclosedenclosure* (2019) – for flute
- 9) *Dying Archon #rulingwheels\$1* (2019) – for a solo saxophonist with VR headset (jointly devised with Tywi J.H. Roberts and Simeon Evans)
- 10) *#insulative* (2019) – for 6 performers and pre-recorded audio/fixed media
- 11) *#inlinewith- offset iii (b)* (2019) – (one-off) video score with live piano accompaniment
- 12) *#outtakes I* (2020) – video art/multimedia
- 13) *#outtakes II* (2020) – video art/multimedia
- 14) *Listen to Me* (2020) – video art/multimedia (jointly devised with The Incógnito Project)
- 15) *upfold, downfold, unfold* (2020-2021) – video art/multimedia, for a remote ensemble of more than three performers
- 16) *vibrato/scratch lottery/vegetable soup* (2021) – for viola
- 17) *#outtakes III* (2021) – video art/multimedia

Appendix B - Selected Performances (from September 2017)

i. Performances of my own work

- 12 December 2017 *offset ii – Nocturne !@#\$\$%*
Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
Decontamination #11
Eldad Diamant (accordion), Bofan Ma (electronics)
- 12 March 2018 *offset iii – etude*
Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
PRiSM 8³
Hannah Boxall (voice), Simeon Evans (saxophone),
William Graham (percussion), Aaron Breeze (piano)
- 31 May 2018 *offset iv – backflash*
Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
Rosalind Ridout (bass flute), Jason Alder (contrabass
clarinet), Callum Coomber (page-turner)
- 27 July 2018 *offset iv (b) – etude for tuba*
Lichtenbergschule, Darmstadt, Germany
Jack Adler-McKean (tuba)
- 11 October 2018 *offset iv – backflash*
Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
INCÓGNITO #1
Jeremy Salter (bass flute), Jason Alder (contrabass
clarinet), Flora Birkbeck (page-turner)
- 24 November 2018 *#rulingwheel\$1*
Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
Being Human Festival 2018
- 23 January 2019 *offset v – set-off*
Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
IN FOCUS Festival
Mark Heron (conductor), RNCM New Ensemble
- 27 May 2019 *#enclosingenclosedenclosure*
Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
Kathryn Williams (flute)
- 7 June 2019 *#enclosingenclosedenclosure*
Churchill College, Cambridge
Kathryn Williams (flute)

- 03 July 2019 *#insulative*
Victoria Baths, Manchester
SPACE//SENCE II
Vonnegut Collective
- 31 October 2019 *#inlinewith- offset iii (b)*
Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
INCÓGNITO #2
Jack Adler McKean (tuba), Bofan Ma (piano), Steven Daverson and Isabel Benito Gutiérrez (video projection)
- 2 November 2019 *#enclosingenclosedenclosure*
Southbank Centre, London
Deep Minimalism Festival 2.0
Kathryn Williams (flute)
- 2 February 2020 *#enclosingenclosedenclosure*
Constellation, Chicago, United States
Kathryn Williams (flute)
- 8 June 2020 *#enclosingenclosedenclosure*
Livestream as part of RNCM Remote Series
Kathryn Williams (flute)
- 15 June 2020 *#outtakes I*
Online release at *Together Apart: Composing in the Age of Zoom*, as part of PRiSM *Future Music Festival*
- 1 September 2020 *#outtakes II*
Online release at *IN)cógnito #2*
- 18 March 2021 *upfold, downfold, unfold*
Online release at *CoMA Manchester – To be Held for a Long Time*, as part of RNCM *PLAY Festival*

ii. Performances of others' and/or collaborative work

- 13 June 2019 *Dying Archon #rulingwheel\$1* – Tywi
Roberts and Bofan Ma
Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
Virtual Reality+ at PRiSM *Future Music Festival*
Simeon Evans (saxophone), Tywi J.H. Roberts and Bofan Ma (electronics)
- 31 October 2019 *Audio-visual conversations* – Isabel Benito Gutiérrez
Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
INCÓGNITO #2
Jack Adler McKean (tuba and piano), Bofan Ma (piano and tuba), Isabel Benito Gutiérrez (video projection)

- 20 February 2020 *Juriritubaïoka* – Vinko Globokar
University of Manchester, Manchester
Jack Adler-McKean (tuba), Bofan Ma (piano)
- 12 March 2020 *Juriritubaïoka* – Vinko Globokar
University of Leeds, Leeds
Jack Adler-McKean (tuba), Bofan Ma (piano)
- 17 June 2020 *Escape Room* – Amanda Zhou
Online release at *IN)cógnito #1*
Zakiya Leeming, Isabel Benito Gutiérrez, Bofan Ma
(performers)
- 1 September 2020 *Music that helps us express opinions – I. Colour* – Nina Whiteman
Listen to Me – The Incógnito Project
Online release at *IN)cógnito #2*
Zakiya Leeming, Isabel Benito Gutiérrez, Bofan Ma
(performers)
- 25 February 2021 *Walk Event and One Note* – Christopher Hobbs
Online release at *Together Apart*, as part of 2021
Klangwerkstatt Berlin - Festival für Neue Musik
With KNM Campus Ensemble, Ensemble KNM Berlin,
and ensembles throughout the international CoMA network
- 18 March 2021 *Walk Event* – Christopher Hobbs
Song for CoMA – Ellen Sargen
Compositions 1960 #7 – La Monte Young
Is this the correct amount of social distancing? – Amber Priestley
Online release at *CoMA Manchester – To be Held for a Long Time*, as part of RNCM *PLAY* Festival
With CoMA Manchester

iii. Conference presentations

- 10 May 2018 *On Compositionally Prioritising a Visual/Aural Interaction - a reflective introduction to my recent projects*
RNCM PGR Conference 2018
Royal Northern College of Music
- 22 May 2019 *In Search of Control, Contextualisation, and Performance Physicality*
RNCM PGR Conference 2019
Royal Northern College of Music
- 19 May 2020 *#insulative: Finding the 'In-between'*
RNCM PGR Conference 2020

Royal Northern College of Music [online]

5 December 2020

*In Search of the In-between, and an Embodied
Compositional Practice*
Midlands New Music Symposium
University of Nottingham [online]

25 June 2021

*CoMA Manchester: Building a Community New Music
Ensemble over Zoom*
[Along with Ellen Sargen and Shaun Davies]
Music and/as Process: Networked Collaborative Processes
Conference
University of Wolverhampton [online]

Appendix C - Other Relevant Recordings/Performance Documentations

(All links provided are open access)

offset iv – backflash

(Premiere version)

Rosalind Ridout – bass flute
Jason Alder – contrabass clarinet
Callum Coomber – page-turner

Recorded live at Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
31 May 2018

<https://youtu.be/8RnobxtO3us>

Dying Archon #rulingwheel\$1 – Tywi J.H. Roberts and Bofan Ma

Simeon Evans – saxophone, VR headset, swivel chair
Tywi J.H. Roberts and Bofan Ma – electronics

Recorded live at Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
13 June 2019

<https://youtu.be/K39FyrLPyk8>

Audiovisual Conversations – Isabel Benito Gutiérrez

Jack Adler-McKean – tuba and piano
Bofan Ma – piano and tuba

Recorded live at Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
31 October 2019

<https://youtu.be/hPK9OIennPM>

IN)cógnito #2 (Part 1)

Programme containing –

Music that helps us express opinions – I. Colour – Nina Whiteman
#outtakes II – Bofan Ma
Flect – Ellen Sargen and Darren Gallacher
Listen to Me – The Incógnito Project

Performed by The Incógnito Project (Bofan Ma, Zakiya Leeming, Isabel Benito Gutiérrez), Ellen Sargen, Darren Gallacher

Released online on 1 September 2020

<https://youtu.be/9sLlr-PH2MI>

CoMA Manchester at RNCM *PLAY* Festival: “*To be Held for a Long Time*”

Programme containing -

Walk Event – Christopher Hobbs

Song for CoMA – Ellen Sargen

upfold, downfold, unfold – Bofan Ma

Compositions 1960 #7 – La Monte Young

Is this the correct amount of social distancing? – Amber Priestley

Performed by CoMA Manchester

Released online on 18 March 2021

https://youtu.be/WSkVVy_waM4

Appendix D - Source Text for #outtakes III

i. Chinese version 1 (background layer)

此评论对应于2017年至2021年之间创作的音乐作品集。这些作品表现为三个相互关联的系列：偏移，#和#演出。检查了乐器剧院的概念，突出了规范化的室内互动以及人体在声音中的参与，以现场表演或视听格式作为音乐表演进行制作。他们广泛地研究了声音和表演物理之间的错综复杂的纠缠。评论和作品集记录了不断扩大的个人，艺术和构图词汇。他们一起按时间顺序描述了我从博士研究中获得的艺术思维和实践的发展，其中通过实践进行审问，同时结合自动人种学的要素，因为我制定了一种不断发展的构图实验方法，这是我最初作品的核心。

我的研究的最初动力是艺术家和理论家塞思·金·科恩的写作。在文章的开头，我有话要说，但我没有说，他说：“音乐取决于前后的时间，中间的时间和持续的时间”。金·科恩的讲话直接回应了美国作曲家约翰·凯奇的声明：“我无话可说，我要说”。这种表达不仅是指听到的声音，还指的是声音信息（无论是投射的还是隐含的）与记忆，经验和环境相互作用的具体过程。通过问“如果说什么都没有等于保持沉默一样”，它就会引起一个更加普遍的（如果不是更大胆的话）声明：“没有单一的来源，没有单一的目的，没有单一的计划。没有奇异之处。一切都是清楚的”。

在过去的三年中，我发现自己经常重新审视这些词汇，在此期间，我的创作实践经历了巨大的转变。每当我为自己的决策辩护时，都会使我想起它们。没有奇异之处。同样，此评论并不旨在论述单个主题，构图方法和/或艺术宣言。相反，它记录了声音与物理的纠缠通常如何充当我对其他涌现媒介的催化剂的作用，这些媒介有助于弥合我自己与创作成果之间的鸿沟。跟随我冒险进入以前对我来说未知的领域，即剧院，开放式乐谱，多媒体。它还揭示了我如何看待自己是一位创造性的从业者，如何开始发现并认可我的思维和制作的多层次历史，如何开始将自己体现在创作中。这是一段令人着迷的旅程，对我而言，这才是真正重要的。

对声音物理性纠缠的质疑源于我长期的个人偏爱之一。对我而言，音乐作品的表演通常包含两个不可分割的元素之间的对话：视觉和听觉。我能够同时收听声音并查看声音的产生，从而丰富了我参加现场音乐表演的经验。即使仅通过扬声器（例如在电声组合物的展示柜中）进行演奏，我也会感到兴奋，因为我知道它们是通过快速移动音圈和振动膜来进行演奏的，并且我坐在扬声器的其他成员旁边可能会或可能不会遇到与我一样的观众。

因此，我想为舞台上的视觉和听觉都吸引人。我希望我的工作优先考虑声音和声音表达方式之间的对话：使身体，力学，力量，抵抗力可见一音乐/乐器表演中固有但经常被忽视的方面和行为。我想创建这样的情况，在这种情况下，这种表演行为与其产生的声音和音乐效果一样。我想传递包含语言和非语言信息的信息：比较我自己的一言不发和保持沉默。我想扩大我

的词汇量。通过扩展，我想在技术上和创造性上超越我最擅长的事物（例如，写下和弦和旋律，设计说明性的音乐结构，制作乐谱）。我想对音乐制作过程中固有的各种参数提出个人的看法，并在某种程度上与众不同。我想成为过程的一部分，而不是一个先发起然后走开并见证它的人。

这些目标，尽管看起来似乎是投机性的，但将我引向了实践所在的概念框架。听觉（声音）或视觉（视觉）表演的物理性都不是指导这项研究的因素。我的作品倾向于居住在两者之间。我意识到通往这里的道路。我试图了解（西方）实验音乐和音乐解构的背景。我希望从音乐和艺术角度捕捉整体行为。我质疑乐谱的作用；我考虑了它如何颠覆我自己（作曲家，表演者和听众）之间可预测的，从历史角度出发的关系。我上台表演。我设计要执行的事情，而不是分发完成的作品。因此，我希望下文中的叙述会变得混乱，因为我希望调查最终将针对我自己。为什么这些问题对我如此吸引人？

ii. English version 4 (foreground layer)

This opinion corresponds to a collection of compositions created in 2017 and 2021. These works are presented in a series of three interconnected titles: Musical-theatre Concept, Interactive Interior Design, Human Body Research in Musical Performance, *Offset* and # Performance. In the form of presentation or audio-visual aids. Complete it. They study the complex relationships between good physics and performance. Veterans' magazine notes personal vocabulary and art and word formation. They discuss the development of artistic ideas and practices you have gained from your dissertation. These are time series used for actual research and are also part of machine ethnography. At the same time, the integration process has been developed based on the experience of evolution as a fundamental element of the original project.

The original impulse for my research was written by artist and theorist Seth Kim-Cohen, at the beginning of this article I had something to say, but I'm not saying it, he said, "Music depends on time and time, even time goes by." Kim-Cohen's speech immediately responded to the testimony of American songwriter John Cage. "I have nothing to say." But it refers to the sound that is heard, also the specific interactions between audio data, (reflex or indirect), memory, experience, and environment - "nothing is more important than silence" (if not in bold) - providing a broader definition: "resources, goals, plans, odd sites, everything understands, yes".

Over the past four years, I have checked the dictionary once again. During this time my creative activity underwent a huge transformation. When I support my decisions, they remind me. Uniqueness. Additionally, this article is not intended to discuss individual issues, styles of composition and / or artistic expression. But he noted that voice-body interactions often foster new communication, creating a gap between creative success in unfamiliar areas such as theatre, public speaking and multimedia. You can also see yourself as a creative professional who has many ways to discover the background of ideas and creativity and begin to understand them at all levels and begin to integrate yourself. How? ... For me, this is a very enjoyable trip.

The natural limitations of sound have long been my personal preference. For me, musicals often require dialogue between separate visual and auditory parts. You can listen and experience the sound at the same time and take part in live performances that will add to your experience. I'm glad you were able to quickly invite soundtracks and movie lists, even if you play them separately to the speakers. Such as display cabinets containing PV components housing. Your friends can meet with an audience like me.

So when I see and hear the sound on stage, I want to be cute. I hope my work enhances the dialogue between vocal expression and vocal expression: so that the body, mechanisms, strength, and resistance are visible, especially in music / performance, but usually not. I like to play with my own music and effects. I would like to send you a letter with verbal and non-verbal information to compare my silence to my fingerprints. I want to increase my vocabulary. As we get older, we hope to explore the possibilities of technology and creativity. Such as writing chords and melodies, creating patterns in the structure of music, and making notes. Personally, I would love to see different parameters of the music production process. But there are some differences. I want to be a part of this process. He didn't vouch from the start.

These goals are for profit. But leads to a practical conceptual framework. Physical characteristics of acoustic (acoustic) or visual (visual) performance were not the driving factors for this study. My work is always in the middle. You can view the directions here. I try to understand the background of experimental music (Western) and decipher it. I want to understand general behaviour in music and art. I would like to know the role of music and how it interferes with the expected historical relationship between me, composer, actor, listener. I play on stage. I am not planning to do anything and I am not sharing my work. So I hope the next story is messed up, and I hope I can calm down. Why are these questions so interesting to me?

iii. Chinese version 4 (foreground layer)

该意见对应于 2017 年和 2021 年创作的作品集，这些作品以三个相互关联的标题呈现：音乐剧场概念，交互式室内设计，音乐表演，偏移和 # 表演的人体研究。以演示或视听辅助工具的形式。完成它。他们研究了良好的物理性能与表现之间的复杂关系。《退伍军人》杂志记录了个人词汇以及艺术和单词构成。他们讨论了您从论文中获得的艺术思想和实践的发展。这些是用于实际研究的时间序列，也是机器民族志的一部分。同时，基于演化的经验将集成过程作为原始项目的基本要素进行了开发。

我的研究最初的冲动是由艺术家和理论家塞思·金·科恩撰写的，在本文的开头，我有话要说。但是我不是在说。他说：“音乐取决于时间和时间，即使时间流逝也是如此。”金·科恩的讲话立即回应了美国歌曲作者约翰·凯奇的证词。“我没什么可说的。”但是指的是所听到的声音，也是音频数据之间的特定交互作用。（反射或间接），记忆，经验和环境“没有什么比沉默重要”（如果不是粗体的话）提供了更广泛的定义：“资源，目标，计划，奇特的场所，一切都能理解，是的”。

在过去的三年中，我再次检查了字典。在这段时间里，我的创作活动发生了巨大的变化。当我支持我的决定时，他们会提醒我。独特性此外，本文无意讨论个别问题，构图样式和/或艺术表现形式。但是他指出，声音与身体的互动通常会促进新的交流，从而在剧院，公共演讲和多媒体等陌生领域创造成功之间存在差距。您还可以将自己视为一个富有创造力的专业人员，他可以通过多种方式发现思想和创造力的背景，并开始在各个层面上理解它们并开始融入自己。如何？对我来说，这是一个非常愉快的旅程。

声音的自然局限性一直是我的个人喜好。对我来说，音乐剧经常需要在视觉和听觉部分之间进行对话。您可以同时收听和体验声音，并参加现场表演，这将增加您的体验。我很高兴您能够快速邀请音轨和电影列表，即使您单独将它们播放到扬声器上也是如此。（例如包含 PV 组件的展示柜）外壳。您的朋友可以和像我这样的听众见面。

因此，当我在舞台上看到并听到声音时，我想变得可爱。我希望我的作品能增强人声表达与人声表达之间的对话：使身体，机制，力量和抵抗力可见，尤其是在音乐/表演中，但通常不可见。我喜欢玩自己的音乐和效果。我想给您发送一封包含语言和非语言信息的信件，以比较我的沉默和指纹。我想增加我的词汇量。随着年龄的增长，我们希望探索技术和创造力的可能性。（例如，编写和弦和旋律，在音乐结构中创建图案，以及做笔记）个人而言，我很想看到音乐制作过程的不同参数。但是有一些区别。我想成为这个过程的一部分。他从一开始就没有保证。

这些目标是为了赢利。但是会导致建立一个实用的概念框架。声学（声学）或视觉（视觉）性能的物理特性不是此研究的驱动因素。我的工作总是在中间。您可以在此处查看说明。我尝试了解实验音乐（西方）的背景并对其进行解密。我想了解音乐和艺术中的一般行为。我想知道音乐的作用以及它如何干扰我之间的预期历史关系。（作曲家，演员，听众）我在舞台上表演。我没有计划做任何事情，也没有分享我的工作。因此，我希望下一个故事搞砸了，我希望我能冷静下来。为什么这些问题令我感兴趣？