

What Does a Secret
Sound Like? Exploring
Communicative Agency
as a Composer

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment

of requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

Sydney Conservatorium of Music

The University of Sydney

2022

Statement of Originality

I declare that the research presented here is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other institution for the award of a degree.

Signed:

Date:

Abstract

This thesis and portfolio of compositions investigates an aesthetics of safety and secrecy in sound. The artistic research is especially concerned with the boundaries between or overlaps of public or private intent in communication and creative expression. While rhetoric is a prominent research focus in the study of composing traditions, the angle of agency, especially in withholding information or expression deserves further attention in the realm of music and sound. This perspective is informed by key scholars across secrecy studies, artistic research and sociology as well as composers whose works approach similar themes. Several musical compositions form this portfolio and discussion: *Secret* (2018-19) for concert and alto flute soloist, backing track and gate effect; *Commute* (2018-20) a chamber opera for mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone and small ensemble; companion works *Street Sketches* (2018) for chamber ensemble of thirteen instruments, and *Streets* (2019) for orchestra; and *Sonata: Ode* (2019) a large-scale solo piano work. The benefits of journaling in both compositional process and output are explored as an avenue for combining creativity and privacy, and for expanding expressive agility across a variety of media whether in the thesis, my compositions or process manuscripts. Aspects of each work are analysed in depth to model various ways that the initial journaling format carries through from the experimental stage and into the final musical output. There are innovations in how live performance mediates with a fixed backing track, and in processes of deconstruction and juxtaposition with ancient source materials to critique gender dynamics in traditions such as opera to offer alternative modes of being and doing. These processes and perspectives have allowed the compositions to extend beyond an initial comfort zone to navigate vulnerable, sensitive and important themes such as street harassment and gendered violence, especially in the light of #metoo.

Keywords: safety; secrecy; journaling; composition; #metoo.

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which I live and work and have completed this thesis and portfolio, the Darug and the Eora people. I would like to pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

At the forefront of my gratitude is Prof. Liza Lim, who supervised this research and has mentored several cohorts of Composing Women. Prof. Lim's capable and courageous leadership has been an inspiration and a source of great strength and reassurance.

Taking part in the Composing Women program of Sydney Conservatorium of Music in 2018-19 has been exciting and career changing, incorporating significant workshopping, recording, travel and professional development opportunities. I am very thankful to the Conservatorium and The University of Sydney for the opportunity to undertake this program in the wonderful company of fellow composers Josephine Macken, Bree van Reyk and Georgia Scott, who are all creating impactful and exciting work. Many thanks to Jacqui Smith and Fiona Chan at Sydney Conservatorium of Music, who facilitated the busy schedule of meetings and activities, and David Kim Boyle and his team for audiovisual support.

The postgraduate intake of 2018 at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music were a wonderful group of musicians sharing their research and activities enthusiastically. Many thanks to my student colleagues for their thoughts and ideas, and to Helen Mitchell and Neal Peres da Costa for coordinating these weekly meetings.

I am enormously grateful for the support provided by The University of Sydney in the form of the RTP Stipend Scholarship (2018-2021), The Paulette Isabel Jones PhD Completion Scholarship (2021), a Sydney Moss Scholarship (2019) and a Vice Chancellor's Global Mobility Scholarship (2019).

I was fortunate to compose the works in this portfolio in collaboration and communication with some phenomenal performers and associates. Special thanks go to: Claire Chase; Mai Nguyen; Levy Lorenzo; Lamorna Nightingale, Clemence Williams, Jack Symonds, Pierce Wilcox, Huw Belling, Sydney Chamber Opera, Roger Benedict, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, the SSO Fellows, Ravel, Miles Mulin-Chivers and Bernadette Harvey.

My final and most loving thanks go to my husband Kieren, and Frances, our amazing child, who has been the most endearing company through several COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. Their genuine, emotional and practical support has made this undertaking possible.

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List of Portfolio Compositions and Recording Information

Recordings of the works in this Portfolio of Compositions can be accessed at <https://peggypolias.com/dma-portfolio-of-compositions-2022/>, or contact the candidate directly via <https://peggypolias.com/contact/>.

Secret (2019)

for concert flute/alto flute, fixed backing track and gate effect

Duration: 11'18"

Performed by Claire Chase (flutes); Recorded by Levy Lorenzo

Performance date: 29 September 2019

Performance venue: National Sawdust, Brooklyn, New York, USA

Commute (2018-20)

a chamber opera, for 3 singers, small ensemble and electronics:

Odyssea (mezzo-soprano), Suitor 1 (tenor), Suitor 2 (baritone), flute, clarinet (doubling on bass clarinet), percussion, piano, violin (doubling on viola), double bass

Duration: c.20'

Commissioned by Sydney Chamber Opera, co-presented with Carriageworks as part of the *Breaking Glass* quadruple bill production.

Production credits: Clemence Williams (Director of *Commute* & *The Invisible Bird*); Danielle Maas (Director of *Her Dark Marauder* & *The Tent*); Charles Davis (Set & Costume Design); Alexander Berlage (Lighting Design); David Bergman (AV Design); Ben Carey (Sound Design); Pierce Wilcox (Writer & Dramaturg); Jason Thelwell (Production Manager); Ellen Castles, Ayah Tayeh (Stage Management)

Musician credits: Jack Symonds (Conductor & piano); Huw Belling (Assistant Conductor); Jessica O'Donoghue (Odyssea); Mitchell Riley (Suitor 1); Simon Lobelson (Suitor 2); Lamorna Nightingale (flute); Jason Noble (clarinets); Alison Pratt (percussion); James Wannan (violin/viola); Ben Ward (double bass)

Filmed March 2020, released online 24 April 2020

Recording venue: Carriageworks

Street Sketches (2018)

for 13 instruments:

flute, oboe (doubling on cor anglais), clarinet (doubling on bass clarinet), bassoon (doubling on contrabassoon), horn, trumpet, trombone, percussion, violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello, double bass

Duration: c. 12'

First performed by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra Fellows; conducted by Roger Benedict

Performance date: 12 October 2018

Performance venue: Recital Hall West, Sydney Conservatorium of Music

Order of movements in the premiere performance was: VOICES, CIRCLES, BACKBEAT, DREAMS, LOW

Streets (2019)

for orchestra:

2 flutes, 2 oboes (2nd doubling on cor anglais), 2 clarinets (2nd doubling on bass clarinet), 2 bassoons (2nd doubling on contrabassoon), 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 3 percussion, harp, violin I, violin II, viola, violoncello, double bass

Duration: c.13'

Workshop performance by Sydney Symphony Orchestra; conducted by Roger Benedict

Workshop date: 7 November 2019

Workshop venue: Seymour Centre, The University of Sydney

Sonata: Ode (2019)

for solo piano

Duration: c.24'

Performed by Bernadette Harvey (piano), in a special adapted version with the addition of spoken word throughout, and cello in movement 3, "Silencing." Excerpts from the poetry of Enheduanna were recited by Ravel, and Miles Mulin-Chivers performed on cello

Performance dates: 16, 17, 18 January 2020, live recording captured 18 January 2020

Recording venue: Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, within the installation artwork *War Room* (2015;2019) by Cornelia Parker as part of *Ode: Sonata*, a Sydney Festival 2020 solo concert by Bernadette Harvey.

As at the date of lodgement there is a forthcoming solo performance by Bernadette Harvey, December 2022, in Coffs Harbour, NSW.

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Content Warning

This thesis and portfolio of compositions include discussion and artistic portrayal of aspects of street harassment and sexual and gendered violence.

Chapter 1: Introduction, “Wading through a stream...”

When I was [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED],
a man [REDACTED] [REDACTED] me. #metoo

When I was midway through this degree and project, walking through a suburban neighbourhood to collect my child from school one afternoon, two men stopped their car on the driving lane of the road right beside where I was walking to loudly make barking noises out the open window at me. I stopped walking, stared at them, made a bit of a face, and said nothing. What could I say? “Why are you doing that?” Or, “Oh hey, I’m writing an opera about you guys?” Perhaps a *Kerberos* episode could be introduced into the chamber opera in this composition portfolio, *Commute* (2018-20).

But this minor inconvenience is not the episode I am referring to at the top of the page. In various communicative environments, such as social media, I often hesitate to publicly share thoughts and ideas, whether having a #metoo theme or on completely different topics. Sometimes this is hesitation within the moment of wanting to share an idea, and other times this is weeks- or months- long reluctance to communicate anything at all in a public arena. It is not wilful non-disclosure of anything particularly sensitive, but a fear of being invalidated in some way. When we then add #metoo to the mix, when women and other marginalised people are considering sharing their previously undisclosed experiences of trauma, I can imagine that the numerous available accounts are just a small portion of a much larger cultural problem. I can imagine this because I have not had the courage to publicly and unambiguously disclose the details of many of my own experiences, such as the one erased at the very top of the page. Once something is disclosed, transferred to another, it cannot be retrieved.

And so I have made a decision to type out the disclosure above and then to carefully redact it. The blanked-out sentence acts as a container, an archetype. It starts out referring to a specific memory but could just as easily refer to many other memories from different times, different places, different perpetrators, me at different ages. Then beyond that, the redacted sentence above is no longer the perspective of me, Peggy Polias, but can just as easily act as a vehicle for other people’s memories, a traumatic space, but one that offers a degree of solidarity and possibly some relief by being shared. #Metoo disclosures en masse in a social feed read like a devastating epic composed by different writers. Sceptically, one could argue that the structure above need not carry trauma, but mundane, harmless details: “*When I was seven years old, a man waved hello at me.*” But this is not my intention: anyone who has been in a situation of street harassment, gendered violence, sexual abuse or other traumatic violence is likely to hold their breath a moment and freeze up a little when reading this container sentence; like I do, often inserting one particular memory, but sometimes finding that others surface.

For the duration of this artistic research project, in which I explore the nature of secrecy and directly face my own experiences of gendered violence within the creative work I do as a composer, the choice to say/type/write a specific occurrence directly and openly (or not) has solidified into a recurring awareness of the choice not to explicitly disclose but to withhold specificity, to allude. The present thesis and accompanying portfolio of original musical works then are a journey into non-specific or partial disclosure in the auditory realm. “What does a secret sound like?” becomes more specifically:

How can a musical work adopt similar archetypal structure to the redacted sentence above?

What kinds of approaches can I use to offer auditory glimpses of sensitive material or themes? How does this sonic, non-verbal realm allow a composer to emulate some of the sensory aspects of such an experience? Are there transformational strategies I can use so that we don’t remain in and with this sensory experience/memory, but are enabled to move on or heal, or to draw attention to social structures that need to be adjusted to prevent these occurrences? The aesthetic plane is a fitting perspective from which to explore many questions like these, and to develop the innate qualities of themes such as secrecy or safety into a sonic vocabulary.

I haven’t always composed with this confrontational intent. The bulk of my existing work has formed a cocooned space within which I have consistently affirmed domestic forms of safety: whether through musical settings of handicraft stitches (*Stitch* [2007]), themes of nostalgia and parent-child intimacy (*Braids* [2017]) or nature and science themes (*Hive* [2017]; *Phlogiston* [2014]; *The Moon* [2007]). The relentless tsunami of #metoo has been a catalyst for reconsidering this approach. While it seems like an instinctive tendency to create safe spaces in my music relates to my lived experience as a woman cautiously navigating public spaces and/or public discourse, the realisation and confirmation of the extent of gendered violence leaves me wanting to raise my hand and say “me too,” if not verbally or in words, then compositionally, in sound.

A deliberate and distinct change in creative direction necessarily prompts a degree of reflection on past work. In particular I have found myself delving into unfinished and unpublished works. An abandoned orchestral sketch has been completely reworked into *Street Sketches* (2018) and *Streets* (2019) in the present portfolio. An hour-long collection of old, unreleased songs *Miniatures* (2003) became the source material underpinning the backing track and flute part in *Secret* (2019). This old collection of recordings signals a fragmentation of my overall musical output, into public-facing score-based work and a secret history of confessional recordings in singer-songwriter mode. I have tended to consistently exclude the latter work from my primary oeuvre and commenced this project with a suspicion that this compartmentalisation had parallels with a more generalised communicative hesitancy that deserved further investigation. This has led to recurring compositional experimentation with ways of incorporating elements of popular music style and structure into a score-based art-music setting across most of the works in this portfolio. Could

aspects of popular music come to represent public urban geographies? Rather than merely simulating pop song forms, like hip-hop, ballad or Greek rebetika, deconstructing them has become a critical creative gesture.

These observations have increased my consciousness of the possibilities for private modes of creativity to be woven into public-facing creative work. Musical gestures that previously only existed in a private sphere of archived, withdrawn or discarded material have been excavated and surfaced. Beyond the creative sonic medium, I will show numerous examples of private or journalistic creativity across various media formats that informed the works in this portfolio, sometimes as part of the process of composing and sometimes filtering into the final composition itself: loose-leaf manuscript and pen inscriptions, voice recordings, old diaries, digital file formats and other archives.

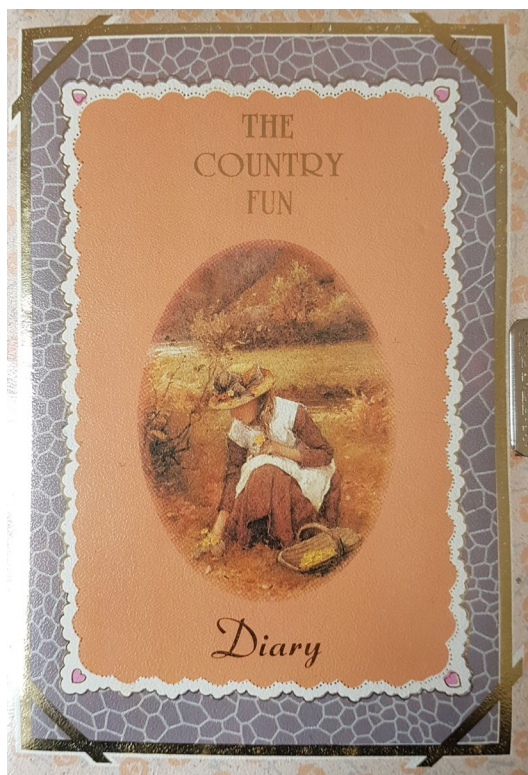


FIGURE 1.1: One of my teenage diaries from the 1990s, The Country Fun Diary. It had a lock and scented pages.

Once secrecy is adopted into the palette of creative decision-making, choices are opened up in the stages of communication before reaching the point of making a sound. When I make a choice not to divulge a particularity, it is not because I am asserting that secrecy or silence is *better than* disclosure. I need to take a moment to declare my status as an able-bodied cis-gendered, heterosexual woman of European (Greek) heritage, writing from a feminist perspective, which affords me a certain privilege to engage with the theme of secrecy in this way. My experiences of secrecy and disclosure tend to be single-instance moments of decision, often related more to memory or feeling than core parts of my identity. Beyond the perspective I am able to offer, there is some beautifully nuanced research on disclosure in the discourse on Coming Out with respect to sexuality or gender affirmation. Ski Hunter gives an informative and

practical volume that moves through themes such as intersectional identity, environment and violence,¹ exhaustively accommodating diverse scenarios and degrees of disclosure, and perspectives on secrecy. There is scope to critically unpack some of the themes and conclusions to be made in this project from various queer and/or non-binary gender perspectives. From another perspective, unique insights into safety and secrecy might be offered by people with experiences of disability in relation to diagnosis and navigating disclosure in other areas of their daily lives.² And furthermore, First Nations people may navigate secrecy and safety in unique ways that are intricately intertwined with place, culture and knowledge protocols.³

The following sections of the thesis will proceed as follows. Chapter 2, “Secrecy, Safety and Journaling,” will provide a literature review of key sources on these themes that have informed the thinking and composing in this project. This will pivot into a discussion of artistic research and autoethnographic methodology. Following a brief overview of the vital statistics for the works, each of the compositions in the accompanying portfolio will be discussed in a discrete chapter. Chapter 3 will give a discussion of *Secret* (2019), for flutes, backing track and gate effect. Grounded in sonic source material from my personal archive, the compositional strategies for this exploration of secrecy are distinctly auditory throughout. This will be followed by analysis of the chamber opera *Commute* (2018-20) in Chapter 4. With the music and drama structured by a libretto, the processes of developing this composition are intensively text- and speech- bound. Companion works *Street Sketches* (2018) for chamber ensemble and *Streets* (2019) for orchestra will be examined in Chapter 5. An old abandoned orchestral sketch using elements of popular music and especially a hip-hop vernacular symbolises an urban streetscape that is manifoldly deconstructed in these works. Chapter 6 will profile *Sonata: Ode* (2019) for piano, where present-day compositional sketches and inscriptions intertwine with an ancient cuneiform poem by Enheduanna, *The Exaltation of Inana*. In Chapter 7, the Conclusion, I hope to demonstrate how approaches explored in this project at the level of decision-making during the composing process have ramifications for the creative content and communication taking place in the public-facing work. The specific messaging emerging in my work is concerned with reimagining cultural and social structures in which gendered violence is absent. To begin to hear, view and sense this environmental reconfiguration as a listener is an important step towards familiarising and manifesting these ideals into reality and lived experience.

¹ Ski Hunter, *Coming out and Disclosures : LGBT Persons across the Life Span* (New York: Haworth Press, 2007).

² Stephanie L. Kerschbaum, Laura T. Eisenman, and James M. Jones, eds., *Negotiating Disability: Disclosure and Higher Education* (University of Michigan Press, 2017).

³ Vicki-Lea Saunders, ““...”: Using a Non-Bracketed Narrative to Story Recovery in Aboriginal Mental Health Care” (PhD Thesis, James Cook University, 2016).

Chapter 2: Secrecy, Safety and Journaling

This creative research project began with a broad focus on the themes of **safety** and **secrecy** in sound. I have pursued these concepts discretely as well as in combination, in order to consider the distinction between private and public, geographic and/or virtual urban or professional spaces; and also the impact of gender (and my own feminine lived experience). I am preoccupied with the ways that communication and authorship play out and how expression might be moderated by concerns of safety or secrecy. The work of Clare Birchall in secrecy studies¹ and around aesthetics, secrecy and visual arts² has been a constant reference point and influence, which I have found to be transferrable into a musical medium. There are powerful resonances with Parpart's sociological framing of silence as an act of agency for women, especially in dangerous socio-political environments.³ Commentators on urban/public environments, such as Kalms et al,⁴ especially as part of #metoo media coverage in 2017 onwards, articulate similar ideas that reinforce this interweaving of safety with secrecy and/or silence.

This project has entailed composing a portfolio of works addressing these themes in various ways, as well as an accompanying immersion in a range of scholarship extending into aesthetics and sociology. Over the course of the research, the scope and intent of the present research project began to demonstrate an emphasis on the act of **journaling**, in various media and with various intents: both within the work as content, and to support the process of composing. Eugen Bacon's work⁵ on journaling as part of practice-led research in literature has been particularly illuminating in modelling how an informal or disorganised capture of ideas can be construed as having a larger continuity in the evolution of creative ideas. My own composerly idea-capture habits closely follow this: they are broadly multimedia across numerous digital and analogue formats. Bacon's reflections on the role of journaling to support exegesis in practice-led research have become quite useful to inform the methodological perspective of the present research. Similarly, the ideas and approaches of Carolyn Ellis to autoethnography,⁶ especially when considering working with more vulnerable subject matter, form a relevant precedent.

¹ Clare Birchall, "Six Answers to the Question "What Is Secrecy Studies?," *Secrecy and Society: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Secrecy Studies* 1, no. 1 (2016).

² Clare Birchall, "Aesthetics of the Secret," *New Formations* 83, no. 1 (2014).

³ Jane L. Parpart, "Choosing Silence," in *Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process: Feminist Reflections*, ed. Roisin Ryan-Flood and Rosalind Gill (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2010).

⁴ Nicole Kalms, Gill Matthewson, and Pamela Salen, "Safe in the City? Girls Tell It Like It Is," *The Conversation Australia* (2017), <https://theconversation.com/safe-in-the-city-girls-tell-it-like-it-is-72975>.

⁵ Eugen Bacon, "Journaling - a Path to Exegesis in Creative Research," *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses* 18, no. 2 (2014).

⁶ Carolyn Ellis, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography* (Walnut Creek, CA ; Oxford: AltaMira Press, 2004).

This chapter will begin with a literature review of the most important sources on the first two themes of safety and secrecy. Then, at the point where the theme of journaling is introduced, ideas on autoethnography and practice-led research will allow the discussion to move into the more applied, methodological perspective informing this study.

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Secrecy

The Oxford English Dictionary defines “secrecy” as:

*The quality of being secret or of not revealing secrets; the action, practice, or habit of keeping things secret.*⁷

And “secret” as:

*Kept from knowledge or observation; hidden, concealed.*⁸ (adjective form) or

*Something unknown or unrevealed or that is known only by initiation or revelation; a mystery; chiefly plural, the hidden affairs or workings (of God, Nature, Science, etc.).*⁹ (noun form)

To sum up these definitions, we are concerned with a withholding or concealing of knowledge or information, and to some degree exclusivity, or disclosure to select individuals. One of the main research questions informing my creative activities is:

What does a secret sound like?

This is of course quite vexing, because as soon as one “hears” something secretive, one is aware of the secret itself, even if some part of its full form or meaning is withheld.

There are many composers addressing the theme of secrecy within their creative work: for example, Damien Ricketson in *The Secret Noise* (2014);¹⁰ Katy Abbott in *Hidden Thoughts I: Do I Matter?* (2017);¹¹

⁷ “secrecy, n.,” OED Online, December 2021, Oxford University Press, <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.library.sydney.edu.au/view/Entry/174532>.

⁸ “secret, adj. and n.,” OED Online, December 2021, Oxford University Press, <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.library.sydney.edu.au/view/Entry/174537>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Damien Ricketson, *The Secret Noise*, Australia: Curious Noise, 2014, accessed 01/02/2022, <https://curiousnoise.com/the-secret-noise>.

¹¹ Katy Abbott, *Hidden Thoughts I: Do I Matter?*, Sydney: Australian Music Centre, 2017, music score.

Tan Dun in *Nu Shu: The Secret Songs of Women* (2013);¹² Britta Byström in *Ten Secret Doors* (2011).¹³ It is rarer to find analytical scholarship on secrecy located entirely within the discipline of music or sound studies. One such composer-scholar is Felipe Hickmann, whose compelling doctoral study presents a range of compositions for technologically networked performers (that is, often in geographically disparate performance spaces).¹⁴ That the ensemble members need to join a virtual network to enact a performance of a given work together provides a shared platform via which Hickmann uses secrecy in various formats to manipulate and selectively filter the information each performer has at hand, influencing the sonic outcomes of the work. Composing with an awareness of some of the theoretical frameworks for secrecy allows Hickmann to design and produce these compositions with an arresting approach, that combines the theme of secrecy with concepts from online communication such as anonymity and cryptography.¹⁵

Secrecy as a theme has limited coverage within disciplines of music and sound but has been examined exhaustively from a number of other perspectives. It has been quite instructive in this project to survey literature from a broad array of disciplines, especially aesthetics, and reflect on some of these ideas within the musical sphere. Sissela Bok approaches the topic from the perspective of ethics in her exhaustive book *Secrets* (1983),¹⁶ following on from the earlier work *Lying* (1978).¹⁷ Many decades earlier, Georg Simmel's early 20th century work in sociology on secrecy and secret societies observes how the information that people hold or lack about another, or that is volunteered or withheld by the subject, acts like strands of social connection or expectation, and also notes the overlaps between secrecy and lying.¹⁸ This influential study laid the foundations for the eventual cross-disciplinary research area of secrecy studies.

A key figure in this tantalising field is Clare Birchall, whose work on secrecy and aesthetics is perhaps the most persuasive precursor to my own research project here. In "Aesthetics of the Secret," Birchall uses case studies of visual artworks by Trevor Paglen and Jill Magid, applying Ranciere's perspective on politics and aesthetics¹⁹ to construct a convincing argument and model for approaching creative expressions of secrecy.²⁰ The framework of aesthetics offers possibilities for appreciating and perceiving the potency of

¹² Tan Dun, *Nu Shu: The Secret Songs of Women*, New York: G. Schirmer Inc., 2013, music score.

¹³ Britta Byström, *Ten Secret Doors*, Edition Wilhelm Hansen, 2011, music score.

¹⁴ Felipe Hickmann, "Territories of Secrecy: Presence and Play in Networked Music Performance" (PhD thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 2013).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁶ Sissela Bok, *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

¹⁷ Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

¹⁸ Georg Simmel, "The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies," *American Journal of Sociology* 11, no. 4 (1906): 441-7.

¹⁹ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

²⁰ Birchall, "Aesthetics of the Secret."

secrecy in its pure form, as opposed to “hermeneutic” approaches to secrecy “...which set up the secret as a problem to be solved through revelation and interpretation.”²¹ Birchall explores how the dynamics between sensory and cognitive components of information give a receiver differing levels of awareness that something is missing or withheld. Various scenarios are categorised based on the degree of knowledge that either the sensory or cognitive aspects provide. Drawing from Donald Rumsfeld’s awkward US Defence terminology, Birchall describes four categories. At the extremes are the “known known,”²² that is, readily available informational and sensory content, not obscure or hidden; and the “unknown unknown,”²³ that is undisclosed information possessing no sensory component, absolute secrecy.

In between are two categories of partial availability where the most interesting aesthetic dynamics take place. Birchall’s “unknown known,”²⁴ characterises something which is unavailable for (re)cognition, which at some point has been able to be perceived sensorily, with examples given of lost or destroyed artworks. Birchall gives most attention to the category of the “known unknown,”²⁵ where there is an acknowledgement of something that possesses a degree of ambiguity on the sensory plane. The notion of the “open secret”²⁶ is rich with creative and expressive possibilities, as uncovered by Birchall in Paglen and Magid’s artworks, and for a creative practitioner such as myself looking to further explore these dynamics. In reference to Paglen and Magid, Birchall writes: “They help us to stay with the secret *as* secret, instead of moving too quickly towards revelation and reform.”²⁷ The kinds of secrecy Birchall is concerned with in this article and both artists’ works include government and military secrecy and surveillance, and the Snowden case of data disclosure in 2013.²⁸

Elsewhere, in “Six Answers to the Question: “What is Secrecy Studies?”,” Birchall gives a broader overview of the research area of secrecy studies, reaching into examples of teaching the discipline and asking students to reflect on secrecy in their own spheres.²⁹ While Bok, Simmel and Birchall’s “Aesthetics of the Secret” offer perspectives on secrecy that frame the individual within a larger socio-cultural and/or political context, the engagement with tertiary students’ personal viewpoints in Birchall’s “Six Answers” resonates strongly with my own concerns with a very domestic, interpersonal level of secrecy: in the domain of

²¹ Ibid., 26.

²² Ibid., 30-31.

²³ Ibid., 44-45.

²⁴ Ibid., 31-32.

²⁵ Ibid., 32-44.

²⁶ Ibid., 30.

²⁷ Ibid., 26.

²⁸ Ibid., 26-28.

²⁹ Birchall, “Six Answers to the Question “What Is Secrecy Studies?”,” 6-10.

private thoughts, yearnings and expression. Birchall makes a striking observation around aspects of agency in secrecy that is just as relevant whether addressing aspects of secrecy in relation to wider political authority or surveillance, or in a more immediate personal environment:

*Feminists (and other politically engaged radical scholars) need to make ethical decisions all the time about when to speak and when to remain silent; when to keep a secret and when to reveal it.*³⁰

This highlights an extra layer in communication that is often neglected when we focus only on what is being said: the decision to speak, to divulge at all. Birchall's extended research on the theme of gossip as a format for what she calls "popular revelation"³¹ is somewhat beyond the scope of the present research but is notable for dedicating attention to a medium that is perhaps the opposite of scholarly modes of communication and much closer to the domestic realm.

The personal, localised aspects of secrecy that I am preoccupied with across this project, reaching back into teenage diaries, unreleased sonic material, and other journalistic or archival artefacts, has some parallels with the *Mortified*³² series of live events, where willing participants read from their old adolescent diaries to a sizeable captive audience. The project expanded into an associated podcast and television series taking this content to a mass international audience. Much of the appeal for the *Mortified* audience is in the combination of bravery and embarrassment with which participants deliver readings of their vulnerable younger selves. One can easily imagine the embodied discomfort and shame of sharing this content publicly: blushing, panicked breathing, crying with laughter. Many of the diary quotations share the titular sentiment: *If anyone ever read this I'd be completely Mortified...* This has been inspiring and instructive for navigating the palpable discomfort of sharing content that had a private intent, or that as a composer I had previously decided not to release publicly. *Mortified* is a clear example of a more domestic approach to secrecy that has allowed for some reflection on the mediation between public and private modes of creative expression, and that has clear links with the theme of journaling that will be expanded in more detail in the "Methodology" section below.

If Birchall's work on secrecy and aesthetics has given the resources needed to navigate between theory and practice, text and music, informational and sensory components of my practice-based research, a collection called *Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process* (2010)³³ provides a richer methodological understanding of some of the wider dynamics I am working with, and especially the ways that the themes

³⁰ Ibid., 11.

³¹ Ibid., 9.

³² "Mortified," accessed 01/02/2022, <https://getmortified.com/>.

³³ Roisin Ryan-Flood and Rosalind Gill, eds., *Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process : Feminist Reflections* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2010).

of secrecy and safety intertwine. This collection is mainly located in sociology, with feminist, psychological, anthropological and autoethnographic perspectives. The authors of each chapter sensitively consider how omitted or concealed components of knowledge play out in their research data and methods, navigating nuanced and reflexive paths between research methods and the data itself, and between personal experiences, sometimes of sexual violence, and wider socio-cultural phenomena, especially in terms of what is reported or omitted, and why. The collection offers a compelling case for silence as a nuanced communicative tool, and sheds light on some of the ways research information is located in the unsaid and how this might be navigated ethically by the researcher.

Jane L. Parpart's "Choosing Silence"³⁴ is a particularly poignant contribution. She interrogates the assumption that silence is a sign of oppression, voice a sign of power:

*...the uncritical identification of silence with disempowerment, and voice with agency/empowerment... dismisses and obscures the potential of many subtle strategies attempting to improve women's lives and to foster gender equality.*³⁵

Parpart gives examples of settings where physical danger threatens those who speak out, and also powerful symbolic uses of silence as a form of resistance: silent vigils, symbolism through clothing, etc.³⁶ Her case for silence has forced me to question my own assumptions about where power resides, and especially her use of the term "voice" has powerful resonances with my own explorations in the auditory realm. While I am passionate about ensuring women's sound worlds and "voices" are heard as part of a wider industry, when I think about why I might have pursued this research area, it is because there is a vulnerability about making any creative expression public, and even more so when a creative practitioner decides to navigate more sensitive themes. While perhaps I have started out by instinctively pairing safety with secrecy/silence, Parpart's perspective has been an important influence in consciously reframing and extending how I creatively approach silence and omission in my work.

Where secrecy overlaps with notions of privacy and theorists articulate distinctions between private and public environments, there are some interesting perspectives offered throughout Landes's edited collection *Feminism, the Public and the Private*.³⁷ A common thread across the diverse reflections and observations offered in this collection is the bringing of private elements *into* the public sphere. The collection is just one instance of the ongoing discourse around the private/public construction across feminist history. A more recent reflection on the topic is the Summer 2020 issue of *Signs Journal of Women*

³⁴ Parpart, "Choosing Silence."

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

³⁷ Joan B. Landes, ed. *Feminism, the Public and the Private* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

in *Culture and Society*; the entire volume is dedicated to the theme “Public Feminisms” and surveys a range of current platforms and conversations from social media and #metoo,³⁸ to menstruation,³⁹ to *Teen Vogue*.⁴⁰ Offering nuanced perspectives on feminism within musicology, Sally Macarthur adopts Deleuzian concepts such as “becoming-real” and the “virtual” to advocate for open-ended future possibilities in musical culture and industry.⁴¹

2.1.2 Safety and #Metoo

#Metoo,⁴² a movement which had existed for some time, rapidly entered the forefront of social media and journalistic discourse in 2017, around the time that I was formulating a proposal for this project. Despite the distressing aspects of divulging, the sheer volume of personal accounts and pace of communication has empowered women and others with a much broadened and finely articulated vocabulary for confronting their own experiences. In the heartbreaking words of Carey, noting the shockingly young age at which many girls experience street harassment: “There’s nothing in your childhood that prepares you for that crushing feeling of being objectified for the first time.”⁴³ Or in the words of various music industry signatories to an open letter #meNOMore, campaigning against sexual harassment in the work environment: “It saddens us that the people who hold us in fear and keep us silenced are people we work with, people who many of us have aspired to work under, and people who some of us have known as friends.”⁴⁴ This traumatic but important conversation has motivated many women and people who have experienced sexual violence to make decisions around whether and how to divulge some of their own experiences, or to maintain their silence: *Should I say something? How much do I tell?* This has certainly been a motivating factor in the present project, in terms of shifting from a prioritisation of safe, soothing musical and conceptual themes to considering how to bring more vulnerable and sometimes traumatic material into my sonic practice.

When I broaden my reading to consider some of the research on safety in urban, public and/or industry spaces, there is a growing body of discourse that shares some common threads, especially in the areas of

³⁸ Suzanna Danuta Walters, “Introduction: We Are All (Public) Feminists Now,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 45, no. 4 (2020).

³⁹ Chris Bobel and Breanne Fahs, “From Bloodless Respectability to Radical Menstrual Embodiment: Shifting Menstrual Politics from Private to Public,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 45, no. 4 (2020).

⁴⁰ Jessalynn Keller, “A Politics of Snap: *Teen Vogue*’s Public Feminism,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 45, no. 4 (2020).

⁴¹ Sally Macarthur, *Towards a Twenty-First Century Feminist Politics of Music* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

⁴² “me too.,” accessed 19/12/2021, <https://metoomvmt.org/>.

⁴³ Grace Carey, “Age and Innocence Didn’t Matter,” *Sydney Morning Herald* (2018), <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/age-and-innocence-didn-t-matter-20180522-p4zgp.html>.

⁴⁴ Various, “#meNOMore: An Open Letter to the Australian Music Industry,” <https://theindustryobserver.thebrag.com/me-no-more/>.

geography, architecture and town planning. In 2017 Kalms, Matthewson and Salen⁴⁵ used an online platform to gather women's perceptions of safe or unsafe locations around Melbourne and analysed these for architectural or behavioural trends. They observe "that the city is far from gender neutral,"⁴⁶ finding that graphic design was a significant element in setting up environments where street harassment incidents were more or less concentrated. These ideas are somewhat reinforced by Brown and Wardale's findings on the impacts of gender on architecture as an industry, both in terms of career trajectory and industry output as reflected by urban spaces. Somewhat unexpectedly, Brown and Wardale use Rebecca Solnit's term "mansplaining" as a framing concept, noting how a greater cultural tendency of men to be able to self-advance is one of the driving forces behind industry progression and therefore output.⁴⁷ The authors identify parameters that would make urban spaces more gender neutral, and offer ways of moving through urban spaces to discover the contributions of women. Despite its breadth, Brown and Wardale's survey is a useful pivot here into ideas around communication (sound and silence) and bears parallels in the creative arts and the Western art music tradition in terms of gender imbalances observed in this industry. More recently, with Grace Tame as 2021 Australian of the Year, recognised as an advocate for survivors of sexual assault, the perspectives of women experiencing harm or trauma have been given serious attention in the media.⁴⁸ Within the contemporary music profession, an Industry Review⁴⁹ was announced in 2021, investigating sexual harassment and discrimination in working environments. Devenish, Hope, Sun and Tomlinson published their findings within music and academia regarding advances in gender equity.⁵⁰

Also closely entwined with modern-day music-making in Australia are Tsitsishvili's reflections on gender.⁵¹ She makes the following observation about safety and gender that : "...it seems that female space needs to be safe. Thus, women create privacy and safety even in public spheres, while men create publicity even in private spheres."⁵² This certainly resonates with my concerns here as a composer, and some of the strategies employed in weaving private content into public creative work. Tsitsishvili's

⁴⁵ Kalms, Matthewson, and Salen, "Safe in the City? Girls Tell It Like It Is".

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Kerry Brown and Dorothy Wardale, "Mansplaining Australian Cities - We Can Do Something About That," *The Conversation Australia* (2017), <https://theconversation.com/mansplaining-australian-cities-we-can-do-something-about-that-83436>.

⁴⁸ National Press Club of Australia, "Grace Tame & Brittany Higgins Address the National Press Club of Australia," YouTube, streaming video, updated 10/02/2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5wIzpu3qpvs>.

⁴⁹ "Music Industry Review," accessed 22/12/2021, <https://musicindustryreview.com.au/>.

⁵⁰ Louise Devenish et al., "Teaching Tertiary Music in the #MeToo Era," *Tempo* 74, no. 292 (2020).

⁵¹ Nino Tsitsishvili, "Music and State of Mind: Towards an Evolutionary Model of Gender," *Context: Journal of Music Research* 35/36 (2010/2011).

⁵² Ibid., 44.

observation also corresponds with my earlier compositional motivations in seeking out “safer” themes and material and articulates some of the gendered aspects of doing so. #Metoo discourse goes against this tendency, motivating women to publicly highlight their experiences of danger; the subversiveness of doing so lends the already harrowing discussion additional potency. However, this does not lessen the trauma of doing so, and in this light it is comforting and crucial to recall the agency that Parpart embeds in the decision-making around communication: we have the option to “choose silence” and exercise a degree of control over personal narratives that enter shared spaces.

This survey of literature illuminates a broad discussion taking place around the central themes of safety and secrecy. The interconnections between these themes are timely and have continued to resonate in public discourse for the duration of this project. I have begun to identify ways that these themes are explored in my own compositional processes and sonic and musical output and I will further unpack aspects of this discussion in relation to specific compositions in the following chapters. While it is tempting for a composer to survey a range of musical works as part of a literature review, I have refrained from delving into the details of the works already mentioned here. Instead, selected composers and works will be discussed within the next few chapters in relation to aspects of specific compositions from the portfolio.

Meanwhile, it remains to explain how the activity of journaling has become bound up in this project with the themes of safety and secrecy and with my creative research as a composer. Because the act of journaling is a process, my interest in it is bound up in the practice of composition. Each finalised public-facing work is built upon and leaves an archival footprint, physical and digital. From the outset of the project the exploration of safety and secrecy has been concerned with turning to face the private journaling processes of current compositions, as well as the private relics of very old works and diary archives. At this point, the discussion of existing research becomes less concerned with the general literature of disciplines addressing the themes of safety and secrecy, and more specifically focused on methodologies of qualitative research with a high degree of personal involvement. The following section makes connections between journaling, practice-based creative research and autoethnography as methodological approaches informing my compositional work.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Journaling

As this project has progressed, I have experimented more with weaving private material into publicly-released music. Each of the compositions in this portfolio has interfaced with my own archival manuscripts across various media: *Secret* (2019), surfacing unreleased recordings of myself as singer-songwriter from

over fifteen years ago; private diary entries from a similar period reworked into part of the libretto of chamber opera *Commute* (2018-20); the deconstruction of a more recent (c.2015) unfinished compositional sketch into the movements of *Street Sketches* (2018) and *Streets* (2019); a digital voice recording captured on a smartphone becoming the first subject in a sonata form movement in *Sonata: Ode* (2019). Part of the fixation with revisiting older archival materials has been a current interest in the conceptual world of the “teenage diary”: an almost sacred private vessel for confession and creativity, at a time in life when some of us have seemingly hours on end to process our thoughts, hopes and dreams. Earlier I mentioned the *Mortified*⁵³ franchise of podcasts, live shows and television series. As the branding of this series suggests, the thought of another soul hearing or reading the contents of such a diary is extremely humiliating and uncomfortable. Making the decision to expose material of this nature is counterintuitive yet rich with creative potency and possibilities in terms of the extent and transformations of the exposed material.

I must confess to idealising a very formal notion of journaling: imagining a regular ritual of writing pen to page in a bound book of lined paper added to consistently and somewhat uniformly. This preconception brings a powerful nostalgia for a youthful period when I had time to freely indulge in filling the pages of a diary, and an assumption that my capacity for such an activity is long gone. Thankfully, Eugen Bacon’s work⁵⁴ on journaling as part of artistic research validates a more “messy” approach which has striking similarities with my own eclectic note-taking:

*Some writers keep journals; I keep scraps... Hand-scribbles of sometimes illegible writing speckled with ideas, dialogue and fragments of characterisation. These scraps grow into dog-eared piles in my handbag, by my bedside, beneath my workstation... before I transcribe them into a computer database.*⁵⁵

While Bacon’s work as a creative writer necessitates that final step of bringing all the separate written fragments into a database, whereby the creative output remains in its original textual format, the approach is necessarily different for a composer. Nevertheless, this had me reflecting on all my own “scraps,” a rich body of data accompanying each completed score: the manila folder I keep for each composition, filled with loose music manuscript pages, mind maps, visual sketches both loose and on graph paper, printouts and drafts annotated with pencil, pen and coloured highlighters. Fragmentary notes, to-do lists and sometimes longer-form writing in various lined and music notebooks, loose leaf paper, a mobile phone notes app. And further in the digital space: the electronic file folder I keep for each composition, filled

⁵³ “Mortified,” accessed 01/02/2022, <https://getmortified.com/>.

⁵⁴ Bacon, “Journaling - a Path to Exegesis in Creative Research.”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

with music notation sketches, text and image files, audio software files, spreadsheet files with numerical and colour-coded workings, PDFs, plain text notes and lists, word processor documents with various musings and planning on the compositions, folders of internet bookmarks, mobile phone voice notes, portable microphone recordings. I usually remember to inscribe the date on the hand-written materials, and the digital materials are embedded with a date of creation or modification. Each item is usually relegated from the main digital or physical workspace into the corresponding file folder after it has served its usefulness during the composing process.

The realisation that perhaps I never stopped journaling but that this activity is deeply embedded in my compositional practice and artistic research is simultaneously startling and heartening. It transforms a wistful yearning for a long-lost age into a renewed energy for current creative activities and projects. Furthermore, where Bacon identifies three modes of journaling discussed with her doctoral supervisor, the “cathartic journal,” the “academic journal” and the “literary journal,”⁵⁶ I can see parallels with my own documentation formats. These modes also allow me to more clearly articulate some of the artistic experimentation with deliberately interweaving these formats, for example, bringing together the “cathartic” *Miniatures* (c.2003) recordings into the backing track for *Secret* (2019); and the various composerly hand-written manuscripts in a spreadsheet to design the overlay of the 33 songs (the “literary” mode).

The consciousness of journaling as a useful resource for both compositional process and musical material has led to some practical experimentation with specific methods. One such resource is Julia Cameron’s *The Artist’s Way*,⁵⁷ a disciplined course designed to harness creativity to its full potential. The foundations for the method, the “Morning Pages”⁵⁸ and the “Artist Date,”⁵⁹ have been useful tools that I have adopted for short periods during this project. The Artist Date is a weekly appointment to engage alone with something inspirational; this has been a valuable and validating activity in terms of seeking out and reflecting on other creative and musical works and broader energising activities. I have been able to keep up a daily Morning Pages ritual for several months at a time over the course of this degree: this takes the form of writing three A4 pages as a stream-of-consciousness, as early in the day as possible to clear the mind. While the Morning Pages are intended never to be re-read by the writer, nor shared, there are some reflections on aspects of this project that could be useful to include here later, despite not having written them with that intention in mind.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 2-3.

⁵⁷ Julia Cameron, *The Artist's Way: Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* (London: Souvenir Press, 2012).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

In the audio domain of private documentation, Jane W. Davidson's work with "talk-aloud"⁶⁰ for musicians generates and analyses a body of data comprising spoken commentary on or during instrumental practice sessions documented in audiovisual recordings. This has been an exciting concept gleaned from some of my performance-major colleagues: could a live-commentary during creative practice be utilised somehow in the composition process? My own one-time experiment with this towards composing the chamber opera *Commute* (2018-20) will be unpacked more in the chapter on that work, offering surprising insights into the persistence of decisions made while composing. It is becoming clear that most of these precedents and points of inspiration are grounded in textual media: written and/or verbal forms. While for writers working in practice-based research, the medium is shared between the creative and research streams of their work, for composers there is a degree of transliteration or transformation between making the musical work and finding the words to unpack what is taking place. For this reason, Davidson's work is a particularly useful reference point in focusing on verbalisations of musicality. For some of the primarily literary precedents of journaling and reflecting described above, there is potential to modify some of the activities undertaken into musical or compositional exercises.

2.2.2 Practice-Led Research and Autoethnographic Method

Here I must return to the "scrappiness" of Bacon's journaling output and draw an explicit connection within the arena of artistic research to Smith and Dean's "Iterative Cyclic Web."⁶¹ At first encounter, the concept seemed somewhat convoluted, especially in its diagrammatic representation. However, the more I have worked with concepts around journaling, the more apparent it has become that the "messiness" of process and the constantly changing modes of work and perspectives of the creative researcher are represented authentically by Smith and Dean's flexible model. Especially relevant is the multi-stranded interconnectedness between process and output, which will be a central focus of my reflections on how journal objects lead to, result from and/or enter the compositions in this portfolio.

⁶⁰ Suh, SoYoung, and Tom Trabasso. "Inferences During Reading: Converging Evidence from Discourse Analysis, Talk-Aloud Protocols, and Recognition Priming." *Journal of Memory and Language* 32, no. 3 (1993/06/01/ 1993): 279-300, quoted in Jane W. Davidson, "Practice-Based Music Research: Lessons from a Researcher's Personal History," in *Artistic Practice as Research in Music: Theory, Criticism, Practice*, ed. Mine Doğan-Dack (London, New York: Routledge, 2016), 96-97.

⁶¹ Hazel Smith and R. T. Dean, "Introduction: Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice - Towards the Iterative Cyclic Web," in *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts*, ed. Hazel Smith and R. T. Dean (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

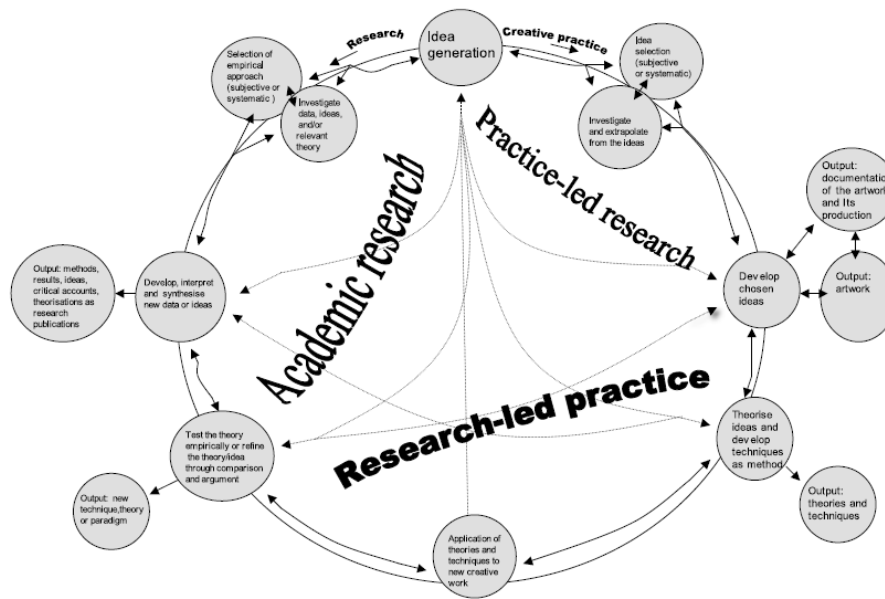


FIGURE 2.1: Hazel Smith and Roger Dean's "Iterative Cyclic Web," diagrammatic representation⁶²
 Reproduced with permission of Edinburgh University Press Limited through PLSclear.

Given that this project started with a clearly defined topic which has persisted throughout, with some adaptations along the way, in some ways my work aligns with Milech and Shilo's "Research-Question Model"⁶³ for combining creative and academic postgraduate work. The authors elegantly describe the relationship taking place as "independent answers to the same research question."⁶⁴ While the other models proposed by Milech and Shilo are also valuable, this one has been most useful here. From the outset, the topics of safety, secrecy and journaling in the sonic world have acted as a strong and practical hinge between my creative activities and background reading and writing, and have led to numerous research questions. At the heart of this is the titular "What does a secret sound like?" but we have already encountered several others in the Introduction and will meet more sub-questions in relation to each of the compositions.

The constant interweaving between one's creative practice and being able to critically identify and articulate the dynamics taking place points directly to the compatibility of autoethnography and practice-based research. For some years now I have been influenced by the deeply personal and confessional approach of Carolyn Ellis's writing. In works such as *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel*, Ellis innovatively presents her research through creative writing, in this case a novel where each chapter represents a lesson week in a university course.⁶⁵ In an approach described by Ellis, via Leon Anderson,

⁶² Ibid., 20.

⁶³ Barbara H. Milech and Ann Shilo, "'Exit Jesus': Relating the Exegesis and Creative/Production Components of a Research Thesis," *TEXT Special Issue No. 3* (2004).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ellis, *The Ethnographic I*.

as “evocative or emotional autoethnography,”⁶⁶ Ellis is primarily concerned with what she calls “narrative truth.”⁶⁷ She aggregates teaching experiences (and student identities) from a number of years into a single, partially fictionalised account where the aim is to convey an emotional authenticity that not only reflects on the input and motivations of the researcher but foregrounds these as inseparable from the research and the researched. Ellis’ novel is painstakingly annotated throughout with numerous endnotes and a formidable bibliography, a clue to the academic nature of this dramatic and highly readable text, demonstrating the integrity and comprehensiveness of her work. It can be surprising within an academic context to read Ellis’ description of the room in which a conversation takes place, or food and beverages served participants, or about some awkward fidget or bodily gesture, but these sensory, extra-textual details are a rich body of research data. This deep attention to sensory and embodied aspects is a compelling precedent for sonic practitioners and researchers, as can be seen from the local responses to and collaborations with Ellis from Queensland colleagues Brydie-Lee Bartleet and Elizabeth Mackinlay.⁶⁸ Ellis’s work has been an especially important precursor to this project in navigating themes of safety/danger and trauma.

I also want to draw a connection between Ellis’s work and Parpart’s, in terms of the ways these approaches to writing gives attention to non-verbal forms of communication. If communication takes place across a continuum from silence to voice, we could locate Ellis’ work to an extent at the “giving-voice”⁶⁹ end. In her published writings Ellis divulges deeply sensitive and personal experiences—her own and/or her students’—such as abortion, chronic illness, grief and loss, drawing the reader’s attention to very fine experiential details. However, Ellis’s approach is not in complete contrast with Parpart’s strategy of “choosing silence.” Ellis’s emphasis on narrative could be seen to align with some of the “subtle strategies”⁷⁰ Parpart observes. One example is the use of fictionalisation or aggregation to protect real-world identities while still allowing detailed reflections on sensitive content. These strategies can be somewhat confronting for a scholar, and require some adjustment from the traditionally literal and direct approach to academic reporting. Nevertheless, the opportunity to write expressively provides the creative researcher with an inspiring degree of flexibility.

Exploring further afield in (auto)ethnography and artistic research, various authors reflect on the nature of their discipline in ways that resonate with some of my concerns and preoccupations: Krizek uses the

⁶⁶ Leon Anderson, “Analytic Autoethnography,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35, no. 4 (2006): 374.

⁶⁷ Ellis, *The Ethnographic I*, 30.

⁶⁸ Elizabeth Mackinlay and Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, “Reflections on Teaching and Learning Feminism in Musicological Classrooms: An Autoethnographic Conversation,” *Outskirts: Feminisms Along the Edge* 18 (2008).

⁶⁹ Parpart, “Choosing Silence.”

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

metaphor of “excavation”;⁷¹ Jefferies describes a “mangling” approach;⁷² Gibbs⁷³ and elsewhere Purnell⁷⁴ use the terminology “haunted” or “hauntings”; Herrmann refers to various “undead.”⁷⁵ In essence, these authors observe the multiple layers coexisting in autoethnographic writing, and some of the disparities that can arise from bridging between current work and past scenarios. These offer rich metaphorical frameworks for discussing how my work makes a negotiation between archival creative items and current compositions and writing. In the following chapters, individual works will be analysed to show how some of the approaches surveyed here have been applied musically, in both the final public output of a work and some of the processes of composing. Archival objects in various media will be reproduced within the thesis, sometimes displaying the original medium, sometimes transcribed to another format. This will sometimes necessitate moving between the more conventional academic register that informs the majority of this thesis, into the various (usually) informal, intimate registers of language in which my journaling activities are expressed. To return once more to Bacon’s categorisation of journal entries: a “cathartic” register of writing is interwoven into this “academic” document, surfaced out of the arena of private expression into this more public, shared environment. As such, journalistic excerpts will receive special typographical treatment, to distinguish them as private material: they will appear right-aligned, in a monospaced font, Courier New, with a light purple highlight:

like this.

In recognising and highlighting these different modes of creativity and expression, I hope to fully explore ways that process and output intertwine, and the often uneasy mediation between both when decisively surfacing content that originally had a private intent.

⁷¹ Robert L. Krizek, “Ethnography as the Excavation of Personal Narrative,” in *Expressions of Ethnography Novel Approaches to Qualitative Methods*, ed. Robin Patric Clair (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003).

⁷² Janis Jefferies, “Mangling Practices: Writing Reflections,” *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice* 5, no. 1 (2012).

⁷³ Anna Gibbs, “Fictocriticism, Affect, Mimesis: Engendering Differences,” *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses* 9, no. 1 (2005).

⁷⁴ David Purnell, “Autoethnography as Hauntings,” *International Review of Qualitative Research* 10, no. 1 (2017).

⁷⁵ Andrew F. Herrmann, “Ghosts, Vampires, Zombies, and Us: The Undead as Autoethnographic Bridges,” *International Review of Qualitative Research* 7, no. 3 (2014).

The Compositions

The discussion of compositions will follow a chronological order, which also happens to form an organic trajectory through the theme of secrecy into that of safety, and from deeply personal autobiographical material through to music that interprets and responds to an ancient literary artefact.

Each chapter will examine a single composition in musical and conceptual detail, in the following order:

- Chapter 3: *Secret* (2019) for concert and alto flute, fixed backing track and gate effect
- Chapter 4: *Commute* (2018-20) a chamber opera
- Chapter 5: *Streets* (2019) for orchestra, and *Street Sketches* (2018) for large chamber ensemble (these are companion works)
- Chapter 6: *Sonata: Ode* (2019) for piano

The musical scores appear in the accompanying portfolio volume in full, following the same order. A hyperlink to a recording of each work is provided in the composition volume as well as full performance information and credits.

Secret (2019) is a composition for flute, fixed stereo backing track and a noise gate of 11 minutes duration. The effect acts on the backing track in response to the live flute as sidechain input. It was composed for flutist Claire Chase as part of the Composing Women 2018-2019 program of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music for which the majority of output in this portfolio was undertaken under the supervision of Prof. Liza Lim. Collaboration with Chase, who is based in New York and at Harvard University, USA, began in early 2018 with a video call with the four Sydney composers to discuss possibilities for flute. This was followed with preparation of an initial four-minute sketch of the composition for workshop sessions and a matinee concert presentation and recording, when Chase visited the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in May 2018. The outcomes of these workshops then informed continued work on the longer-form, final version of *Secret*, which was completed in April 2019 in advance of September 2019 travel of the Composing Women 2018-19 cohort to the USA. During this trip we collaborated with some of Chase's flute students at Harvard University, Boston MA, presenting ideas and excerpts from our works, culminating in Chase's premiere of the works at new music venue National Sawdust, Brooklyn, New York, with sound engineering/recording support from Levy Lorenzo. Following the May 2018 presentation, an adapted four-minute version suitable for secondary school student performers was created for Lamorna Nightingale, called *Little Secret* (2018). This was recorded and released by Nightingale on *Other Voices* (2019),¹ an album of works for flute and electronics.

¹ Lamorna Nightingale, *Other Voices: Music for Flute and Electronics*, Fluteworthy, 2019, CD, accessed 01/02/2022, <https://www.lamoranightingale.com/othervoices>.

Commute (2018-20) is a 20-minute chamber opera for three voices, seven instruments and fixed media electronics. At its most basic, the work follows the homeward commute of protagonist Odyssea and examines experiences of street harassment and gendered violence via characters and creatures from Ancient Greek myth. *Commute* was initially composed in 2018 as part of the Composing Women 2018-19 program of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, for workshop presentations with Sydney Chamber Opera and student directors from NIDA. It received a September 2018 presentation for voices and piano directed by Darcy Green and Mikala Westall, sung by Jessica O'Donoghue (Odyssea), Mitchell Riley (Suitor 1) and Simon Lobelson (Suitor 2), with Jack Symonds on piano. Composition of the work continued in 2019-20, with expanded chamber instrumentation, the libretto adapted with grateful advice and input from Pierce Wilcox, and musical material redeveloped in the leadup to a 2020 public production by Sydney Chamber Opera, a quadruple bill of chamber operas titled *Breaking Glass*. Director Clemence Williams oversaw *Commute* and *The Invisible Bird* by Bree van Reyk, alongside director Danielle Maas taking the helm of Georgia Scott's *Her Dark Marauder* and Josephine Macken's *The Tent*. March 2020 rehearsals for a live performance were disrupted by the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the production pivoted to a filmed one in time to be captured before the first Sydney lockdown. The filmed production of the *Breaking Glass* quadruple bill was released online in April 2020 and remains available on Sydney Chamber Opera's website to watch and hear in full.

Street Sketches (2018) for chamber ensemble is a prototype composition for an orchestral work that followed, *Streets* (2019). The *Sketches* received workshopping and a performance in October 2018 by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra Fellows of that year, conducted by Roger Benedict, at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. The composition was slightly reworked and received repeat public performances by the SSO Fellows in August 2019. The orchestral work was fleshed out instrumentally and extended for a November 2019 workshop and recording with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra at the Seymour Centre, The University of Sydney, conducted again by Roger Benedict. Both of these workshopping/performance opportunities were undertaken as part of the Composing Women 2018-19 program. The musical material overlaps in both works and is a substantial reworking of an old unfinished orchestral sketch from circa 2015, with themes of sex positivity and gender affirmation within the urban streetscape.

Sonata: Ode (2019) was composed especially for pianist Bernadette Harvey for her ongoing Sonata Project. The piano work is a musical setting of an ancient cuneiform poem, *The Exaltation of Inana*, by Enheduanna. Following a process of several workshop meetings through 2019 during the composition of the work, it received a premiere in January 2020 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, as part of the Sydney Festival. The premiere occurred as part of Bernadette Harvey's *Ode: Sonata* recital, for which a piano was specially transported and situated within an art installation, Cornelia Parker's *War Room* (2015; 2019).

The Compositions

While the work is scored for solo piano and appears as such in the portfolio, the premiere was a specially adapted version incorporating spoken word recitations of excerpts from Enheduanna's poem, given by Ravel in or between movements, and a cello part in the third movement, "Silencing," performed by Miles Mullin-Chivers.

Chapter 3: *Secret* (2019), for concert and alto flute, fixed backing track and gate effect

Before creeps over her skin—
Magnet worms—
Forever-Reminder of that time¹

[Online link to sound recording: worms.mp3](#)

AUDIO EXAMPLE 3.1: “worms” from *Miniatures* (2003), song recording (corresponding with the lyrics above)

To ask the question—*What does a secret sound like?*—is to ponder the varying degrees of communication possible through sound. At a surface level the question seems like a paradox: *if we can hear it surely it cannot be secret*. One can brainstorm and utilise some of the more obvious sonic signifiers of secrecy: whispers, muffling, morse-like tapping, scrambling, garbled or partial texts, and more transformational strategies such as codes and ciphers. Once we careen into this realm of partial cognition, we have Birchall’s aesthetic perspective to guide us:

*All forms of the open secret challenge standard assumptions about the cognitive process and template: an open secret requires us to know and not know at the same time. This chink in the chain of cognition, this acknowledgement of knowledge’s fallibility and accommodation of its lack leaves space that can be filled by the aesthetic.*²

Birchall’s argument that preserving secrecy through representation is more potent than resolving it through discovery is compelling. In the present composition, *Secret* (2019), employing a gate effect has allowed a dynamic mediation between live, present-day flute sounds and a fixed backing track assembled from a collection of old, unreleased singer-songwriter recordings that I made circa 2003. The backing track is only heard when the flute passes a certain decibel threshold that triggers the gate effect to “open” and allow the backing track to sound. The work is a dialogue between present and past voices of the same composer-individual, exploring a domestic and interpersonal level of secrecy: memory; private creativity; youthful expression and emotion; embarrassment, self-appraisal, and a decision to surface old unpublished material similar to participants in *Mortified* events.

¹ Lyrics from Peggy Polias, “worms.” Unpublished, song 5 from *Miniatures*, last edited 18/11/2003, mp3 file.

² Birchall, “Aesthetics of the Secret,” 34.

A survey of existing compositional work on secrecy reveals various innovative and notable dynamics taking place. Katy Abbott's hour-long song cycle, *Hidden Thoughts: Do I matter?* (2017)³ is a setting of text adapted from responses to an anonymous online questionnaire about experiences of womanhood. The anonymous aspect allows contributors to feel safe disclosing often quite vulnerable thoughts and experiences: "I wish I'd always been faithful."⁴ The chamber music setting of the sixteen movements is sensitive and poignant, bringing out qualities of the shared secret thoughts from the funny to the harrowing. Similarly, composer Kate Neal's work with director Tamara Saulwick in the Chamber Made production of *Permission to Speak* (2016)⁵ uses anonymous pre-recorded interviews disclosures of family relationship dynamics, particularly between parent and child generations. The pre-recorded spoken material is played back at times, woven into composed musical and rhythmic responses to the sonic qualities of the spoken word. The interplay between the live musical material and the disclosures in the words and voice of the interviewee is compelling, and the inclusion of choreographed visual and physical elements, including domestic objects such as furniture and cutlery, emphasises the home and family setting for memories and experiences that may be complex or otherwise left unsaid. Damien Ricketson's *The Secret Noise* (2014)⁶ is concerned with intimacy, exclusivity and privacy in the performer and audience experience of the work. The live version of the work is fragmented into miniature and sometimes customised renditions including choreography or audience-interactivity. The uniqueness of a given rendition from within the larger collection of movements, and restricted access to it by a small subset of the audience attending the event, together create a tantalising version of secrecy that combines with a sense of initiation for the select audience present. Felipe Hickmann's composition, *Disguises* (2011),⁷ is devised for tenor saxophone and accordion fronting the audience, along with a bagpiper who also operates Max/MSP in a separate location. The work combines fragmentation, guessing-game play and multimedia elements that are only revealed to the audience if certain musical conditions are met.⁸

Aspects and degrees of revelation play a nuanced part in constructing an awareness that secrecy has taken place. Krizek gives a convincing reflection on his activities as an ethnographer and communication researcher: "I frame my research as the excavation of personal narratives. It is a process of "digging," of uncovering, of actively pursuing the stories people tell about their lives, their experiences, and their

³ Abbott, *Hidden Thoughts I: Do I Matter?*

⁴ Ibid. viii "sweet sixteen."

⁵ Kate Neal and Tamara Saulwick, *Permission to Speak*, Chamber Made, 2016, accessed 01/02/2022, <https://chambermade.org/works/permission-to-speak/>.

⁶ Ricketson, *The Secret Noise*, <https://curiousnoise.com/the-secret-noise>.

⁷ Felipe Hickmann, *Disguises*, 2011, Vimeo, streaming video, <https://vimeo.com/22942275>.

⁸ Hickmann, "Territories of Secrecy: Presence and Play in Networked Music Performance," 87-91.

identities.”⁹ There was a moment in 2018, during a presentation of my work-in-progress on this composition, *Secret* (2019), that I spontaneously began to describe the sonic result using a similar archaeology metaphor. If we imagine the zero-state of silence as a present-day baseline, I described for my listeners how the noise gate keeps the backing track silent, until each of the flute player’s gestures acting on the gate effect has the effect of “dredging” or “excavating” the sonic material of the backing track out the chthonic depths of an exaggerated “ancient” (at least 15 years) compositional past, from which the recordings were retrieved and reassembled. In this moment of description, I pictured the curve of the gate effect as applied in the software I was using, Ableton Live, and an arm or hand pulling it upwards out of the earth and into the air domain, where the flute resides in the present, or possibly even the future.

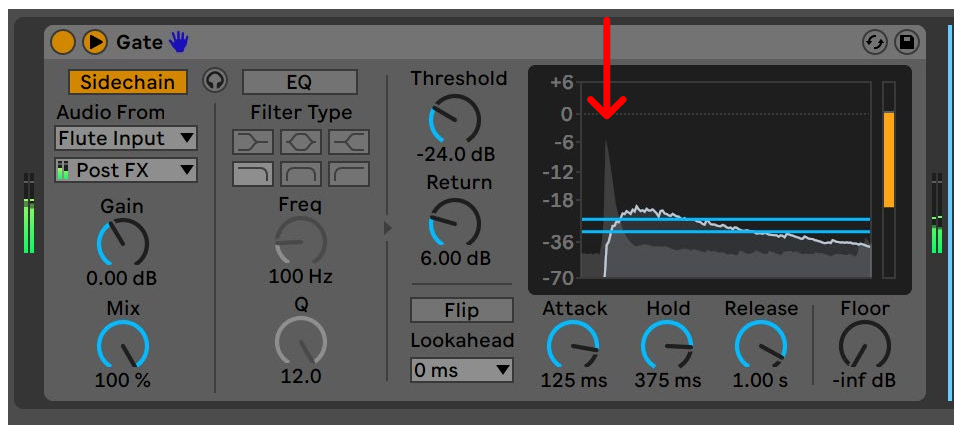


FIGURE 3.1: Gate effect activated in composer's Ableton Live setup showing how the flute dB level (grey) crossing the Threshold triggers the raising of levels on the backing track (white line) with a very slow fade-out

Therefore, my approach here in describing some of the processes taking place across the different sonic strata of the work will build upwards, starting from the underground layer of a backing track that re-sonifies and reflects on my own past creativity, and to an extent represents the self-curation of my identity as a composer.

3.1 The Backing track: *Miniatures* (2003)

During undergraduate composition studies in 1999-2002, I experimented with a strand of creative work that I kept quite separate from the notated scores I was showing to my supervisor/teachers and submitting officially for university assessment. My activities as a singer-songwriter were mostly private: unperformed, first experimentations with singing and with recording and sequencing technology. By 2003 I was making lo-fi recordings of my own vocals with piano, guitar or MIDI-sequenced accompaniment rendered with the tools I had at hand: a mini-disc recorder and single stereo microphone; sound treatment using household items; audio editing using free software. I ended up with recordings of 33 short songs which as an album I named *Miniatures* (2003). The intention was to burn 100 copies onto compact discs

⁹ Krizek, “Ethnography as the Excavation of Personal Narrative,” 142.

and distribute these to close friends and family, but after gifting a handful of copies I changed my mind and archived it electronically as a private/withdrawn project.

In the years since I have gone on to many other works, projects and modes of expression, all produced for performance and release as an early career professional composer seeking to grow a public audience. In advancing one's composition career, curatorial decisions are often made to elevate particular works as stronger examples of one's creative capabilities, while withdrawing or suppressing other works as less representative of one's central artistic aims. Thus, the *Miniatures* for me became part of this latter category, with my most fruitful professional activities continuing mainly along the strand of score-based composition. Importantly, and symbolically, this places the *Miniatures* in the realm of private creativity, with parallels to activities like journaling, or the particular phenomenon of the "teenage diary," which I actively undertook contemporaneously with the creation of the *Miniatures*.

However, as an eclectic listener, especially consuming popular music across many decades and genres, I do reflect back on the withholding of *Miniatures* and the implications of this for my wider body of work: am I forcing a separation between composing and song-writing/recording? What does it mean to forge ahead with composing while retreating from the song-writing mode of creativity? What are the dynamics of this concealment: is there an unexplored element of shame or cultural conceit on my part, or a fear of disapproval from colleagues? How can I integrate my interest in modes of popular music expression with my practice mainly as a score-based composer? How would it feel to release *Miniatures* now publicly as an unmediated work? This last question is no doubt answered to a degree by the often hilarious intensity with which diary readers share their youthful innermost thoughts in the *Mortified* series.

In the present work, *Secret*, the *Miniatures* became source material for a fixed stereo backing track. The entire collection of songs was used, but this act of "airing" has been counteracted via several strategies of auditory secrecy: obfuscation via combining, filtering and blurring to create a new conglomerate audio entity. The backing track consist of six tracks, over which all thirty-three *Miniatures* are distributed, six songs playing simultaneously, with each occurring once in full. 61'23" of original content is compacted down to a recording of 11'14" duration.

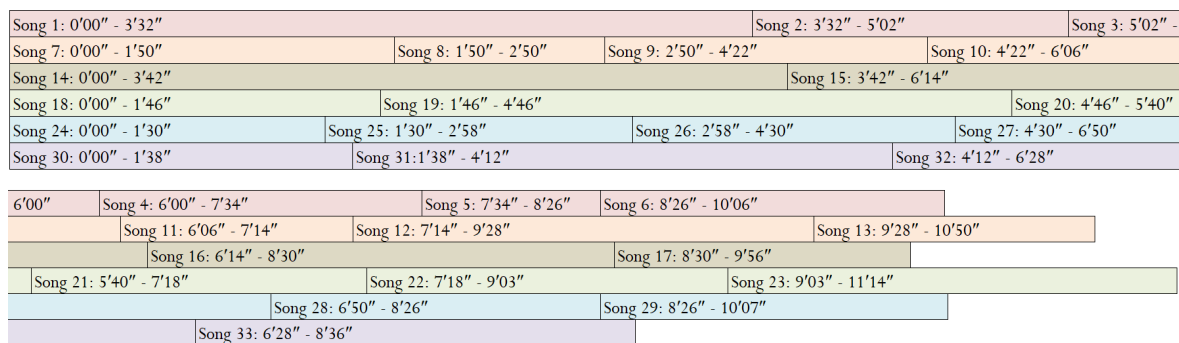


FIGURE 3.2: Distribution of the 33 songs of *Miniatures* in the fixed backing track for *Secret*

Each of the six layers is frequency-filtered using high-pass and low-pass filters respectively at 250Hz, which approximates to middle C and the low point of concert flute range, and 750Hz, which approximates to G5, an arbitrarily chosen threshold which seemed to give a useful middle range which is not exceeded by the vocals in the *Miniatures*. The tracks are also panned across the stereo field from far left/right to near centre. As a result, each track provides a cropped piece of frequency and stereo field information from the original recordings in that track to a new and unique audio image created from the six layers in combination.

		Panning					
		50L	35L	20L	20R	35R	50R
EQ	>750Hz (ie >G5)	Track 1		Live Concert Flute			Track 6
	250-750Hz (ie C4-G5)		Track 2			Track 5	
	<250Hz (ie <C4)			Track 3	Track 4		

FIGURE 3.3: Distribution of the six tracks in the fixed backing track for *Secret* (2019) across the stereo field and frequency filtering

Finally, a relatively extreme reverb effect (an Ableton Live preset called Outer Space) was applied to blur and blend the six tracks together in this new entity. While the entire *Miniatures* collection is present in the backing track, any one song is now indiscernible as a coherent entity. The new hybrid backing track is a fractured array of sonic fragments within which each listener will notice different moments and sonic qualities.

While to an extent I can describe this sonic architecture dispassionately here, really the whole process of assembling the backing track was imbued with all kinds of embodied responses to the material at hand: from a wistful smile, to a cringe, to a nauseous panic at relistening to the individual tracks; even at deciding to share “worms” at the opening to this chapter. Deliberately working against the instinct to keep these songs unreleased and hidden has been one of the necessary processes of moving beyond my previous habit of musical cocooning.

3.2 The Noise Gate

A noise gate is a hardware or software audio filtering device, usually applied to a recording to eliminate ambient noise or equipment hum on the overall mix when the target sound source is silent. As described by Anderton: “A noise gate mutes its output when it’s receiving a low-level input signal, but higher-level

signals are allowed to pass through.”¹⁰ While the desired sound source is active the gate does not actually filter unwanted sounds but makes them non-continuous and less noticeable. Typically employed as a utility aiding the improvement of audio quality, authors in the home recording arena, such as Anderton, are keen to suggest creative applications for the noise gate, especially in combination with other effects, for example: “grotesque distortion”;¹¹ “realtime rhythm track tricks”;¹² also popularly cited is the “gated reverb”¹³ on drums of Phil Collins and others in 1980s. While many of the suggested experimental applications are rhythmic or percussive in effect, there does not seem to be a precedent for the approach to using a noise gate that I have used in *Secret*. This long-form approach—applied over the course of an 11-minute work—is foregrounded with elongated attack-hold-release settings, and introduces a degree of mediation, variability and interactivity between the flute player and what would otherwise be a static backing recording. Instead, the backing track remains completely silent until the flutist exceeds a certain decibel threshold by playing the scored gestures, and this interaction becomes part of the “open secret” of the work.

Whether a physical or virtual device, noise gates typically include the following settings, which will each be defined generically before describing their application in the setup of the noise gate for *Secret*.

The **Threshold** is the decibel level of a signal source above which the gate will “open” and allow the target audio to sound. To continue with the “excavation” metaphor established earlier in relation to *Secret*, this is the “ground,” the point of transition from “buried” into “air,” or audibility. The value of this setting is necessarily variable, based on the unique acoustic circumstances of each performance or recording. The Threshold needs to be adjusted to ensure an aesthetically convincing implementation of the gate; a balanced performance would have the Threshold set high enough to allow sufficient fading to silence between gestures in the Intro section, not allowing any ambient sound (or any audio spill of the backing track playback itself) to impact the operation of the gate, but not set so high that the quieter, airy sounds do not trigger the gate to open.

Hysteresis, also called **Return**, adds a range of decibels below the Threshold within which the gate will continue to remain open after triggering so that the application of the gate is not as abrupt for fast-changing sounds. For *Secret*, this is set to a fixed value of 6dB, which seems to be sufficient to avoid stuttering from the noise gate, in addition to the relatively long hold and release values prescribed.

¹⁰ Craig Anderton, “Digital Home Recording: Beyond the Gate,” *Keyboard*, May 1999, 116.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 117.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 116.

In the domain of attack-decay-sustain-release, **Attack** is a setting of time (in milliseconds) that the target audio will take to fade in from the moment the gate is “opened” to reaching its peak level. A fixed value of 125ms is applied in *Secret* which is relatively brief but an audible crescendo entry. The **Hold** value is the time (in milliseconds) that the gate will remain open, keeping the target audio at its peak level, after the source signal drops below the assigned Threshold value in decibels; this has been fixed at 375ms in *Secret*. The **Release** setting is the time (in milliseconds) that the target audio will fade out from its peak level to reach the “closed” state of the gate. For *Secret*, I have specified a relatively long release time of 500ms, which, in addition to the Attack and Hold values takes the overall arc of the gate implementation to 1 second ($1000\text{ms} = 125\text{ms} + 375\text{ms} + 500\text{ms}$), which will become relevant when referring to whole-second values in the discussion of the flute part below. This long release time causes the sounded backing track to “trail” the live flute material.

The **Floor**, or **Range**, is the amount of signal reduction (in decibels) that occurs when the gate is fully “closed.” Maximum attenuation, as applied in *Secret*, means the target audio is silent when the gate is operational, but other values can allow the target audio to persist at reduced decibel levels.

Some devices allow the operator to allocate a signal source for the gate that is independent of the target audio: a **Sidechain** or **Input** channel. I have exploited this feature in *Secret*, instructing the performer to set up the noise gate to be applied on the backing track as the target audio, with the audio signal from the flute assigned as the sidechain signal that acts upon the gate. The flute signal will trigger the opening and closing of the gate without the device acting on the flute audio. The noise gate will act on the backing track without its signal having any impact on the gate’s operation.

Finally, some devices have a **Flip** setting which allows the operator to invert the gate operation; when the source signal is above the decibel Threshold, the gate will be “closed,” and vice versa. I have not implemented this feature in *Secret*, though during the design of the composition I considered which way the gate should operate, and certainly there is the possibility for experimenting with this inverted operation in a subsequent, possibly even companion composition.

The implementation of the noise gate in the ways described above means that every performance of *Secret* will have a unique rendering of the backing track material based on subtle differences in the delivery of the flute part. If the dynamic is soft enough, especially in the Intro or Outro sections of the work, the gate will “open” less often to the sounding of the backing track, or for minimal periods of time. Variations in timing will cause certain events executed by the flutist to synchronise with slightly earlier or later material in the backing track, bringing slightly different moments of the backing track into the foreground and varying the auditory reflexivity between flute and fixed recording material.

3.3 The Flute: A New Song

The intention in designing the backing track as a conglomeration of many recordings was to obfuscate them through layering, but also to consider this new hybrid entity as source material for the flute part: one line of music selectively woven from multiple sources. Much of the experimentation in this work has been with composing the flute material, and specifically, what approach to use in drawing the flute sounds out of the foundational backing track. The recording was completed before any work commenced on the flute music. I then experimented with representing this multi-layered entity in various ways: via music notation; via spectral analysis and filtering; through software-transcription to MIDI; then finally, psycho-acoustically. Here, I'd like to survey some of the insights and drawbacks of each approach and consider the influence of composer Peter Ablinger in his *Quadraturen* series.

Once the backing material for *Secret* was configured and bounced down into a fixed stereo file, I considered ways that this hybrid entity could be re-notated and represented, as a maximum density source for “sculpting down” into the accompanying flute part. I had notated the original *Miniatures* in score form as well as recordings, even typesetting these using Finale software in files which I still had stored electronically. I located the scores for individual songs and attempted to calculate tempo relationships and extra-metric groupings that might allow up to 6 songs to be notated simultaneously as they sounded in the track. This approach was abandoned after a few bars due to the sheer workload of attempting this for an hour worth of songs compressed into the 11-minute track, considering that the resulting document would only be an intermediate step towards an actual flute score, and the relatively short time-frame I had to devise at least a draft work-in-progress. Also, notational simultaneity in such a working document wouldn't faithfully account for the flexibility in expressive delivery across the collection.

The next approach was to create looser graphic representations of what was taking place. These were not practical as source material for derivation of the flute but proved to be quite useful tools in communicating and representing aspects of the backing track. Two examples follow:



FIGURE 3.4: Graphic superimposition of music notation for six different songs from *Miniatures*

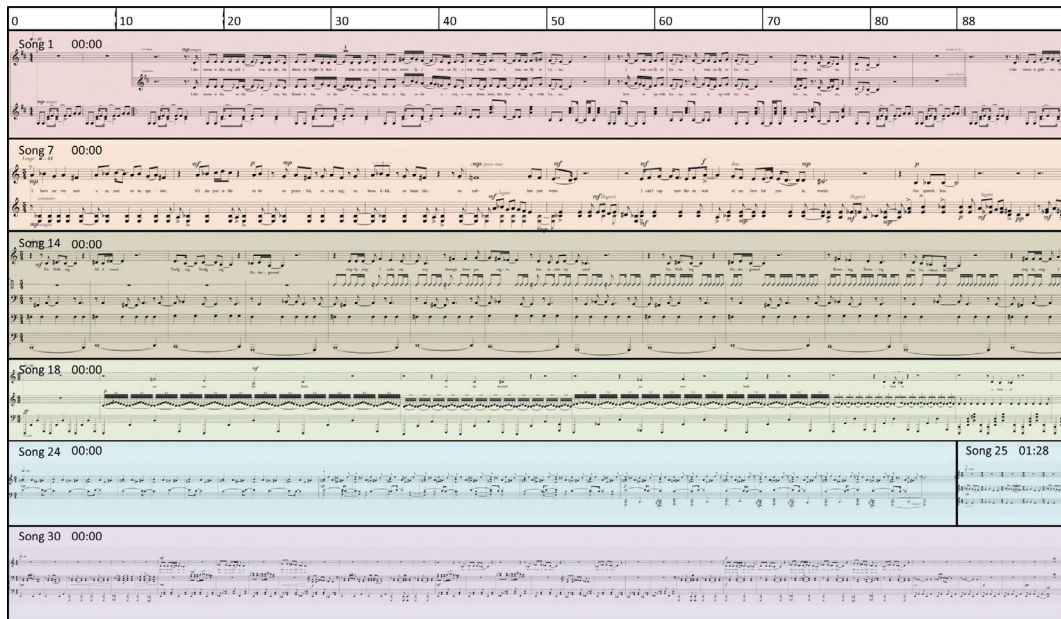


FIGURE 3.5: Notation for simultaneous songs from the *Miniatures* as six layers colour-coded and presented vertically

In figure 3.5, I'd like to point out the values across the top row (0, 10, 20, 30,...): these are seconds, counted by tens. I was starting to measure the *Secret* backing track in whole-second durations, in a sense applying yet another durational scale to this material which already consisted of many simultaneous tempi. This strategy is influenced by the approach of composer Peter Ablinger in his *Quadraturen* series. Ablinger describes a process that begins with a source recording, often centring on spoken word, to which a “grid-” or square-like filtering is applied, generating a score that translates the audio image with varying degrees of resolution and likeness, based on the instrumentation or medium of the work’s output.¹⁴ The following image from the composer’s website is illuminating:

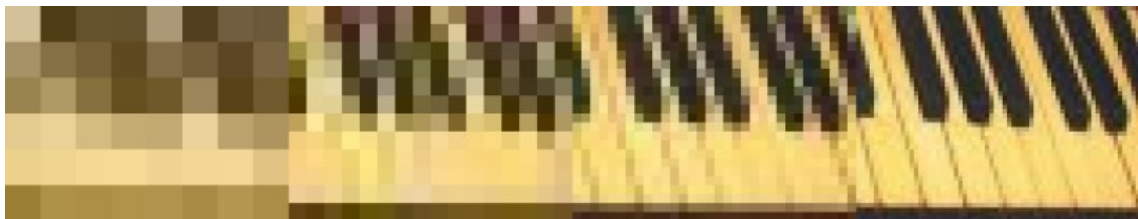


FIGURE 3.6: Composer Peter Ablinger's graphic representation of different resolutions of “phonorealism”¹⁵

Ablinger explains:

When using humanly played instruments the grid has to be enlarged (slowed down) to remain playable - thus the result of the transformation is not so much a reproduction of the original but an approach to or a situation of comparison between instrumental sounds and the original sound source. Using a smaller grain, e.g. 16 units per second (about the limit of the player piano), the original source approaches the border of recognition within the reproduction. With practice

¹⁴ Peter Ablinger, “Peter Ablinger - Quadraturen,” accessed 04/09/2020, <https://ablinger.mur.at/docu11.html>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

listening the player piano can even perform structures possible for a listener to transpose into/understand as spoken sentences.

Actually however, my main concern is not the literal reproduction itself but precisely this border-zone between abstract musical structure and the sudden shift into recognition - the relationship between musical qualities and “phonorealism”: the observation of “reality” via “music.”¹⁶

The works that result are compelling, whether performed by live players, as in the *Voices and Piano* series (1998-),¹⁷ a series of over 50 pieces where a live pianist plays simulations of famous speech recordings along with the original recordings, or automated, as in *Quadraturen III*, “A Letter From Schoenberg” (c.2006), a spectral derivation of an original spoken recording rendered into MIDI instructions for a complex self-playing piano setup (described as “speaking piano”¹⁸). This replaying entirely via piano has a high enough resolution that that the text is audible and decipherable, but would be impossible to be played by a human performer. It is important to emphasise Ablinger’s preoccupation with this moment of “recognition”; this can be contrasted with my own focus on obscuring aspects of the source. In my own practice, the concept of the grid is useful for composing a flute part that filters the layered source material to create one new hybrid line of music. And at the same time, the grid sets up parameters for filtering out information, allowing a partial impression of the combined originals.

The next step towards a flute part for *Secret* was to abandon reliance on notational forms of representation of the combined songs. I started to bring the material into software that would analyse and filter aspects of the spectrum. Sonic Visualiser was useful in terms of generating a chromagram, that is, a tool that divides the spectrum into the 12 pitch classes of the octave and highlights which is the dominant pitch class at each point on a variable time scale. Spear was useful in its ability to remove parts of the audio based on frequency and or duration. Ultimately both of these tools had the same drawback as my earlier approach to notation; for an 11-minute track, there was simply too much information to process for the time-frame I had to make progress on the work.

A final attempt to rely on software analysis was made, by experimenting with audio recognition and translating audio material to MIDI. Using the *Secret* backing track mix as well as individual songs from *Miniatures* as audio input material, the results across different software suites were surprisingly consistent (Ableton Live; Neuratron AudioScore) but quite unusable in their raw format. Once a MIDI file was generated, I imported it into music notation software (Avid Sibelius), using quantisation settings to

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Peter Ablinger, *Voices and Piano*, 1998-, accessed 04/09/2020, https://ablinger.mur.at/voices_and_piano.html.

¹⁸ Peter Ablinger, “A Letter from Schoenberg,” from *Quadraturen (III)*, 2006, accessed 04/09/2020, https://ablinger.mur.at/txt_qu3schoenberg.html.

experiment with different “grid” resolutions. With crotchet = 120 (2 beats per second), I imported the material ranging from semibreves (one pitch/chord for every 2 seconds) through to semiquavers (8 pitches/chords per second). At the semiquaver level, I ended up with a working document like the following, in which each track layer from the backing recording was colour-coded:

FIGURE 3.7: Colour-coded semiquaver-quantised transcription of the six layers in the backing track for *Secret* (2019)

This yielded some quite useful material, especially in the 2018 prototype version of the work, but the fixed nature of the quantization tended to skew my instinctive response to the material to even, metric passages rather than more organic, variable gestures.

For the full 11-minute version of *Secret* in 2019, in combination with this type of material, I returned to the backing track audio, and my own ears as tools for perceiving the hybridisation of the songs. In keeping with the songwriter spirit of the *Miniatures*, I started to shape a structure for *Secret* that referenced and stretched out an archetypal popular song form:

Intro: Whispers	0" – 1'34"
Verse I: "Step by step I make my way"	1'34" – 2'54"
Chorus I: "Scrawls in red ink"	2'54" – 4'16"
Verse II: "This panorama"	4'16" – 5'44"
Chorus II: "It's cold up here"	5'44" – 6'54"
Bridge: "Turn your head"	6'54" – 7'38"
B-Section: "The full moon shines behind a cloud"	7'38" – 9'32"
Outro: "As you wade through"	9'32" – 11'18"

Each of the sections was imagined as having a character influenced by its role popular music conventions. Commentators like Osborn observe the “verse-chorus paradigm”¹⁹ in popular song, where the Chorus is a “memorable highpoint,”²⁰ that is, a section where the song intensity escalates. Osborn gives detailed analysis of more recent songs that extend verse-chorus form, gradually escalating towards a contrasting and climactic ending. In *Secret*, I have alluded to the components of verse-chorus paradigmatic structure to explore which abstracted aspects of a flute solo could show an affinity with the traditional character of each section type.

The Intro and Outro were treated as counterparts, as a respective fade-in then fade-out of sonic density and intensity, with a high degree of space allowing silence to prevail, and the gate to open and close multiple times. The two Verses were imagined as introspective solo voices, in contrast with the two Choruses, each having a more declaratory, public, direct character, and more filled out passages that would hold the gate open and allow the backing track to sound continuously. The Bridge was conceptualised as a transitional passage with a similar character to the Intro and Outro, leading into the B-Section, a much contrasting musical tangent: a highly abstracted, “chorale-like” contrapuntal interweaving between various layers of flute techniques.

To compose the flute material for each section, I listened to the backing track through headphones in one-second samples. Keeping a one-second excerpt on loop brought certain pitches, words and/or melodic shapes to the foreground as psycho-acoustically more prominent, allowing me to notate a personal impression of that short moment in the timecode of the backing track. Once I had an entire section transcribed in this way, I could “sculpt” the transcription to certain rhythmic or textural structures which I wanted to take place in each section. Keeping in mind the setup of the gate, and that the backing track would always “follow” the sounding of the flute but not necessarily vice versa, the flute could slightly anticipate corresponding material in the backing track to create an aural interplay between the two.

3.3.1 Intro, Bridge & Outro

The starting and ending points of the work are extremely spacious, with airy, aspirated gestures alternating with silence, producing a very fragmentary sounding of the dense backing track texture. Allowing the flutist space to perform each gesture discretely creates a very intimate atmosphere, and in the Intro sets up the sonic interplay between flute and backing track for the audience. To return to the core research question here, of “What does a secret sound like?”, the Intro, Outro and Bridge point to the aesthetic first

¹⁹ Brad Osborn, “Subverting the Verse–Chorus Paradigm: Terminally Climactic Forms in Recent Rock Music,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 35, no. 1 (2013): 23.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

port-of-call for answering this question: fragmentary whispers, air sounds, “shushes,” breathy sounds, key clicks that resemble morse code. These increase in frequency and density through the Intro:

26''

4 Inhale: Air sound: *pp* Sh

40''

5 Inhale: Key clicks *mp*

56''

6 Inhale:

FIGURE 3.8: *Secret* (2019), Intro, lines 4-6 (26''-56'')

Meanwhile, the Bridge is quite restrained, subsiding for a moment where the second Chorus transitions to the highly abstracted “B-Section.” The Bridge is voiceless and restricted to air sounds and key clicks:

6'54'' Bridge: “Turn your head” 7'02''

43 Air sounds (sim.) Key clicks (sim.) *mp*

1'' (sim. - note timings are proportional to their placement in each 1 second block and can be somewhat flexible)

FIGURE 3.9: *Secret* (2019), Bridge, line 43 (6'54''-7'02'')

And ultimately the gestures in the Outro gradually become less frequent, more sparse:

9'57''

58 Inhale: Whisper: *p* "No Bat Woman..."

10'11''

59 Inhale: Air sound: *p*

10'26''

60 Inhale:

FIGURE 3.10: *Secret* (2019), Outro, lines 58-60 (9'57''-10'26'')

While this sound world is quite evocative, and an important, quite immediate exploration of the sonic signature of secrecy, having the background of Birchall’s analysis of the interplay between sensory and informational aspects of secrecy has been crucial in leading to the richer, deeper explorations of sonic secrecy across the different sections of this work, where various strategies of layering, encoding and hybridisation become more prominent.

The six layers of conglomerated backing track can be represented notationally from the original songs as follows. The vertical box indicates which excerpt from each of six songs coincides with 1'34"-1'35" in the backing track to *Secret*:

The figure displays a musical score for six tracks, with a vertical box highlighting a one-second excerpt from 1'34" to 1'35".

- Backing track:** 1'34"-1'35" (♩ = 56)
- TRACK 1:** Voice, "Luna" Guitar. Lyrics: "Lu - na, love_ is__ up with". Tempo: ♩ = 56.
- TRACK 2:** "Creatures I" Guitar. Tempo: ♩ = 44. Dynamics: *mf*, *p*, *mp*.
- TRACK 3:** Voice, "Hound" MIDI. Tempo: ♩ = 72. Lyrics: "Un - der-ground_".
- TRACK 4:** "Leech" Pno. Tempo: ♩ = 56. Dynamics: *ff*.
- TRACK 5:** "Lava" Pno. Tempo: ♩ = 208. Dynamics: *pp*, *molto ped.*
- TRACK 6:** "Kaemni" Pno. Tempo: ♩ = 96. Dynamics: *pp*.

FIGURE 3.13: *Secret* (2019), notational representation of one-second excerpt from backing track (1'34"-1'35")

The G-natural in Track 2 is most sonically prominent, falling comfortably within the mid-range equaliser filtering for that layer. On further analysis of the same one-second audio excerpt using a chromagram to match the division of the spectrum to the twelve pitch classes of equal temperament, the dominance of this G-natural can be clearly measured:

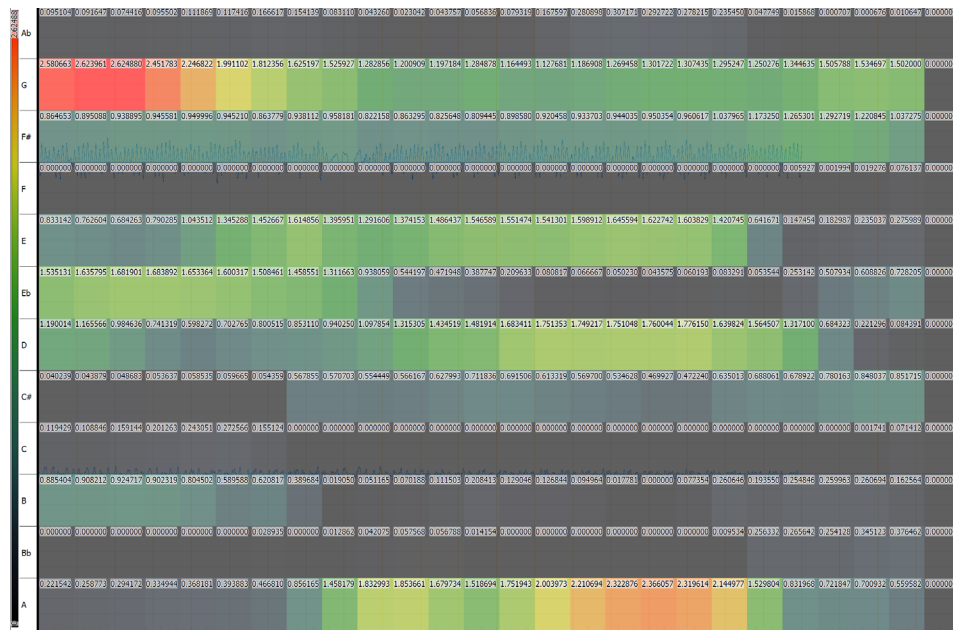


FIGURE 3.14: *Secret* (2019), chromagram representation of one-second excerpt from Verse I (1'34''-1'35'')

Once the pitch class is chosen, the register in which it will appear is compositionally decided according to recurring gestures taking place in a given section; here they are upward-moving melodic fragments.

Verse II returns to the alto flute, but in contrast with the previous verse, the music is legato, with more elongated note values appearing in sustained rising gestures:



FIGURE 3.15: *Secret* (2019), Verse II, line 26 (4'24''-4'29'')

The passage has an architecture of increase followed by decrease, and eventuates in a series of sparse, long held tones:

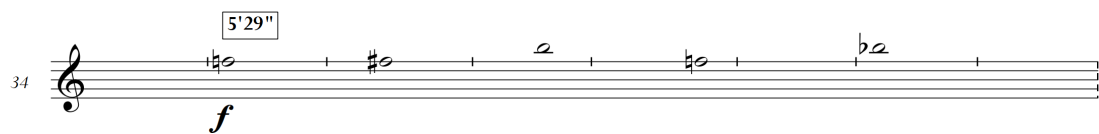


FIGURE 3.16: *Secret* (2019), Verse II, line 34 (5'29''-5'35'')

Choice of pitches is handled in the same way as Verse I: by the composer's psycho-acoustic perception of a dominant pitch class within each one-second block of the backing track, creating a new sonic connection and thread out of the archival material.

3.3.3 Chorus I & II

The Choruses each move back to concert flute, with this standard member of the instrumental family acting as a strong, default, public timbre. Each Chorus has the most dense passage writing utilising the

mid-high register of the flute to give the instrument sonic prominence in a way that contrasts with the more intimate sounds heard in the other sections:

FIGURE 3.17: *Secret* (2019), Chorus I, lines 20-21 (3'26"-3'42")

FIGURE 3.18: *Secret* (2019), Chorus II, line 39 (6'16"-6'24")

The denser flute writing here also acts to hold the gate open and provide uninterrupted accompaniment for the full duration of the passage. Together these aspects embody the public, collective character of a chorus. With similar intent, the Choruses are notated in a 4/4 (popular song) time signature at a metronome marking of crotchet = 60, with all rhythms specifically notated, and the music moving through gestures that have a phrase-like length. Devices such as timbral trills, flutter-tongue and tremolo give an effect similar to bird call that also creates a collectivist chorus aesthetic.

As discussed in relation to the Verses, the pitch content of the Choruses was also decided as a psychoacoustic compositional interpretation of the dominant pitches in the excerpt from the backing track that is occurring at that time. With the introduction of *tremolo* and repetitive oscillations on a fixed group of pitches as seen in figures 3.17 and 3.18, the treatment starts to become “chordal”; that is, based on the series of dominant pitches repeated in such a way that they begin to sound vertically stacked and static for a time. This intensifies the hybridisation or “encryption” of the original *Miniatures* material, where pitches from different songs are recombined, reordered, lengthened.

3.3.4 B-Section

Once the verse-chorus relationship becomes familiar, the Bridge section is used to move the composition into a highly contrasting section, which I have been describing as having a “B-section” quality. If I return to the work of Osborn for a moment, who describes a phenomenon of “Terminally Climactic Form”²¹ as departing from verse-chorus structure where the Chorus is the climax, there are parallels with the

²¹ Ibid.

inclusion of this section in *Secret* as a surprising and focused sonic detour before the close of the work. The flute part in the B-Section is multi-layered, highly abstracted, in a sense virtuosic through the shifts between various extended techniques. The notation on two staves gives some clue to the layered material, with sounds voiced through the flute on the upper staff, and sounds made with the flutist's voice on the lower staff:

7'38" B-Section: "The full moon shines behind a cloud"

FIGURE 3.19: *Secret* (2019), B-Section, line 47 (7'38"-7'50")

The strategies of hybridisation employed in increasing degrees in the Verses, then the Choruses, culminate here. When I describe this section as “chorale-like,” a polyphonic rhythmic structure is imagined, where each recurring technique or timbre is like a bell “tolling” repeatedly in its own time against the others, each moving independently. The simple quadruple meter is divided into triplet beats, over which repeating cycles recur every 10 triplet quavers, or every 15 triplet quavers, or alternating between these two values. The four layers are the flutist’s voice, single pitches played directly on the flute, natural multiphonics and consonant articulations:

	Line 47 - Bar 1 (7'38")	Bar 2	Bar 3
Consonants	15	10	
Multiphonics	10	15	
Single pitch	10		
Voice	15		
Line 48			
Consonants			
Multiphonics			
Single pitch			
Voice			
Line 49 (8'06")			
Consonants			
Multiphonics			
Single pitch			
Voice			
Line 50			
Consonants			
Multiphonics			
Single pitch			
Voice			

FIGURE 3.20: *Secret* (2019), B-Section, structural overview

Where two (e.g. third beat of bar 3, line 47) or three (e.g. first beat of Line 48, bar 2) “bell tolls” coincide, the flute part is scored for combined and adapted sounds. For example, at the third beat of bar 3, line 47 (see figure 3.19), the flutist is instructed to hum a C-natural while playing an F-natural. As in the other sections, pitches, words and consonant sounds are all derived from synchronous moments in the backing

track and making the approach to encryption or recombination of the original backing track material a multimedia one across pitch and text. If layers of simultaneous technique are not playable for a given player at a given time, there is the possibility for the flutist to strip down the density somewhat and “choose their own adventure,” selecting only the instructions that speak best for the given player and omitting layers of detail occasionally in a way that accords aesthetically with ideas about secrecy being explored in this work.

If I had decided now, after more than 15 years to release the *Miniatures*, I would have simply uploaded the original set of songs to a streaming service and shared the links with potential listeners. Instead, the decision to revisit this old sonic artefact has been one imbued at every stage with choices around how the songs are to be heard or obscured; which elements are echoed in the flute line; which aspects of the score and the sonic result are determinate and which are variable. I deliberately revisited a collection that I was not at peace with in terms of creative work I considered “worthy” of sharing. The lo-fi character of the song collection and recordings is quite at odds with the polished scores I am accustomed to delivering to instrumentalists to perform, and quite a private-facing mode of creativity given that I seldom perform publicly on any instrument in any context, compositional or song-writing. There were many times when I was physically uncomfortable while revisiting and reworking this material: squirming during the production of the backing track when I had to listen again and again to the songs while adjusting levels and placement; gasping at the rawness of lyrics; blushing to remember some of the autobiographical references; an anxious tightness in the stomach to share the backing track with performer Claire Chase for the first time. However, these were all choices that I made, that I worked through, and that culminated in the work at hand. To allude to Parpart’s ideas, I originally “chose silence”²² for the *Miniatures* only to decide many years later to excavate them now, to air them. In doing so I did choose to heavily obscure the songs, and the addition of the gate means that often the backing track does literally fall silent.

To return to Birchall’s adoption of the “known-unknown” quadrant to focus in on the “open secret,” the composition here interweaves different degrees of the informational and the sensory. The existence of the *Miniatures* collection is divulged: “cognitively known” via public performance of *Secret* and explanation in the program note. Meanwhile, each *Miniature* on its own remains “sensibly unknown”: unheard in its original form, scrambled with the others, partly heard, partly hidden when the gate falls silent. The collection as a whole is partially aesthetically known through the rise and fall of the backing track accompanying the flute. The moments when the gate fades to silence and the listener knows they have been “tuned out” of hearing something actually require the initial sounding of the backing track to have

²² Parpart, “Choosing Silence.”

this impact. If *Secret* was for solo flute without the interactive gate and backing track elements, the relationship to the originating material would be theoretical rather than sonic, even if it was transcribed from the *Miniatures*. All the elements need to be present for the work to have its full aesthetic effect.

Finally, the roots of *Secret* in the manipulation of existing sonic material (the *Miniatures* recordings) led the entire process of compositional journaling for this work to focus on auditory experimentation, culminating in the intuitive psychoacoustic approach that I used to painstakingly map out the flute part as a second-by-second recoding and interpretation of the combined backing track. Later in the thesis we shall see how the processes of creating each composition are innately intertwined with the working media in differing ways. For now, the experiences and output gained in creating *Secret* have raised new and tantalising compositional questions around different degrees of inclusion and omission. This work has caused me to reflect on the public nature of creative authorship and possibilities for reaching further into the sphere of private expression. It has also taught me to take notice of how intuition and embodied sensations combine during the process of composing, and to embrace not only the easier gut feelings but the more uncomfortable ones as part of a fuller musical palette.

Chapter 4: *Commute* (2018-20) a chamber opera

The world of opera abounds with gendered violence, historically permeating its drama, action, and music. Clément's¹ extensive 1979 critique of the artform opened up continuing scholarly discourse on the extent of this dynamic and debate² around women's agency in vocal and dramatic roles. As a collective in the midst of composing chamber operas, the Composing Women of 2018-19 found ourselves overwhelmed by structural issues of gender inequity in opera as an artform and an industry. After attending the New Opera Workshop (NOW2019) in Brisbane, April 2019, several attendees initiated a call to action, inviting signatories to commit to seven points of suggested reform, including the following:

2. *We call for a questioning of the systemic acceptance of gender-based violence in opera.*³

This is the context for the composing of chamber opera *Commute* (2018-20), a reflection on violence and street harassment from a feminine perspective. A mundane homeward public commute is removed from its originating urban environment and recast as a mythical journey. The chamber opera tells the story of Odyssea (mezzo-soprano) walking home, as a deliberate parallel to the Homeric protagonist sailing home. Just as Odysseus's journey is episodic, through which a single creature is met and vanquished in each chapter, *Commute* is in two Episodes. Hypothetically any number of additional episodes could be inserted, but the chamber opera stands as a minaturised epic. Various creatures from Ancient Greek myth are invoked, from within and without the *Odyssey*: in Episode I Odyssea meets and beats the *Hekatoncheiris* or Hundred-Handed Giant, and in Episode II encounters and overcomes the Cyclops. Both are played by two so-called Suitors (tenor and baritone), whose voices conjoin each time to form an internal narrative of a perpetrator. The Episodes are bookended by a Prelude and a Postlude, with an Interlude between. I see the narrative trajectory from Prelude to Postlude as a completely internal one: for Odyssea, from a status quo of trauma and fear, to a state of relief. And for the Suitors, a journey from acting and doing to sensing and noticing.

4.1 Background

The research proposal for this wider portfolio and thesis was drafted and submitted in late 2017, just after the #metoo movement received viral coverage in social media and news:

¹ Catherine Clément, *Opera, or, the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

² Carolyn Abbate, "Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

³ Sally Blackwood et al., "Opera and the Doing of Women," <https://www.artshub.com.au/news/opinions-analysis/opera-and-the-doing-of-women-257968-2363191/>.

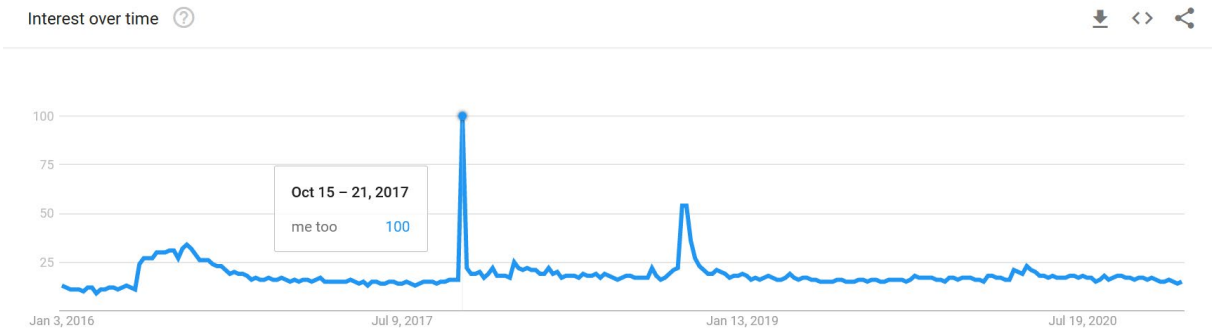


FIGURE 4.1: Google Trends search for the term “me too” in the 5 years between 2016-2020⁴

As I have mentioned earlier, sociocultural concerns of safety and secrecy were very much foregrounded in my thoughts at this time. As a woman, I was grappling with the question of whether or not to divulge my own experiences, how, or to what extent. As a composer, I reflected on whether the intensity of these private preoccupations could be reconciled with my public-facing work, which had tended to explore more safe or comfortable themes. To this end, I wrote the following brief for a possible chamber opera:

I propose to start composing sketches towards an operatic/theatre work that disrupts or reconsiders some of the archetypes from the operatic tradition, especially involving the representation of women, and concerning protagonists’ safety. It might be possible to play with the phenomenon of ‘shipping’ ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shipping_\(fandom\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shipping_(fandom))) ie fan fiction that invents non-canon relationships between characters from within or between franchises. Alternatively, to set up a metanarrative scenario that starts to self-reference the processes of composing or creating art, of communication and/or silencing. In addition, I would want to utilise the physical, dramatic space of staging to explore some preliminary research on safety, and public/private space distinctions, and possibly blur some of the boundaries between classical and pop style to include some more fragile or vulnerable elements inspired by the latter.⁵

While the “shipping” theme was abandoned for this work, in this chapter I will demonstrate that quite a few of these initial ideas persisted through to the completed chamber opera, particularly around the public/private divide. The evolution of *Commute* from these early ideas through to a final, public entity became primarily concerned with agency in communication and/or silence. Odyssea’s fraught journey home evolves into a state of physical relief and communicative freedom through various approaches within

⁴ “Me Too,” Google Trends, accessed 17/02/2021, <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?q=me%20too&date=2016-01-01%202021-01-01>.

⁵ Peggy Polias, “Preliminary Research Proposal for a Doctor of Musical Arts (Composition) Candidature.” Unpublished manuscript, last edited 08/11/2017, Microsoft Word file.

the music and in the libretto, and many of these dynamics within the work came to be reinforced through processes of creating the work as well as approaches to discussing the work.

There are several musical precursors that weave Ancient Greek and Homeric motifs into the arena of opera. Luciano Berio's *Outis* (1996)⁶ is an eclectic multilingual fleshing-out of the Odyssean "No-Man" that has close parallels with James Joyce's literary approach in *Ulysses* (1922). Kate Soper's *Here be Sirens* (2013)⁷ takes as a departure point the figures from Book XII of the *Odyssey* to explore resonances between narrative, language and voice. Her restricted palette of three sopranos and an on-stage prepared piano played by the singers is a striking example of an eclectic sound world achieved despite such economy. Less ancient myth and more genre-pushing, Du Yun's *Angel's Bone* (2010/2015)⁸ is scored for three operatic singers and one punk-style singer, and demonstrates the possibilities for bringing rock/pop elements onto the opera stage.

4.2 Compositional Structure

The opera is structured as follows:

Prelude: Amen I	[A]	For wordless voices and electronic backing track.
Episode I: O Hekatoncheiris (The Hundred-Handed)	[B]-[M]	Full ensemble with electronics. Includes the pop-like "Song: <i>Hundred</i> "
Interlude: Amen II	[N]	Voiceless. For percussive ensemble with no electronics.
Episode II: To Mati (The Eye)	[O]-[U]	Full ensemble with electronics. Includes the pop-like "Song: <i>She feels</i> "
Postlude: Dawn	[V]-[AA]	For mezzo-soprano and ensemble, no electronics.

TABLE 4.1: Overall structure of *Commute* (2018-20)

This chapter discusses the chamber opera through its Episodes/movements, with occasional attention given to stages in its trajectory from initial idea in November 2017 through workshops and collaborative processes to a film production that streamed online in April 2020. I will demonstrate how various text media—existing words by other authors, my own writings old and new and spoken word—were emphasised in processes of composing the opera, reflecting the role of the libretto in structuring the work.

⁶ Luciano Berio and Dario Del Corno, *Outis*, Milan: Ricordi, 1996, music score.

⁷ Kate Soper, *Here Be Sirens*, New York: PSNY, 2013, music score.

⁸ Du Yun and Royce Vavrek, *Angel's Bone*, New York: G. Schirmer Inc., 2010/2015, music score.

4.3 Libretto

The creation of this work began with the writing of a libretto. Due in part to time constraints and also to an interest in crafting the language that would accompany the music, the libretto is of my creation.⁹ It appears in full within the composition portfolio, in the cover pages to *Commute*. The chamber opera, much more than *Secret* and other compositions in this portfolio, leans consistently on literary sources and inspiration. Central to these are allusions to Homer's *Odyssey*: Odyssea our protagonist; the tenor and baritone roles, described as "Suitors" 1 & 2; and the Cyclops in Episode 2. There are two small fragments quoted from the Homeric text: the "wine-dark sea" («οἴνοπα πόντον» / "oinopa ponton"¹⁰) and a formulaic paragraph opening "As soon as Dawn appeared, fresh and rosy-fingered..." («ἤμος δ' ἠριγένεια φάνη ροδοδάκτυλος Ἥως» / "ēmos d' ērigéneia phánē rhododáktulos Ēōs"¹¹), used frequently throughout the epic.

I should note that Emily Wilson's refreshing translation of *The Odyssey*¹² was released in 2017 to significant acclaim and media coverage. Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005),¹³ in novel and play formats, has also been an important precedent. Atwood gives a feminist reimagining of the *Odyssey* from Penelope's perspective. Particularly interesting is the author's agility between literary formats: prose-like text, children's clapping games, etc. In some ways this set a precedent for passages in the present libretto, such as the ritual counting to one hundred, and the adoption of "pop song" structure at times. Some wider motifs from Ancient Greek myth were also important, especially the *Hekatoncheires*/Hundred-Handed Giants.

These various motifs and influences collide into a libretto that is sometimes in English, sometimes in Modern Greek, and sometimes in Ancient Greek. The narrative is completely an internal one, charting Odyssea's journey from a state of trauma to a state of relief, and this is echoed in aspects of the text: ritualistic Modern Greek counting create a sense of escalating tension then later the reverse; words (for example, "hundred") are reduced to harsh consonant sounds; the English moves between longer-form prose and snappier rhyming pop-chorus-like stanzas; grammatical person shifts and evolves symbolically with the narrative trajectory.

⁹ With thanks to Pierce Wilcox for important input in the development of the libretto between the 2018 workshops and final 2020 version.

¹⁰ For example, Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 1, Line 183, "Perseus Digital Library," Department of Classics, Tufts University, accessed 21/12/2021, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>.

¹¹ For example, Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 2, Line 1, *ibid*.

¹² Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Emily R. Wilson (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018).

¹³ Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2005).

4.4 Prelude & Interlude: Amen I & II

Like, shit, how do I even put this to music? Like it's just [sigh] insanity. I'm thinking about the dark. I'm thinking about bodily tension. How do I bring that tension into the music? How do I put it onto a piano or into a synth? Um, maybe in the Prelude we're dealing with percussion only so we don't even have pitch to deal with, we've got these sort of tense, um, triggered sort of sounds. Um, [sigh] so tricky, this is so tricky.¹⁴

[Online link to sound recording: TalkAloud_20180618_excerpt.mp3](#)

AUDIO EXAMPLE 4.1: Private "Talk-aloud" recording (18/06/2018) [3'07"-3'44"]

These candid thoughts are transcribed from a 30-minute experimental compositional "talk-aloud"¹⁵ recording, captured 18 June 2018, early in the process of composing the chamber opera *Commute* (2018-20). The idea for this experiment was adapted from performance major student colleagues, using Davidson's model of recorded instrumental practice sessions with spoken commentary as part of their practice-led research. Not originally intended for sharing or inclusion here as part of the compositional data, it is as disarmed and confessional as the unreleased *Miniatures* that inspired the composition of *Secret*, and some of the other journalistic media that will follow. The procedure was to set a timer for the intended duration of the work, thirty minutes, and to record a spoken and played commentary of the ideas for the opera that approximated the durations of each movement or episode. This one-off experiment with talk-aloud live-composing demonstrates a high degree of uncertainty, filled with questions and subjective comments indicating a degree of difficulty. However, despite my own somewhat dismissive critiques through the recording, suggesting that the process was not really resulting in material, there are in fact some decisive movements that have a direct bearing on the resultant final work. I want to put emphasis here on the following:

...we're dealing with percussion only so we don't even have pitch to deal with...

¹⁴ Peggy Polias, "Transcription of Private "Talk-Aloud" Recording." Unpublished recording, captured 18/06/2018, mp3 file. [3'07"-3'44"].

¹⁵ Suh and Trabasso, "Inferences during Reading," via Davidson, "Practice-Based Music Research: Lessons from a Researcher's Personal History."

This musing collided with thoughts around forms of popular music that could represent an urban, public space, a status-quo, a starting point for Odyssea’s operatic journey.

If we directly consider the rhythm section of popular music, I couldn’t help but think of the now-ubiquitous “Amen Break.” This is a six-second stretch of drum solo played by Gregory Coleman in The Winstons’ track “Amen Brother” (1969), a B-Side recording on the single release *Color Him Father*.¹⁶ The inclusion of this sample in the 1986 LP collection *Ultimate Breaks and Beats* (SBR501) saw the sample enter hip hop and extended use of the Amen Break across tempi, genres and continents over the following decades. According to user-submitted data on the website Who Sampled, it is statistically the most sampled track, said to be adopted 5,339 times in other popular music recordings at the time of writing.¹⁷ If the history of contemporary popular music is intertwined with urbanisation and industrialisation, then one of the most signature sounds of a range of popular music styles could act as a sonic signifier of the masculinised city.

In the “Prelude: Amen I” of *Commute*, the Amen Break is not sampled, but quoted via a synthesised rendition. Coleman’s exciting, spontaneous performance is dehumanised by reducing the drum part to its precisely-quantised transcription:

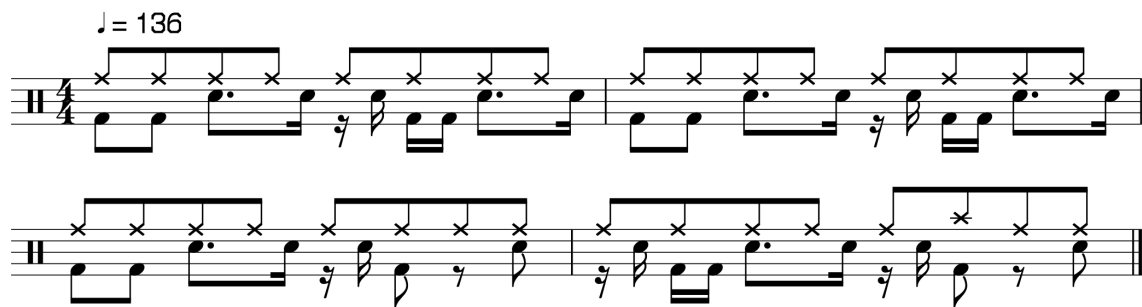


FIGURE 4.2: Public domain transcription of The Winstons’ Amen Break (notated by Kugland and Bo98)¹⁸

This is made choppy by slightly reducing the durations of all tones to leave short gaps between the sounds, and it is rendered through several layers of white noise mixed with a subtle sine wave to give slightly different pitch to the kick drum, snare and cymbal parts:

¹⁶ The Winstons, “Amen Brother,” from *Color Him Father*, Metromedia Records MMS-117, 1969, YouTube, streaming audio (originally released on vinyl), accessed 01/02/2022, <https://youtu.be/HrrWhCbZAYY>.

¹⁷ “Who Sampled,” accessed 08/03/2021, <https://www.whosampled.com/>. (<https://www.whosampled.com/most-sampled-tracks/> date accessed 10/05/2021)

¹⁸ Public domain image https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Amen_break_notation.png.

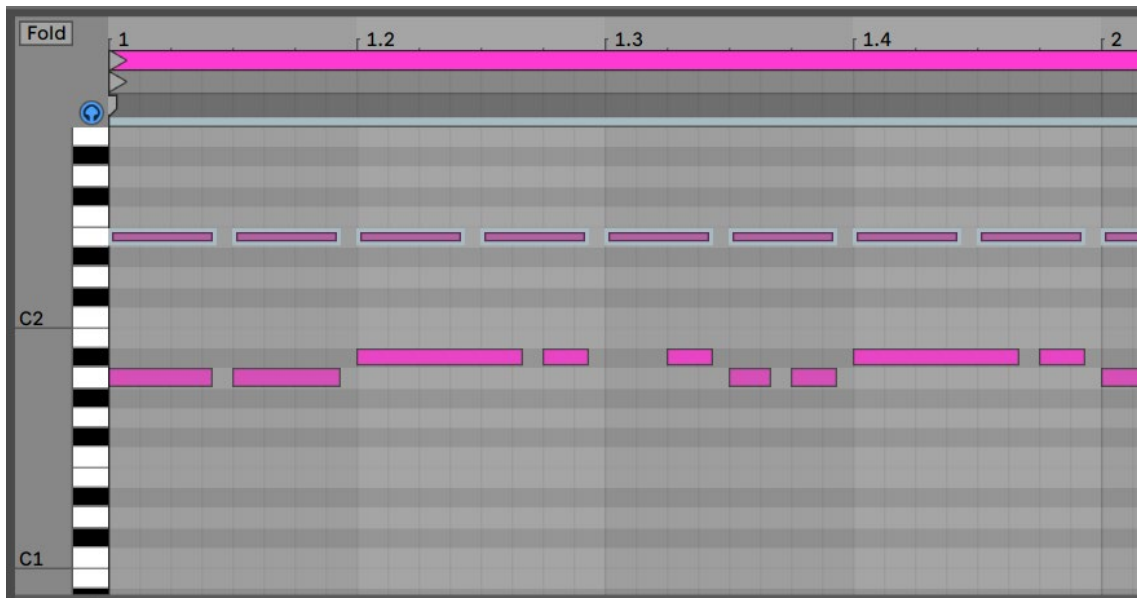


FIGURE 4.3: Ableton Live rendering of the Amen Break (bar 1), as used in the backing track to the Prelude of *Commuter* (2018-20)

Over the four or so minutes of the backing track for the Prelude the loop gradually slows down from an initial speed of crotchet = 126 (this is slightly slower than the original performance tempo of the drum break), down to an eventual speed of crotchet = 88. A potential effect of this very gradual *ritenuto* is that the quoted drum break will reflect some of the various genres in which it has been sampled at different tempi. The more immediate sonic effect is a sinister broadening.

Regarding text, the earliest version of the Prelude libretto for the 2018 workshops had words in English. The instruction was for several male voices to recite the options within each of the sections in any order:

i. Greetings. Small talk. Compliments. Flattery. Evaluation. Assumptions. Charm. Whistles.

Gestures. Smile.

ii. Have you got the time? Where are you going? How old are you? Where are you from? Are you single? Where do you live? What do you do? Can I see your...? Smile.

iii. Threats. Hostility. Insults. Profanity. Intimidation. Aggression. Coercion. Force. Violence.

Smile.

This text was echoed in the June 2018 talk-aloud recording, which unfolded to include numerous personal reflections on specific street-harassment episodes I had experienced, and which I have decided not to cite here. In consultation with the Sydney Chamber Opera team, I was insistent that at no point in the music or staging is any one particular instance of street harassment recreated. Instead, I wanted to capture archetypal aspects of a street-harassment episode. The original text above did this to an extent, by using general descriptive text that followed a sequence from initial approach, to interrogation, to abuse. Following the 2018 workshops with Sydney Chamber Opera and NIDA student directors, the collaborative team returned with feedback that this passage of text was still very specific and didn't allow enough freedom to mediate between the here-and-now and the ancient mythical resonances of the

chamber opera. While I initially struggled with this feedback, I did rework the libretto to remove all text from the Prelude, and I tend to agree with this position now. Instead, the Prelude includes no intelligible text, only consonant sounds. I tried to at least begin with consonant sounds that were shared between English and Modern Greek, anticipating the languages of later sections of the opera, moving through a series from softer to harder utterances across six sections:

m/n l/y/w b/d/g z/v/δ p/t/k s/f/θ

This goes even further to remove specificity from the Prelude, while continuing to embody the trajectory of increasing hostility that I had set up in the original version of the Prelude. This time, the escalating violence takes place inside the mouths of the two Suitor roles, reinforced by the ensemble as a chorus/mob, rather than in the realm of textual meaning or of inter-personal physicality. These are more like grotesque creatures from ancient European myth than a dapper urban Man-on-the-Bondi-Tram. Furthermore, removing the specificity of language in the Prelude creates a blank canvas scenario within which perpetrators of gendered violence could potentially begin to recognise and call into question their own memories of acting or doing.

I'm thinking about the heaviness of silence.¹⁹

Odyssea is silent throughout the Prelude but onstage, in a state of maximum oppression. She will not begin to gain voice or agency until part-way into Episode 1, at rehearsal letter [F] where she enters with her own syllabic vocalisations on parts of the word “hundred.”

Later on, between the two Episodes, the “Interlude: Amen II” recalls the percussion-focused quotation of the Amen Break. This time, there is no electronic rendition, nor any vocal parts; this short passage is entirely played on the acoustic instruments of the ensemble, with rhythm prioritised and a lack of specified pitches. The Amen Break is deconstructed into its smallest component rhythmic cells, distributed across the ensemble for ad lib. performance in any order, with each rendition unique. The percussionist sets a tempo with a shaker on repeated quavers, similar to the way the piano opens Terry Riley’s *In C* (1964).²⁰ Kick drum material is given to the piano and double bass; cymbals are distributed to the flute and viola; and the snare drum cells are given to the clarinet:

¹⁹ Polias, “Transcription of Private “Talk-Aloud” Recording.” Unpublished recording, captured 18/06/2018, mp3 file. [6'35" - 6'38"].

²⁰ Terry Riley, *In C*, New York: Associated Music Publishers, Inc., 1964, music score.

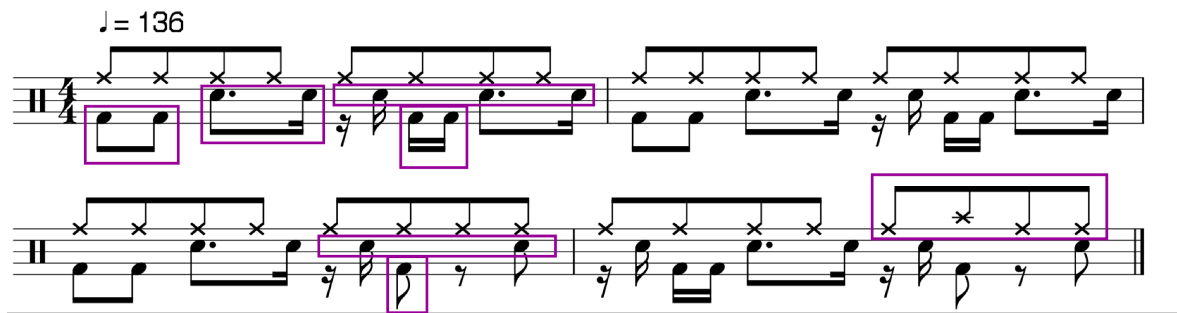
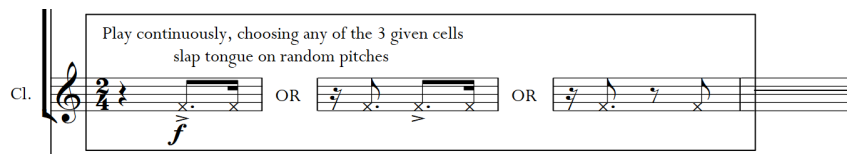


FIGURE 4.4: Amen Break marked up to show smallest rhythmic cells

FIGURE 4.5: Snare drum cells redistributed to the clarinet in the Interlude of *Commute* (2018-20)

This deconstruction of the Amen Break retains a degree of sonic resemblance with popular music but constitutes an abstraction, almost encryption of the original entity. Similarly to the Prelude, the rhythmic cells are based on the exact transcribed notation of Coleman’s performance, but this time the rhythms are heard organically from human performers, without the harsh electronic quantisation of the Prelude. This time, in the Interlude, partway through *Odyssea*’s journey to liberation the percussive Break is still ominous, but falling into smaller pieces, just like #metoo hopes to break down the gender dynamics of the city that we could consider the Amen Break to represent. Here in the Interlude, the traces of the Break are also slightly more organic, slightly more human.

4.5 Episode I, O Hekatoncheiris (The Hundred-Handed)

Um, I’m also thinking about the physicality of this and how this begins with *Odyssea* sort of hemmed into almost a corner or blockaded somehow, um, and part of her severing these arms is that she can sort of pass, so maybe... we’re like literally vines blocking a path or something and she’s severing those.²¹

The narrative concept for this part of the opera is an invented Odyssean episode: our protagonist *Odyssea* on her homeward commute encounters an *Hekatoncheiris*,²² the mythical Hundred-Handed Giant from

²¹ Polias, “Transcription of Private “Talk-Along” Recording.” Unpublished recording, captured 18/06/2018, mp3 file. [22’22” - 22’48”]

²² A note on spelling: H.J. Rose has the plural form *Hekatoncheires* for the three giants Kottos, Briareos and Gyes. (H.J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, 6th ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 1928/1958), 22.) I have adopted a singular spelling, *Hekatoncheiris*, based on -es plural endings in Modern Greek resulting from a masculine singular ending of -is. However, I note

Ancient Greek myth, outside of the Homeric epic. A metaphor for non-consensual invasions of women’s physical space, the Giant—a conglomerate of the two Suitor singers—grows his arms one-by-one over the course of Episode I, while a silent Odyssea slowly finds her voice. Through the emboldened gesture of a pop-song-like aria (“Song: *Hundred*”) she gains agency. The pop-song is like Odyssea’s weapon, or act of vanquishing. This continues into a reflective, confessional passage, “Journal,” during which Odyssea “disarms” the giant and continues her journey unimpeded:

“The Growing of the Hands”	[B]-[E]: bars 1-33
“Song: <i>Hundred</i> ” (“Reflective” prelude) (“Reflective” postlude)	[F]: bars 34-42
	[G]-[J]: bars 43-94
	[K]: bars 95-108
“The Severing of the Hands & “Journal”	[L]-[M]: bars 109-141

TABLE 4.2: Structure of Episode I from *Commute* (2018-20)

4.5.1 Growing and Severing Hands



FIGURE 4.6: Staging of *Commute* (2018-20), Episode I, in Sydney Chamber Opera’s 2020 production as part of *Breaking Glass*. Director: Clemence Williams; Photograph: Daniel Boud; Pictured: Jessica O’Donoghue (Odyssea)

The theme of growing arms, or becoming “armed” is expressed metaphorically in the Suitor’s text, a simple count in Modern Greek from 1 to 100, advancing by ones, then by tens:

the usage in Homer’s *Iliad* (1.402) of *Hekatoncheiron* (ἑκατόγχειρον), the singular accusative form of *Hekatoncheiros*, to refer to Briareos alone.

Ένα, δύο, τρία, τέσσερα, πέντε, έξι, εφτά, οχτώ, εννέα, δέκα,

Ena, dhio, tria, tessera, pente, exi, epta, ochto, ennea, theka,

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten,

είκοσι, τριάντα, σαράντα, πενήντα, εξήντα, εβδομήντα, ογδόντα, ενενήντα, εκατό.

eikosi, trianta, saranta, peninta, exinda, evthominda, oghthonda, eneninda, ekato.

twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety, one hundred.

This grotesque, growing array of arms/tendrils is also expressed musically. A highly influential precedent is the solo piano work *Evrjali* (1973) by Iannis Xenakis²³. I first became familiar with this work some years ago as an undergraduate. After viewing the graphic sketch for the work in Varga's *Conversations with Iannis Xenakis*,²⁴ I set about working from the score back onto graph paper to painstakingly reconstruct some of the arborescences, gaining a deeper understanding of the relationship between the architectural gestures and resulting sound.

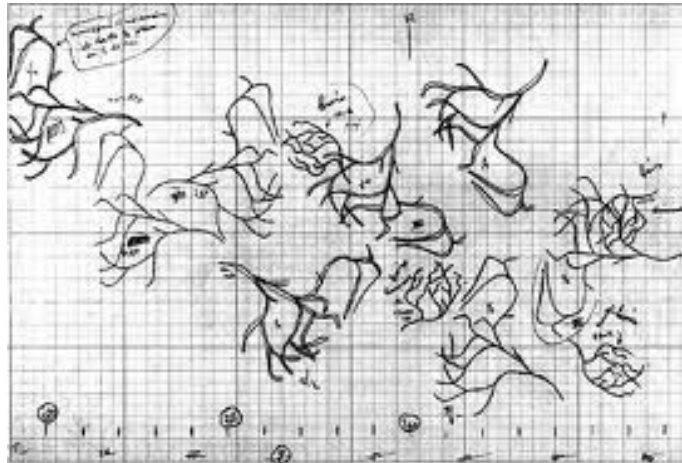


FIGURE 4.7: Xenakis, *Evrjali* (1973), the composer's arborescent sketches for the work²⁵

The wild tendrils of Euryale's serpentine, Gorgon hair envelop the pianist and listener in Xenakis's evocation of the Ancient Greek myth world. While Xenakis's arborescences are organic, wild, hand-drawn, in Episode I of *Commute* my own array of growing limbs or "vines" is more linear, calculated. The opening section, "The Growing of the Hands," (bars 1-33) is built on a simple suspended contrary-motion stepping of pitches that forms the basis for a musical growing of arms, both in the Suitors' voice parts and the ensemble:

²³ Iannis Xenakis, *Evrjali*, Paris: Editions Salabert, 1974, music score.

²⁴ Bálint András Varga, *Conversations with Iannis Xenakis* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.



FIGURE 4.8: *Commute* (2018-20), Episode I, main motif (bars 4-15)

These expand outward through widening pitch intervals between the two lines, with lengthening durations in a similarly stepwise, incremental approach that helps add a contrapuntal, non-ostinato quality to the layering of this material. To further enhance the sense of increase in this passage, additional pairs of tendrils are stacked canonically on rising octave registers across the ensemble. The entries of each new pair of “musical arms” become closer and closer so that eventually, when we reach “ekato” (one hundred), all the pitches are stacked simultaneously across the many tendrils.

This acoustic material is depicted in the bolder central row of figure 4.10 (below). Additionally, a prepared electronic track extends the process further. This follows the same stepwise motion in rhythmic unison, but not on a diatonic array moving outwards from E-flat. Instead, the backing track mimics the accumulating structure using pairs of pitched, sawtooth waveforms that move incrementally by integers from A-natural (110Hz). The increments follow the text: where the counting advances by one, so do the frequencies of the waveforms, then later they advance by tens.

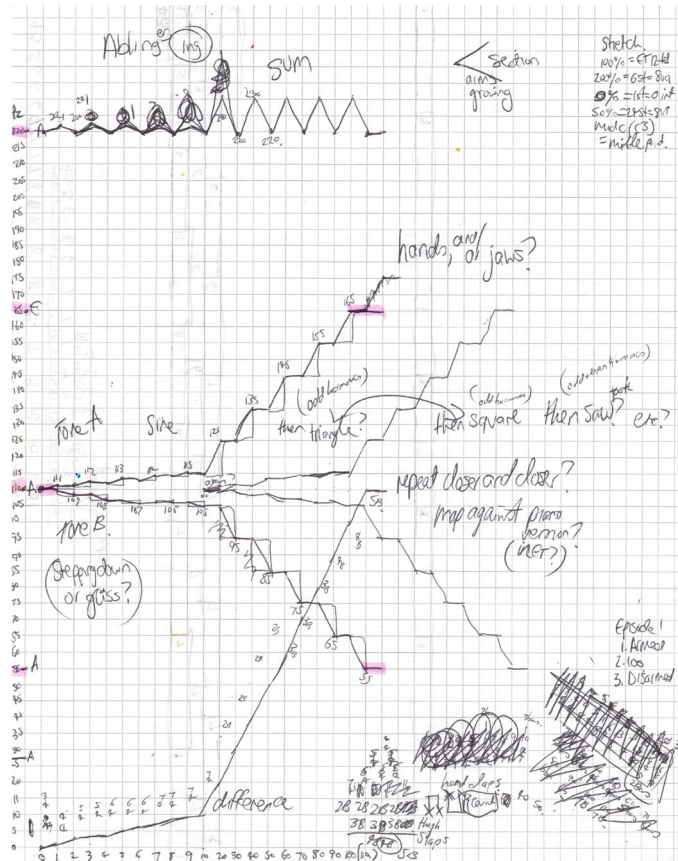


FIGURE 4.9: Compositional sketch of contrary stepwise “arms” in the electronic track (undated)

The electronic tendrils produce a growing cluster of acoustic interference beats that parallels or shadows the live ensemble. This adds a sinister, nauseating quality to the overall sound. At the vertical extremities of the drawing above I’ve sketched out the expected trajectories of the sum and difference tones that accumulate alongside the synthesiser output. The addition of the electronic element adds more “arms” to the ensemble, further increasing the Hundred-Handed Giant’s array of limbs.

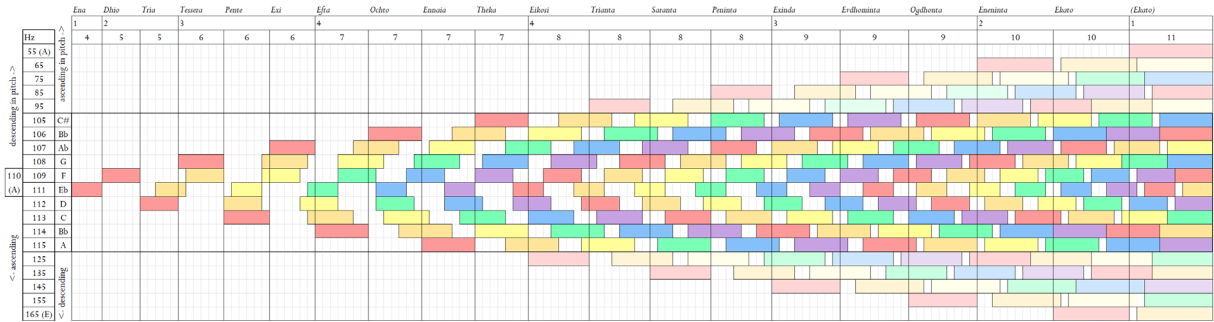


FIGURE 4.10: *Commute* (2018-20), Episode I, “The Growing of the Hands” (bars 4-33), accumulation of main motif

While the Hekatoncheiris has grown all one hundred verbal and musical arms, Odyssea has been gradually finding her voice. She interjects with a pop-like song, “Hundred,” that will be discussed in detail in the following section. Odyssea’s song acts as a damaging initial blow to the Hekatoncheiris. In “The Severing of the Hands” (bars 109-141), a descending count from one hundred to one, in English, reverses the musical texture of the Growing section, a “disarmament.” Where earlier we started with a single musical tendril that multiplied, this time we begin with the fullest, queasiest texture, one hundred arms of equal-temperament instrumentation and calculated microtonal waveforms. These gradually subside until there is a single musical layer remaining, then none. The fixed media electronic track was composed in Ableton Live with pairs of tracks to each Hertz pitch value used previously in the Growing section.

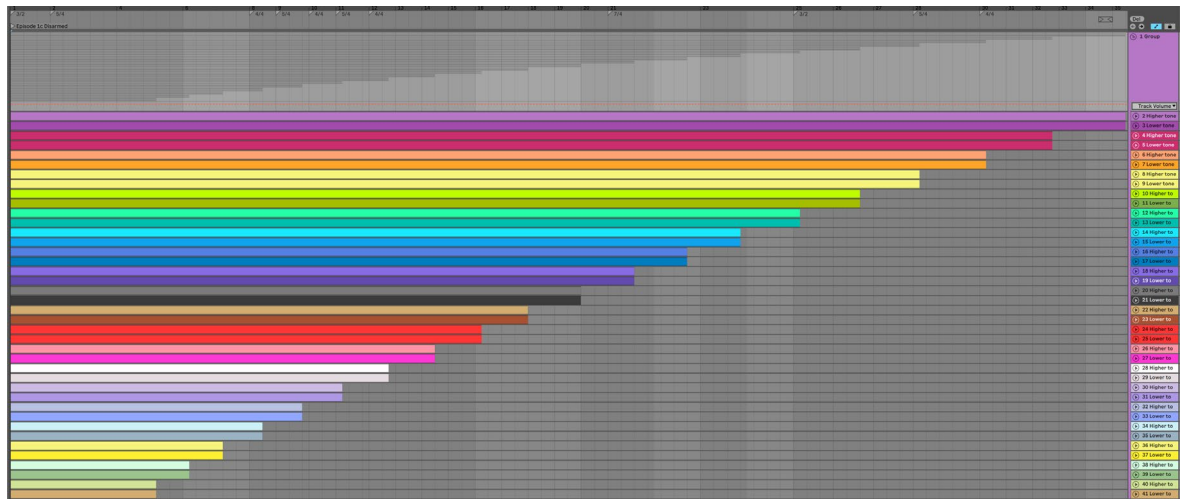


FIGURE 4.11: *Commute* (2018-20), Episode I, “The Severing of the Hands” (bars 109-141), set up of fixed electronic track in Ableton Live

While this array gradually subsides, a retrograde of the earlier, acoustic Growing motif is distributed through the ensemble. While the Growing motif began Eb-F-D-G, the Severing motif concludes G-D-F-Eb:

FIGURE 4.12: *Commute* (2018-20), Episode I, “The Severing of the Hands,” closing passage (bars 135-138)

This time, as indicated by the arrows in figure 4.12, instead of each instrument giving a coherent rendition of the notes in sequence, the motif is fractured and distributed through the instruments, each oscillating through the octaves of a fixed pitch class, and initially alternating between normal, sustained tones, and grotesque trill fluctuations.

4.5.2 Journal

The Hekatoncheiris’s disarming takes place while Odyssea sings a passage called “Journal,” which is a text adapted from one of my old real-life diary entries (of 2003, same year as the *Miniatures*). If Odyssea’s song “Hundred” was a catalyst for this shift, now, textually and musically, Odyssea is severing all the Giant’s grabby hands one-by-one with private words reflecting on a scenario of trauma, which I could never have imagined at the time might have made their way into an opera. While the voices of Suitors 1 & 2 as Hekatoncheiris continue to move through a ritualistic counting sequence, Odyssea’s “Journal” melody floats above, expressive and reflective:

FIGURE 4.13: *Commute* (2018-20), Episode I, “Journal” (bars 111-116)

In the following image and table, the original journal entry that this passage is based on can be seen, hand-scratched in red calligraphy pen, followed by a typed transcription alongside the textual transformation that made its way into the libretto. I can hardly believe I’m including this image in the context of an academic thesis, and the feelings of panicky discomfort persist: a dry mouth; a pang at the solar plexus, hovering over the “delete” button. Nevertheless, here it is:

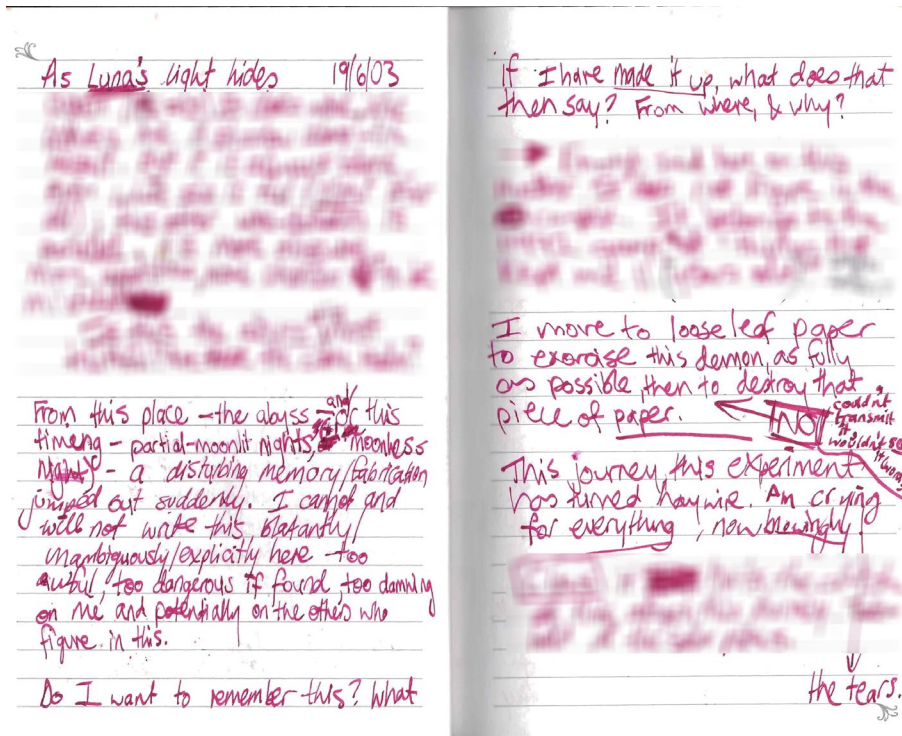


FIGURE 4.14: Old diary entry (19/06/2003) adapted for “Journal” in the libretto for *Commute* (2018-20)

Transcription of journal entry (19/06/2003)	Adaptation in the libretto of <i>Commute</i>
<p>From this place—the abyss—and/or this timing— partial-moonlit nights, (*1 moonless night)— a disturbing memory/fabrication jumped out suddenly. I cannot and will not write this blatantly/ unambiguously/explicitly here—too awful, too dangerous if found, too damning on me and potentially on the others who figure in this. Do I want to remember this? What if I have <u>made it</u> <u>up</u>, what does that then say? From where, & why? ... I move to loose leaf paper to exorcise this demon as fully as possible, then to destroy that piece of paper. NO: couldn't transmit it, wouldn't <u>see</u> it (words). This journey, this experiment has turned haywire. Am crying (the tears) for <u>everything</u>, now <u>knowingly</u>.</p>	<p>From the abyss of memory one memory suddenly emerged.</p> <p>I questioned the reliability of the mind.</p> <p>I agonised over releasing it in plain words but in the end I could not.</p> <p>It faded with tears and time.</p>

TABLE 4.3: Comparison of text in journal entry from figure 4.14 with adapted text in libretto for *Commute* (2018-20)

The correspondences between the private and public texts are clear, but this demonstrates an active mediation of revelation, or partial disclosure. I have decided to include an image of the original diary entry here in the thesis but have blurred the extraneous material that I didn't want to share. While elsewhere my diaries include detailed disclosures, this particular diary entry, like the redacted quotation at the opening of this thesis, does not give specific information, even though I personally remember the scenario it refers to. Then, the textual transformation for the libretto leaves the raw wording behind, adding a layer

of artifice as a protective barrier between my original private writing and the audience for the chamber opera.

4.5.3 Song: Hundred

Odyssea's first pop-song, "Hundred," is bounded by two transitional passages marked "Reflective." In the first of these (bars 34-42), Odyssea makes her first utterances of the consonants from the word "hundred"—H(uh), (uh)N, D(eh), R(eh), D(eh)—which has sonic parallels with the Suitors' first utterances in the Prelude. The Suitors canonically intertwine to reflect on pseudo-philosophical questions about themselves: "A hundred hungry, or one hunger, hundred-fold?" Chromatic content is juxtaposed grotesquely against drones and arpeggiated fifths in the piano: while there is a hiatus in the electronic part during this passage, semitones and tritones abound in the voice and ensemble lines and sustained tones in the strings sometimes slide through close glissandi:

FIGURE 4.15: *Commute* (2018-20), from Episode I, the "reflective" prelude to "Song: Hundred" (bars 34-35)

The semitone movement continues into the commencement of the "Hundred" song structure (bars 43-94). A regular, rhyming text underpins a simple quadruple musical structure that undergoes several strategies of destabilisation:

One Hundred hands

One Hundred places

One Hundred eyes

One Hundred gazes...

While Odyssea’s stuttered consonants flower into an expressive lead vocal as she finally finds her voice, the Suitor’s now take on the consonants from the word “hundred” in a rhythmic pseudo-beat-boxing. The flute and bass clarinet open with similarly percussive material before doubling Odyssea’s part over expanded registers. The percussionist moves to a drum kit to play trap-style beats throughout. The pianist moves to a synth or MIDI controller, playing a piano bassline and sawtooth semitonal riff that undergoes electronic processing to add a simultaneous quarter-tone detuning, as well as hemiola-like repetition with delay at the values of 3 semitones and 5 semitones:

FIGURE 4.16: *Commute* (2018-20), Episode I, “Song: Hundred,” transcription of synthesizer part with delay effect (bars 47-48)

Meanwhile, the piano bassline is also heard on the double bass, at standard pitch, but continuing to slide uneasily in a slow, close glissando to each new tone. The viola adds occasional semitonal trills, doubling the piano right-hand tones in a higher register.

The harmonic or bassline structure of the song is closely intertwined with the constantly fluctuating tempi. The song, naturally, starts with a tempo value of crotchet equals one hundred. When the bassline rises, the tempo increase, when the bassline descends the tempo slows, and each tempo value corresponds to a specific pitch. In the four-bar introduction and the opening four-line stanza, the bassline moves from A, up a semitone to B-flat, then to the tone below, G. The tempo of crotchet = 100 increases slightly to 106, then slows to 94:

FIGURE 4.17: *Commute* (2018-20) Episode I, “Song: Hundred,” double bass (bars 43-46)

These tempo shifts are like our human heartbeat, ever fluctuating, especially in an adrenaline response to potentially dangerous scenarios. It is a sonic embodiment of the uncomfortable or anxious feeling of being in this environment. However, there is a transformative aspect here: the queasy, unsteady destabilisation of the popular music language of the song can also be interpreted as a symbolic deconstruction or interrogation of the urban streetscape in which the opera is taking place.

After the first four lines of text, the song escalates into a two-line pseudo-chorus and a slight instrumental break. The bassline pitches have moved up and the tempo quickens further:

Bars	Lyrics	Bassline pitches	Tempi (crotchet =)
63-66	One Hundred bodies	C, C, D \flat , B \flat	112, 112, 2, 106
67-70	One Hundred faces	C, C, D \flat , B \flat	112, 112, 118, 106
71-74	[Instrumental]	C, slow downward glissando	112, 112, 118, 106

TABLE 4.4: *Commute* (2018-20), Episode I, “Song: Hundred,” structure (bars 63-74)

The drumkit part intensifies with a less withheld kick drum part. Odyssea and the woodwinds introduce a gruesome, wide vibrato, and the Suitors alternate between silence and momentarily singing their beat-boxed riffs, echoed by the viola.

The musical score for 'Song: Hundred' (bars 63-66) from *Commute* (2018-20) features the following parts and lyrics:

- OD. (M.S.):** Lyrics: "One Hun - dred bo - dies" and "One". Tempo markings: c. ♩ = 106, **H** ♩ = 112 (slow, wide vibrato as far as indicated pitches), c. ♩ = 118, c. ♩ = 106.
- SUIT. 1 (Ten.):** Lyrics: "h h h h" and "Hun - D(ch) - Re - D(ch) Hun - D(ch) - Re - D(ch)". Dynamics: *ff*.
- SUIT. 2 (Bar.):** Lyrics: "d" and "Hun - D(ch) - Re - D(ch)". Dynamics: *ff*.
- Fl.:** Dynamics: *mp*, *ff*, *mp*. Includes "slow, wide vibrato" markings.
- B. Cl.:** Dynamics: *mp*, *ff*, *mp*.
- Perc.:** Rhythmic accompaniment.
- Synth./Pno.:** Bassline accompaniment.
- Vla.:** Dynamics: *f*, *f*. Includes "norm." marking.
- Db.:** Bassline accompaniment.

FIGURE 4.18: *Commute* (2018-20), Episode I, “Song: Hundred” (bars 63-66)

At bars (75-82) we move to a shortened two-line stanza that returns to the primary bass pitch of A (“One Hundred mouths/One Hundred times”). This then descends to a second and final two-line pseudo-chorus on F \sharp , with corresponding broadening tempi:

Bars	Lyrics	Bassline pitches	Tempi (crotchet =)
83-86	One Hundred words	F \sharp , F \sharp , E, G	88, 88, 82, 94
87-90	One Hundred crimes	F \sharp , F \sharp , E, G	88, 88, 82, 94
91-94	[Instrumental]	F \sharp , slow downward glissando	88, 88, 82, 94

TABLE 4.5: *Commute* (2018-20), Episode I, “Song: Hundred,” structure (bars 83-94)

The second transitional section marked “Reflective” (bars 95-108) continues to prioritise semitonal movement with a continuation of the four-bar synth riff from “Hundred,” this time expanded in the acoustic piano with woodwinds. This movement is confined within one register in each of the voices, while the pitch range travels between registers in the instrumental parts:

95 **K** Reflective ♩ = 88

OD. (M.S.) *ff* *dim.* *mp* *mf cresc.*
 name each head and name each hand Hurting and angry, Dis -

SUIT. 1 (Ten.) *mp* *f* *mf*
 Will she speak my name? An gry,

SUIT. 2 (Bar.) *mp* *f* *mf*
 Will she speak my name? An gry,

Fl. *mp* *cresc.* *f* *dim.* *mp*

B. Cl. *mp* *cresc.* *f* *dim.* *mp*

Pno. *mp*

FIGURE 4.19: *Commute* (2018-20), Episode I (bars 95-98)

This is further reinforced in the electronics part, in which the same interval progression occurs through synthesised compound triangle wave blips that circle around the instruments and voices quasi randomly in rhythm and register:

95

FIGURE 4.20: *Commute* (2018-20), Episode I, transcription of fixed backing track (bars 95-96)

“I name each head and name each hand”: Odyssea’s pop song has emboldened her to disclose the particulars of her offender. The Suitors as the Hekatoncheiris can only echo Odyssea’s statements with questions, guilty uncertainty: “Will she speak my name?” As the tenor and baritone vocal lines gradually shrink away, Odyssea’s range expands, in the leadup to the “Severing of the Hands”:

107 *mf*

OD. (M.S.)
 Who is hurting now?

FIGURE 4.21: *Commute* (2018-20), Episode I, Odyssea (bars 107-108)

And indeed, by the end of the Episode, Odyssea persists in her homeward journey, while the Hekatoncheiris is no longer “armed.”

4.6 Episode II: To Mati (The Eye)

Following the voiceless Interlude, the second Episode in the opera opens with a vocal solo from Odyssea in a recitative style, an opportunity to reflect that mirrors and extends the “Journal” passage at the close of Episode I. Rhythms are free, with only relative durations specified by white or black noteheads, and the ensemble is led by Odyssea in the aspect of duration, also echoing her sung pitches. This is a pivotal moment, in which the protagonist has begun to gain a degree of agency, however this is tempered by the language used. The libretto is careful to avoid first-person pronouns, and it is unclear if Odyssea is referring to herself:

*Wading through a stream,
Drawn into the wine-dark sea,
Mirror of the midnight air,
Treads in opaque waters.
Eis oinopa ponton. [Into the wine-dark sea]*

The water motifs in the libretto extend the “wine-dark sea” quote from Homer’s *Odyssey*, alluding to the original seafaring context of the epic poem. This is reinforced by oceanic tam-tam rolls and an undulating fractal-esque electronic track that set up a marine musical aesthetic for Odyssea’s aria.

EPISODE II: To Mati (The Eye)

ODYSSEA (Mezzo-Soprano) **Ad lib. (follow Odyssea)** *mp*
Wa - ding through a stream,

Bass Clarinet in Bb *pp*

Percussion *ppp* *mp* Tam tam: soft mallets *l.v.*

Piano *p* *con Ped. sostenuto*

Double Bass *pp*

Electronics/Backing track
Trigger [O] pre-recording
[An array of detuned pitches rapidly cycling semi-randomly across a wide octave range.]

FIGURE 4.22: *Commute* (2018-20), Episode II (line/bar 1)

Following this opening section, Odyssea “duels” with the Suitors-as-Kyklopes in alternating musical passages throughout Episode II:

(Odyssea's opening solo)	[O]: bars 1-6
"Everyman Noman"	[P]: bars 6-16
"Song: <i>She feels</i> "	[Q]: bars 17-28
"Everyman Noman"	[R]: bars 29-40
"Song: <i>She feels</i> "	[S]: bars 41-52
"Everyman Noman"	[T]: bars 53-65
"Song: <i>She feels</i> "	[U]: bars 66-88

TABLE 4.6: Structure of Episode II from *Commute* (2018-20)

4.6.1 Everyman, Noman



FIGURE 4.23: Staging of *Commute* (2018-20), Episode II, in Sydney Chamber Opera's 2020 production as part of *Breaking Glass*. Director: Clemence Williams; Photograph: Daniel Boud; Pictured: Jessica O'Donoghue (Odyssea)

In the *Kyklopes* (Cyclops) passages that follow, a lighthouse motif for Suitors 1 & 2 is explored in the libretto as a counterpart to this, as a kind of marine representation of surveillance. Initial brainstorming for this text yielded connections between the Odyssean Cyclops and concepts such as the Panopticon as well as the lighthouse as symbols of the male gaze. If Episode I was concerned with hands, with arms, with touch/being touched, Episode II is concerned with various interpretations of the Eye symbol: looking, viewing, watching/being watched, cameras, surveillance, and the ways that the direction of the gaze in public and/or creative spaces manifests power.

I was preoccupied with the idea that Cyclops, with his one huge eye, *sees everything but himself*, and wanted this to inform the narrative trajectory of Episode II. If we begin with the idea that Suitors 1 & 2 play a conjoined Cyclops, or two voices within *Kyklopes*'s head, the two start out in agreement as a united,

phallic monolith, and over the three instalments at rehearsals [P], [R] and [T], their viewpoints diverge to become an internal conflict where one voice stubbornly maintains this position, while the other begins to have an internal realisation:

Maybe I could learn to see?

In #metoo dialogues, this divergence between masculine perspectives at large is often the context for fiery online debate, and I can't help but make the connection between Homer's *Outis* ("NoMan") and the #notallmen social tag that emerged as a form of resistance to the impact of #metoo accounts.

The musical setting for all of this to take place is assigned the tempo marking "Slow, Queasy Waltz." A very stretched out compound feel notated in a 6/4 time signature carries the weight of two low voices. In a musical reinforcement to the marine themes described above, this almost has a drunken "sea shanty" feel, with step-wise contrary movement echoing the pitch trajectory in Episode I's "Growing and Severing of the Hands," that permeates all the vocal and instrumental parts:

The musical score for Figure 4.24 consists of ten staves. The top staff is for the OD. (M.S.) with lyrics 'sca, air,'. The next two staves are for SUIT. 1 (Ten.) and SUIT. 2 (Bar.) with lyrics 'One win-dowed to - wer, pil - lar of light, A lamp in - tense' and 'to - wer, pil - lar, Shi - ning a lamp, in - tense and bright.' The remaining staves are for Fl., B. Cl., Perc., Pno., Vla., and Db. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (p, mp, mf, cresc.), articulation (accents), and performance instructions (8va).

FIGURE 4.24: *Commute* (2018-20), Episode II, "Everyman, Noman" (bars 9-12)

At the outset, the *Kyklopes*'s internal narrative is unified:

*We are Kyklopes. One-windowed tower: a pillar of light
Shining a lamp, intense and bright.*

4.6.2 Song: *She Feels*

After the first stanza of “Everyman, Noman,” the Suitors-as-Kyklopes are interrupted by Odyssea with the first verse of a pop-like song, “She Feels.” The pop song is reminiscent of slow electronica, somewhere between hip-hop, industrial, alternative, and new (classical) music, with syncopated and repetitive riffs in the ensemble underpinned by a recorded track of electronic beats and a growling, downward-sliding bassline resembling the aggressive revving of a car engine:

The musical score for "Song: She Feels" (bars 19-22) features a complex ensemble arrangement. The vocal parts (OD. and SUIT. 1 & 2) are in the upper staves, with lyrics: "She feels a glaring gaze, One Eye follows, She is slowing." The instrumental parts include Flute (Fl.), Bass Clarinet (B. Cl.), Percussion (Perc.), Piano (Pno.), Viola (Vla.), Double Bass (Db.), and Electronic/Backing (Elec./Backing). The score is marked with dynamics such as *mf*, *mp*, *f*, and *p*. The percussion part includes a section labeled "Vibraphone". The electronic/backing part features a prominent, syncopated bassline.

FIGURE 4.25: *Commute* (2018-20), Episode II, “Song: She Feels,” ensemble with backing track transcription (bars 19-22)

The song is in three verses, that alternate each time with Kyklopes’s sea shanty. In the first verse, Odyssea initially refers to herself in third-person language (bars 17-28):

*She feels a glaring gaze,
One Eye follows, She is slowing.
She sees a Beacon burning
One eye watches, Disorienting.*

After this first musical “blow” to the Kyklopes, the two songs continue to alternate stanza and verse. Each iteration of Odyssea’s song acts as an interruption, fragmenting the “sea shanty.” In the lyrics of each verse, Odyssea gradually brings her grammar from third- into first-person. The second verse (bars 41-52):

*She feels a sudden pang,
I realise: She is Me.
I see Kyklopes vision,
Narrow view, Distorting.*

And in Odyssea’s third and final verse, the accompanimental setting and pace has evolved. The verse is somewhat loosened and abstracted, with more moments of pause in which a tertian downward gesture on quintuplet quavers against the simple quadruple time heralds a transition towards a lighter, less grounded sound world. Odyssea’s song culminates with a rising and intensification of pitch that affirms her new-found voice (bars 66-88):

*I feel, the streets are warming,
Rising sun, on My surroundings
I see a winding path,
Rosy rays, Remembering.*

Just as Odyssea gains her agency, reclaims her “I,” the Kyklopes gradually loses his certainty, moving from a unified internal narrative to a fractured one over the three stanzas of the “sea shanty.” At the second stanza (bars 29-40):

FIGURE 4.26: *Commute* (2018-20), Episode II, “Everyman, NoMan,” Suitors 1 & 2 (bars 29-31)

Then by the third stanza Odyssea’s repeated pop-song impact has caused Kyklopes’s internal voice to diverge into two distinct perspectives. The voice that maintains the status quo—of looking—has descended to third-person grammar, while the questioning side—that has begun to see—maintains a first-person perspective:

*SUITOR 2: Kyklopes fuels a brighter light,
SUITOR 1: Maybe I’m not the same person I was before?*

The conflicted Kyklopes retreats into silence while Odyssea’s song blossoms into and arrives at the “Postlude: Dawn.”

4.7 Postlude: Dawn

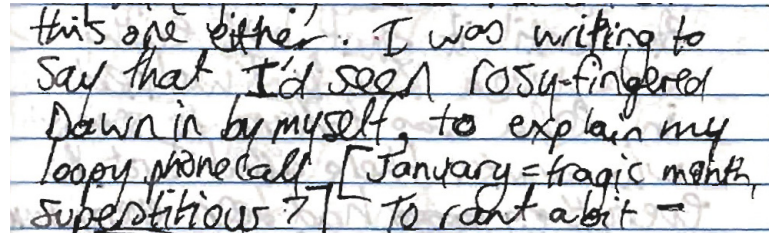


FIGURE 4.27: Excerpt from “Green Diary” entry (19/06/2003)

“Rosy-Fingered Dawn” is a motif from Homer’s *Odyssey* that has resonated strongly for me over many years since I first read the work. Through this project, as I have pored over decades-old diaries and letters, before and after composing *Commute*, the epithet has surfaced several times in my old writings. This has been going on for so long that I almost forgot how far back it reached, and it’s quite arresting to see this through-line as far back as eighteen years ago in the diary entry above.

A digital version of Homer’s text allows for thorough and instant searching; this little fragment of text appears in Homer’s *Odyssey* twenty times in the exact format below, plus an additional two places in slightly variant formats:

ἤμος δ' ἠριγένεια φάνη ροδοδάκτυλος Ἥως,
*ēmos d' ērigéneia phánē rhododáktulos Ēōs*²⁶

The translation offered at the same online resource, Perseus Digital Library, by A.T. Murray in 1919, treats the fragment identically each time, as in the original Greek:

*As soon as early Dawn appeared, the rosy fingered,...*²⁷

Elsewhere however, Emily Wilson is much more flexible in translating each instance of this device a little differently:

When vernal Dawn first touched the sky with flowers... or
*When early Dawn revealed her rose-red hands...*²⁸

The fragment of text gives Dawn an endearing epithet, similar to many recurring characters in Ancient Greek myth. It is formulaic, in accordance with an epic poem that likely arose out of an oral tradition.²⁹ Importantly, though it is a striking and notable fragment of text, the repetitive use of it is as a decorative

²⁶ For example, Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 2, Line 1, “Perseus Digital Library,” Department of Classics, Tufts University, accessed 21/12/2021, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Homer, *The Odyssey*.

²⁹ Peter S. Hawkins, “Epic,” in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Religion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 202.

but functional pivot to the narrative action that follows: “As soon as rosy-fingered Dawn appeared, . . . [*the next part of the story happened*].” This elliptical quality is crucial in the choice of this text for the Postlude of *Commute*. The intention was to create a stand-alone aria brimming with optimism, feminine sensuality, freedom and fluidity, and using a text like this, excavated of the narrative drive or intent that traditionally follows it, allows the listener to insert their own aspirations into the experience of hearing this aria. Furthermore, the wording “rosy-fingered” is particularly loaded with a degree of gentle loveliness that reinforces the sensuousness that I was hoping to convey.

The slight shift of textual focus from the actual narrative happenings in the *Odyssey* to the connective tissue, the ornamental elements, is akin to some of the compositional strategies of Pamela Z. In works like *Geekspeak* (1996),³⁰ awkward breathy noises and stutters receive as much sonic priority as more articulated speech fragments. More recently, her *Sonora Spolia* (2020)³¹ is an installation using samples from many spoken interview recordings. The soundscape collects coincidental repetition from the interviews, grouping together voices that echo each other’s words. The opening passage especially focuses on the connective tissue of speech: creating choruses of “um,” and “so” and allowing the audience to savour the unintentional sounds that would normally be edited out as extraneous to the meaningful part of speech.

The open, hopeful quality evoked is reinforced in the music in several ways. I had always intended the vocal-piano version of this Postlude to be a departure from the electronic sounds and popular music allusions of the two Episodes and moving into a more folk-sounding and entirely acoustic aesthetic. In the lead-up to the 2018 workshops of *Commute*, I imagined the piano part as more like a zither; maybe a classical harp if this were a possible addition to the ensemble, but more specifically the musical gestures or conventions of either the *kanonaki* or *santouri* of Greek folk musics. Actually, the music ended up closer to the *siter* of Javanese gamelan, echoing some of the colotomic structures of that tradition, but instead of following a 4x4x4 rhythmic organisation, I adjusted the music to a 5x5x5 architecture, that is quintuplet semiquavers, in a time signature of 5/4, in 5-bar groupings.

While the intention had been to incorporate some of the familiar sounds of my Greek heritage, heard in the context of dancing and celebrations throughout my life since earliest childhood, my compositional reflex reached for inspiration from the musical gestures of Javanese gamelan, a tradition that had become somewhat embodied over the solid decade or so that I had rehearsed music of the central Javanese tradition from Surakarta in a local group, Langen Suka Sydney Gamelan. For a few months I was fortunate to have the loan of a *siter* in a red, wooden box, to learn on at home.

³⁰ Pamela Z, “Geekspeak,” from *Sonic Circuits IV*, Innova #113, 1996, YouTube, streaming audio (originally released on compact disc), accessed 01/02/2022, <https://youtu.be/-3JXItG-LyU>.

³¹ Pamela Z, *Sonora Spolia* (a sound installation), 2020, Vimeo, streaming video, accessed 01/02/2022, <https://vimeo.com/424434162>.

In terms of modal content, the music of the Postlude is pentatonic, on the following scale:

D Eb F A Bb (D)

While this is in equal temperament, it is a very loose approximation to the *Laras Pélog, bem* series modes³² from Javanese gamelan:

1 2 3 5 6 i

The openness of this scale, giving a major quality to intervals of thirds when they are used, reinforces the optimistic character of the movement. The opening of the mezzo-soprano line follows the following pitch contour and its inversion, which underpins the structure of the entire movement from voice through to accompaniment:



FIGURE 4.28: *Commute* (2018-20), “Postlude: Dawn,” basic melodic contour and its modal inversion

The application of this pitch contour across all durational scales of the work can be seen in the following diagram of the entire Postlude structure. It informs the bar-by-bar progression of bass notes; crotchet beat advancement of the melody; ornamental quintuplet-semiquaver contours.

Rehearsal letter	Bars				
[W]	D	Bb	D	Eb	F
[X]	Eb	F	Eb	D	Bb
[Y]	D (Bb D Eb F)	Eb (F Eb D Bb)	D (Bb D Eb F) (Eb D Bb A)	Bb (D Bb A F)	A (F A Bb D)
[Z]	Bb	D	Bb	A	F
[AA]	A	F	A	Bb	D

FIGURE 4.29: *Commute* (2018-20), “Postlude: Dawn,” scalar melodic architecture

Each of the instruments plays pitches that follow similar contours, but they are all offset durationally. The colotomic structure decides moments of co-incidence and the smaller-scale gestures diverge. While the shared end-goal of the #metoo movement is an optimistic liberated state, each of the motivations and pathways of those seeking change is unique. The ensemble moves together but in its own way.

Following a short introductory passage [V], an ABABA structure is applied. In the A-sections the voice soars at a higher range, while in the B-sections the mezzo-soprano reverts to a lower register and all the other instruments move to slower-rate triplets, punctuated by a rising pizzicato motif in the double bass. The smaller-scale material for the A-section is as follows:

³² Richard Pickvance, *A Gamelan Manual* (London: Jaman Mas Books, 2005), 46-47.

FIGURE 4.30: *Commute* (2018-20), “Postlude: Dawn,” A-section ensemble texture (bar 6)

Durational activity varies between the instruments from single crotchets in the double bass, through to triplet quavers in the clarinet, through to the piano and violin quintuplets. This can be compared with the B-section material, which has somewhat more homogenous triplet quaver movement through the ensemble, with the piano slowing to regular semiquavers, tied so that there are three pitches in each beat:

FIGURE 4.31: *Commute* (2018-20), “Postlude: Dawn,” B-section ensemble texture (bar 12)

If the opera overall has been a sensory journey starting with the pit-of-the-stomach feeling that is all too familiar to people who have ever been on the receiving end of street harassment, the most potent aspect of the Postlude is that it allows the listener to feel a “preview” of a liberated state as they personally imagine

it. This corresponds somewhat with Sally Macarthur's adoption of Deleuzian concepts of "not-real" or "becoming real" around "futurity" in a musical setting:

*In [Grosz's] view, the virtual provides a way to think about the future that is not imagined as a predetermined thing but as an idea of something that is always in the process of becoming.*³³

When someone is brave enough to publicly disclose stories of trauma, what are they hoping to find? At an individual level, one motivation might be an unburdening, relief, the feeling that they are not alone in harbouring secret memories. At a collective or activist level (#metoo), I can only suggest that one of my own yearnings is for relief in navigating the outside world, for example, to enjoy a walk through a beautiful park in the moonlight without the hovering question of safety. In the opera, this trajectory is suggested on a small scale in each Episode. In the overarching structure of the work, the Postlude is the fullest culmination of this yearning. To feel and to know this sensation of "arrival" before it has taken place brings it closer to the realm of possibility. To feel such a free and blissful state again and again makes us accustomed to it, seek it, expect it.

4.8 Real-Life Epilogue

I began to wear eyes.



FIGURE 4.32: Various garments and items purchased and worn 2018-2020

³³ Macarthur, *Towards a Twenty-First Century Feminist Politics of Music*, 12.

At some stage during the composing of this opera and particularly the *Kyklopes* Episode, the visual motif of the Eye became somewhat all-consuming, beyond the creative work, and began to influence my fashion choices. There was something energising about going through the process of creating this work and cheekily adorning myself with graphics suggestive of my not-yet-public creation. I have continued to wear these garments even now that the opera is complete, and the eye motif also creates a sense of “watching back,” of returning a cultural gaze even when I am not in a situation of threat or danger.

Because music as a performing art is a distinctly embodied discipline, it lends itself very effectively as a natural vehicle for the kinds of “evocative...or even emotional”³⁴ modes of communication described by Ellis as a powerful avenue for autoethnographic exploration. The aspect of sensing, not telling, became very important in this opera to avoid the risk of steering the work in a didactic direction. It has been one of the key motivators for continuing to confront and work through some palpably uncomfortable themes. It has also been surprising to notice how far the sensory, or as Birchall would say, “sensible” components of this project extended, beyond creative and communicative labour, and even into the expressive realm of dress.

³⁴ Anderson, “Analytic Autoethnography,” quoted in Carolyn S. Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, “Analyzing Analytic Autoethnography: An Autopsy,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35, no. 4 (2006): 435.

Chapter 5: *Street Sketches* (2018) for chamber ensemble and *Streets* (2019) for orchestra

Street Sketches (2018) and *Streets* (2019) join a growing body of recent compositions addressing street harassment and gendered violence in public spaces, including works written before the #metoo movement gained rapid momentum in 2017 as well as those composed in response to this public dialogue. While *Street Sketches* and *Streets* were composed in the light of #metoo discourse, they both draw upon the archive of an abandoned orchestral piece, working title *Puttanesca*, that I had begun drafting in 2015 in the structure of a pop song with a clear hip-hop influence. This incomplete work remains in a physical folder of handwritten text and musical notation sketches and ideas, as well as an electronic folder containing several Sibelius music notation file sketches and a text file with some free association ideas. While remaining faithful to the conceptual motivations for this idea, *Streets* and *Sketches* required a complete deconstruction of the musical material from *Puttanesca* in order to see the idea through to completion. The fragmented approach taken will be demonstrated through discussion of each of the five movements of the work(s):

- I. Backbeat
- II. Circles
- III. Voices
- IV. Dreams
- V. Low

These two compositions arose out of a structured opportunity to compose for workshops and a performance first by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra Fellows, a large chamber ensemble, in 2018 (*Street Sketches*), then for workshops with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in 2019 (*Streets*). In the same way that a visual artist might complete a study before commencing work on a larger-scale final work, I consider these to be companion works, with *Sketches* allowing for initial sonic experimentation with textures that are adapted and expanded in *Streets*. In some cases, the larger orchestration in *Streets* of initial ideas from *Street Sketches* simply entailed a thickening of textures and forces; at other times, the musical ideas needed to be compositionally reconfigured to suit larger forces or slightly varied durations.

To draw connections to existing works that address related themes, Mirela Ivičević alludes to themes of gendered violence and sexual agency in works such as *SCARLET SONG* (2015) for percussion and electronics¹, which combines textual rhythm of recorded soundbytes voicing negativity or judgement with organic live musical execution across an array of percussion instruments. Another of her works, *The F*

¹ Mirela Ivičević, *SCARLET SONG*, 2015, accessed 24/11/2021, <https://cargocollective.com/mirelaivicevic/SCARLET-SONG>.

SonG (dominosa VII) (2014) for ensemble of improvisers, gives a text of 28 lines, each beginning with the letter F. An excerpt from this text resonates powerfully here: “Flashback of a painful experience.”² Shelley Washington’s *BIG Talk* (2018)³ for two baritone saxophones is a powerful meditation on aspects of verbal and other street harassment. The composer writes: “This unrelenting, churning duo is written to be somewhat of an endurance piece that incorporates all aspects of the body – the muscular ability to play the piece, the wind to power the horn, the focus to see it through...”⁴ Across these compositions we see works that intertwine memory, physicality and sensation, identifying an aspect of experience with a view to reflection and transformation.

I also want to discuss two companion works by Samantha Wolf, sharing the title *The More I Think About It, The Bigger It Gets*: an initial soundscape recording (2015)⁵ and a chamber version (2016) utilising the same recording as a tape track with live flute, violin and cello.⁶ About the original recording, Wolf writes:

*‘The More I Think About It...’ is my first foray into the world of sound art. This piece takes after the soundwalks of Hildegard Westerkamp, but adds a psychological and socio-cultural element by juxtaposing statements from a variety of sources (e.g. news reports, interviews, panel discussions) against environmental sounds. The result is a soundwalk of both the environment and of the mind; specifically, the internal and external sounds a woman hears when she is walking home alone at night. In doing so, this piece seeks to expose the inherent flaws in the mainstream discussion around women’s freedom of movement.*⁷

The soundscape recording foregrounds the sound of footsteps, with the centre-panned sound of heeled shoes maintaining a consistent, relatively fast walking rhythm throughout. The sound of heeled shoes signifies corporate attire, which, along with the slightly fast pace of walking strongly suggests a homeward commute from work. Meanwhile the listener is bombarded with audio soundbytes from media reporting of gendered violence, panned to various locations in the stereo spectrum to surround the walking, non-speaking protagonist (and listener). Many of the attitudes expressed in these soundbytes take a victim-blaming perspective, critiquing women’s appearance or behaviour as a reflection on the level of safety or

² Mirela Ivičević, *The F SonG (dominosa VII)*, 2014, accessed 24/11/2021, <https://cargocollective.com/mirelaivicevic/The-F-SonG-dominosa-VII>.

³ Shelley Washington, *BIG Talk*, 2016, Bandcamp, streaming audio, accessed 01/02/2022, <https://shelleywashington.bandcamp.com/album/big-talk>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Samantha Wolf, *The More I Think About It, The Bigger It Gets*, 2015, Soundcloud, streaming audio, accessed 01/02/2022, <https://soundcloud.com/samanthawolf/the-more-i-think-about-it-the-bigger-it-gets>.

⁶ Samantha Wolf, *The More I Think About It, The Bigger It Gets*, 2016, YouTube, streaming video, accessed 01/02/2022, <https://youtu.be/Q0zbX65gf3o>.

⁷ Wolf, *The More I Think About It, The Bigger It Gets*, <https://soundcloud.com/samanthawolf/the-more-i-think-about-it-the-bigger-it-gets>.

danger they experience rather than as a consequence of the actions and choices of an aggressor. Wolf's soundscape overwhelms the listener in an incisive and powerful simulation of how these problematic attitudes impact and exhaust women on a day-to-day basis. This collection of sampled audio leaves little room for the ambiguity or denial that many women are accustomed to when they interrogate or critique this message. I also note that the dates of composition of the works by Ivičević and Wolf considerably predate the spike in media conversation around #metoo that occurred in 2017.

The motif of walking or commuting was at the forefront of my chamber opera *Commute* (2018-20), discussed in the previous chapter, and this focus is further developed in my own companion works discussed here: *Streets* (2019) for orchestra, and its precursor, *Street Sketches* (2018) for large chamber ensemble. Musings on the city streetscape formed a stream-of-consciousness of connected themes informing the intent behind this work, right back to its archival origins in 2015:

Reclaim the Streets, (reclaim the internet), Reclaim the
Night, film noir, hip-hop, rebetika, street music, street-
walking, prostitution, Slut-Walk, walking, boots, walk a mile
in my shoes...⁸

This array of themes combines activist stances in support of street safety and affirming sex positivity with a determination to reconfigure architectures of urban environments and musics, with a view to cultivating belonging in a cultural environment where women and other marginalised people articulate common experiences of hostility, alienation or violence in public environments. If the original archival *Puttanesca* sketch that this work was based on followed a coherent verse-chorus structure, then the deconstruction of the “verse-chorus paradigm” that resulted in *Streets* and *Street Sketches* is a metaphor for the anticipated deconstruction of urban and social “paradigms” that have previously allowed predatory #metoo behaviours to flourish. By deconstruction, I mean a taking apart of the components of the original sketch/song: bassline, voice and text, rhythm, dance and similar to *Secret*, discussed two chapters prior, a so-called “B-section” or contrasting dreamy passage. *Streets* and *Sketches* have five miniature movements, each one focusing on one of these elements. The first movement, “Backbeat,” takes a relentless snare on beats 2 and 4 as its departure point. Movement II, “Circles,” rhythmically and melodically alludes to one of the most common folk/popular Modern Greek dance forms, the *kalamatiano* in 7/8. Movement III, “Voices,” has a short whispered text that emerged from the “Chorus” of the original *Puttanesca* sketch:

Walking in my black boots

Walking in my blue boots

⁸ Hybrid ideas from pen on paper brainstorm (1/11/2014) and plain text file (15/02/2015).

Walking in my silver boots

Walking in my red boots

“Dreams” is the fourth movement, alluding to a contrasting B-section passage that I had intended for the original orchestral sketch. And finally “Low,” the closing fifth movement, explores the bassline from the original sketch.

5.1 Backbeat

In reference to the snare drum on beats 2 and 4 that relentlessly underpins Western popular and rock music, the entire ensemble takes on the role of snare drum in this movement, which opens with a staccato tutti chord on beats 2 and 4 of a 4/4 meter. The movement is in two sections. In the first section, a repetitive process unfolds where each instrument or line individually asserts its independence from the snare “role” with a sustained *fp* swell, as in the flutes and clarinets in the excerpt below:

The image shows a musical score for woodwinds in 4/4 time, marked "Punchy, ♩ = 80". It includes parts for Flute 1, 2; Oboe 1, 2; Clarinet 1, 2; and Bassoon 1, 2. The score is in 4/4 time and features a repetitive rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Dynamics include *f* and *fp* (fortissimo piano) swells. The woodwinds play a staccato eighth-note pattern, with some instruments having a sustained *fp* swell on beats 2 and 4.

FIGURE 5.1: *Streets* (2019), “Backbeat,” woodwinds (bars 1-4)

Once this process has completed one architectural arc of increase and decrease, of symbolic independence then departure, the music metrically modulates to a 12/8 iteration of the same process in the second section of the movement, where the original 4/4 pulse continues in the timpani, but also introduces an embellished rhythm that alludes to a *tsifteteli* or belly-dance drumbeat that sits in a cross-rhythm against the 12/8 time signature:

The image shows a musical score for timpani and finger cymbals in 12/8 time. It includes parts for Timp. and Perc. 1. The score is in 12/8 time and features a repetitive rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Dynamics include *mp* (mezzo-piano). The timpani part plays a staccato eighth-note pattern, while the finger cymbals play a pattern of eighth notes. A *tsifteteli* rhythm is indicated above the timpani part, showing a pattern of eighth notes in 4/4 time.

FIGURE 5.2: *Streets* (2019), “Backbeat,” *tsifteteli* rhythm in timpani and finger cymbals (bars 20-21)

A belly-dance rhythm was chosen because of its distinctive identity as a feminine dance in the context of modern urban musical styles such as rebetika in Greece. The physical and electronic archive for *Street Sketches* includes some attention to an old Rebetiko song, “*To Haremi Sto Hamam*” [“The Harem in the

Hamam”] (1935) by Anestis Delias (Artemis). In September 2018 I listened to and transcribed parts of the recording as part of the preparatory listening for this composition. After an unintentional exclusion of the style from the chamber opera *Commute*, the sonic influence of my ethnic heritage is a welcome aspect of the *Streets* sound world. In particular, the bassline carries the signature *tsifteteli* rhythmic lilt.

The image shows a musical score for a voice and band. The voice part is in the upper staff, and the band part is in the lower two staves. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked as c. 104. The lyrics are: "Mes tis po - lis to Ha - mam e - na ha - re - mi ko - lym - ba, [In the city's Hamam a harem is swimming,]". The band part consists of a piano accompaniment with a bass line that has a characteristic lilt.

FIGURE 5.3: Anestis Delias (Artemis), “*To Haremi Sto Hamam*” [“The Harem in the Hamam”], transcription of short excerpt from sound recording (c.40”-44”)⁹

The opening tutti chord of “Backbeat” is a series of stacked fifths conforming to the *Hijazkîar* (Χιτζαζκιάρ) mode from Rebetika, likely hybridised from the Turkish *makam* (modal) system. Just like the subtle reference to a *tsifteteli* belly-dance rhythm, this use of the *Hijazkîar* is completely removed from its traditionally horizontal modal vocabulary, and instead it is embedded in a vertical harmony.

The image shows a musical notation for the Hijazkîar mode. It is a single line of music in treble clef, showing a sequence of notes: E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C#5, D5. The notes are spaced in intervals of fifths.


FIGURE 5.4: *Hijazkîar* (Χιτζαζκιάρ) mode¹⁰

The spacing of the notes in the opening unison chord in intervals of fifths leaves room around each pitch for the instruments to move stepwise as they begin to individually assume more sustained gestures. In the first section, the mode is built on a tonic of E, played by the timpani.

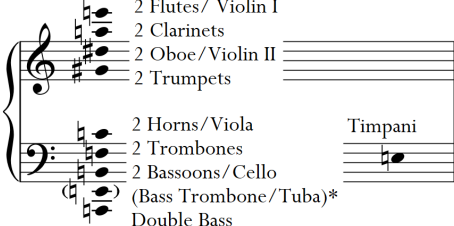
⁹ Anestis Delias, *To Haremi Sto Hamam*, Columbia DG 6165, 1936, YouTube, streaming video (originally released on vinyl), accessed 01/02/2022, <https://youtu.be/h2bRE6SZWdU>.

¹⁰ Variously known as Hicazkâr, Şehnaz, Zengüle, Zirgüleli Hicaz depending on starting note, register and resulting intonation, see Karl L. Signell, *Makam : Modal Practice in Turkish Art Music* (Seattle, Wash.: Asian Music Publications, 1977), 25, 36, 145.

Hijazkiar mode on a tonic of E



Street Sketches (2018) and *Streets* (2019),
“Backbeat,” 1st section chord

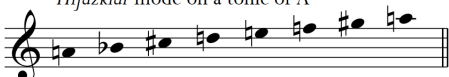


**Streets* only

FIGURE 5.5: *Street Sketches* (2018) and *Streets* (2019), “Backbeat,” opening chord construction

In the second section, the same pitch persists in the timpani, but the *Hijazkiar* mode is now on a tonic of A. While the first section is very similar in both versions of the work, the different-sized ensembles in *Sketches* and *Streets* meant that in the larger work the passage in the second section needed to be redistributed across the available instruments, and the process of gradual entries and exits was lengthened significantly in the orchestral version.

Hijazkiar mode on a tonic of A



Street Sketches (2018),
“Backbeat,” 2nd section chord

Streets (2019), “Backbeat,”
2nd section chord

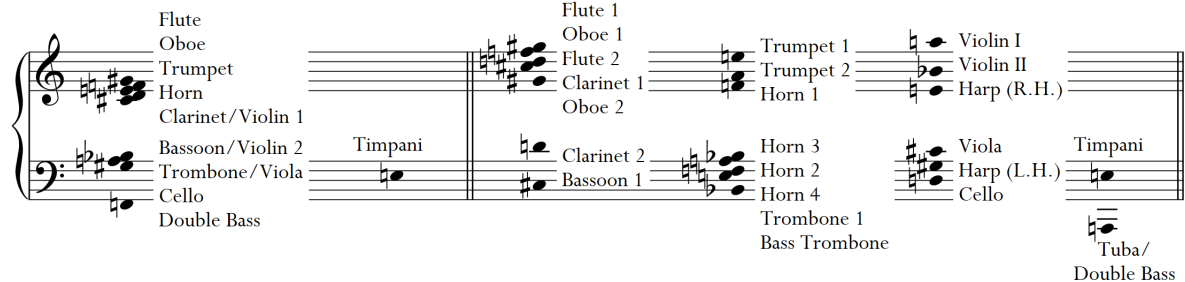


FIGURE 5.6: *Street Sketches* (2018) and *Streets* (2019), “Backbeat,” second section chord construction

5.2 Circles

The title “Circles” refers to Greek folk and popular dances in a circle formation, in particular the familiar 7/8 (3+2+2) lilt of the *kalamatianos*, a now ubiquitous festive Greek dance. Its name suggests origins in folk song and dance from the city of Kalamata in Greece, however the dance has crossed over into the broader national Greek pop (*Laiko*) environment, with countless modern renditions of the form in a Western rock or pop band formation, commonly using bouzouki with clarinet, violin, guitar, bass, keyboard, drum-kit and voice, often amplified.

FIGURE 5.7: Traditional Greek song “*Mantili Kalamatiano*” [“*Kalamatiano Handkerchief*”], as sung by Giota Lydia (1960)¹¹

“Circles” is a pseudo-*kalamatiano*, using the 3+2+2 lilt, reinforced by a tambourine and finger clicks from the percussionists. A longer sustained tone is combined with a melodic gesture that recalls common ornamentation in Greek folk/pop music. The tonic moves up a step to the second mode degree, leaps down to the seventh, back up to the second, then returns to the tonic on the next beat. This can be compared with some of the ornamentation Theodorakis employs in “*Zorba’s Dance*”:¹²

FIGURE 5.8: *Streets* (2019), “Circles,” opening melody, comparison with Theodorakis, “*Zorba’s Dance*” (1964)

In “Circles,” while this ornamental motif persists throughout, the concept of mode is destabilised. In Greek music, much influenced by the modal principle of *makam* from Turkish music styles, it is not unusual for a song to start with a *taksim/taxim(i)*, a kind of improvised tuning prelude that establishes the mode that will be employed in the piece that follows.¹³ Instead here, a tonic of A-natural is established upon which modes are constantly incrementally shifting. Each repeat of the melodic gesture is part of a sequence of gradual sharpening or flattening of the second and the seventh modal degrees, forming a cycle away from and back to the starting mode:

FIGURE 5.9: *Streets* (2019), “Circles,” full modal cycle (bars 1-18)

While this cyclic process of shifting modes is taking place, the musical texture gradually grows, in *Streets* to a birdcall-like flourish from the woodwinds at [E] (bars 31-38). The instruments move heterophonically

¹¹ Giota Lydia, *Mantili Kalamatiano*, Columbia SCDG 2699, 1960, YouTube, streaming audio (originally released on vinyl), accessed 01/02/2022, <https://youtu.be/3RGO6MPNSgU>.

¹² Mikis Theodorakis, “*Zorba’s Dance*,” from *Songs for Piano*, ed. Tatiana Papageorgiou, Schott Music, 2011, music score.

¹³ Gail Holst, *Road to Rembetika: Music of a Greek Sub-Culture, Songs of Love, Sorrow & Hashish* (Limni, Evia, Greece: Denise Harvey (Publisher), 1983/1994), 43-44.

through wave-like ascending and descending gestures, with the wind choir interweaving and slightly displaced from each other, while the tambourine returns with the opening dance rhythm:

The image shows a musical score for woodwinds in the piece "Streets (2019), 'Circles,'" at rehearsal mark [E] (bars 31-34). The score is arranged in four staves: Flute 1 & 2 (Fl. 1,2), Oboe 1 & 2 (Ob. 1,2), and Clarinet 1 & 2 (Cl. 1,2). The music is marked *ff* (fortissimo). The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and quintuplets, and is characterized by wave-like ascending and descending gestures. The woodwinds interweave and are slightly displaced from each other. The score includes a rehearsal mark [E] with the instruction "Like a flock of birds" above the first staff.

FIGURE 5.10: *Streets* (2019), “Circles,” woodwinds at [E] (bars 31-34)

The musical material in this movement is new; that is, not derived from the orchestral sketch that informs most of the other movements. The intent is to widen the palette of popular music styles referenced beyond Western genres. The familiar ornamental vocabulary of Greek music is combined with artificial adaptation to result in a distinctive sonic signature for this movement in particular, and also as part of the larger composition.

5.3 Voices

This movement explores the components of text, melody and ensemble that together combine to form a pop-song chorus. The chorus is deconstructed by focusing on the elements of text and melody separately. In the opening section [A]-[E] (bars 1-5) the entire orchestra whispers and repeats four-line text stanza (chorus lyrics) independently. Each player is gradually cued to stop whispering and take their instrument to continue sounding a given series of pitches independently. Elements of togetherness—the massed sound—combine with individuality: free and independent timings, and a unique rendition every time the movement is performed. While the orchestra vocalises “in chorus,” sonically we are not at the usual maximum intensity, but hearing a massed whisper where the voices are asynchronous; the audience cannot necessarily make out the words, and cannot sing along to a memorably melody. While this composition is more concerned with the realm of safety, there are overlaps back into the theme of secrecy. The direct sonic connection of whispering with the act of secrecy (or revelation) is combined with the more aesthetically evolved sonic outcome of non-sensibility. The blur of “hushed disclosures” that we hear is a sonic impression of the mass of #metoo disclosures of experiences in the street environment.

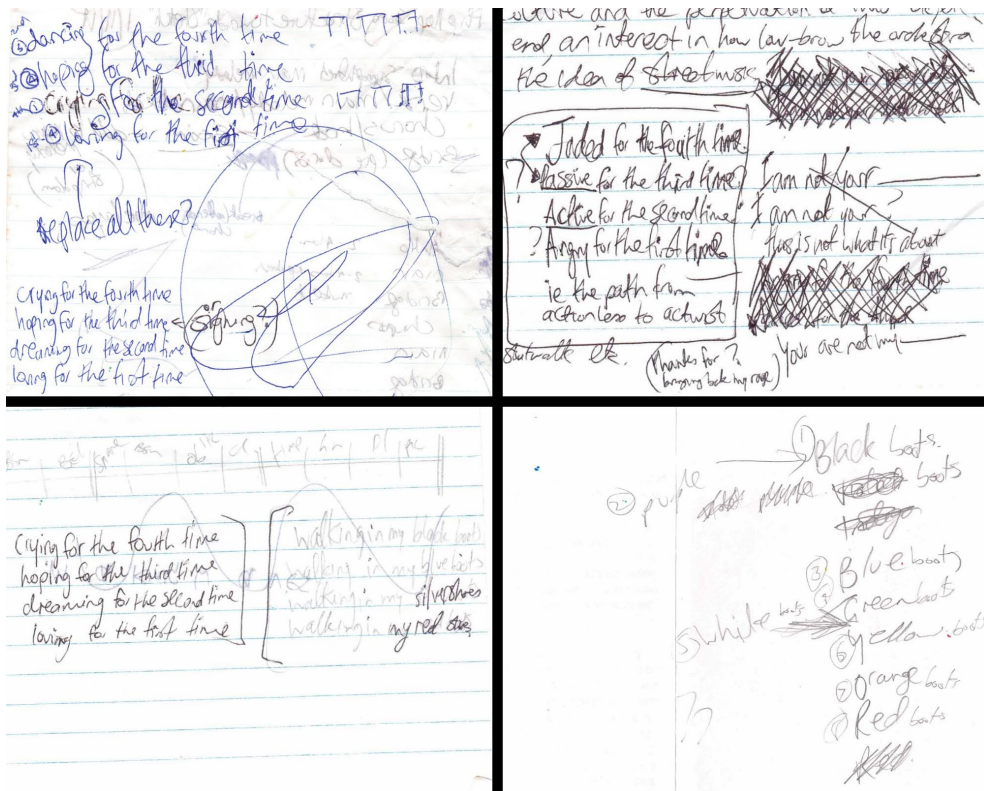


FIGURE 5.11: Various loose-leaf pen and paper drafts of lyrics to orchestral sketch preceding *Street Sketches* (2018) (undated, c.2014-15)

As seen in the various pen on paper sketches in figure 5.11 from the physical archive for *Street Sketches*, the text evidently went through many drafts in the 2015 archive before I settled on the “walking boots” motif:

Walking in my black boots,
Walking in my blue boots,
Walking in my silver boots,
Walking in my red boots.

The whispered lyrics suggest resilience, determination, persistence. With resolve, I do not resign from my activity: “I continue to walk.” Here is the theme of walking that corresponds with Samantha Wolf’s composition and sonic imagery. There are also clear parallels with themes previously explored in the chamber opera *Commute*. This important thread of resilience can also be seen in the abandoned text fragments above:

Thanks for bringing back my rage.¹⁴

Black and blue are an allusion to themes of violence, and also melancholy (“the blues”). Culminating on silver and red suggests optimism, festivity, passion, fashion and style.

¹⁴ Quoted from pen/sketch notes (undated) in figure 5.11 (top right image).

Until they revert from voice back to their instrument, the orchestral players are well outside their comfort zone; in rehearsal and recording reactions from some players seemed anywhere from confused/bemused to simply enjoying the sonic task they were instructed with. As each member of the orchestra assuredly moves back to their instrument to now make pitched sounds in their own timing, the four fragments spread registrally through the orchestra at [B]–[E] give the faintest echo of the four-phrase melody that is to follow at [F]:

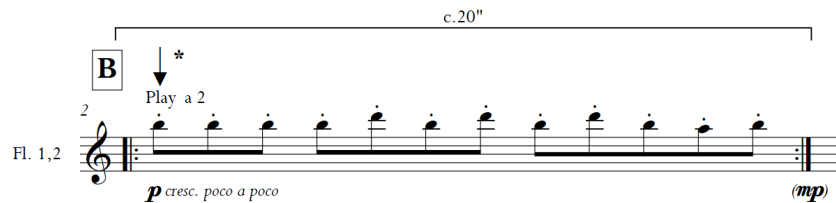


FIGURE 5.12: *Streets* (2019), “Voices,” flute entry at [B]

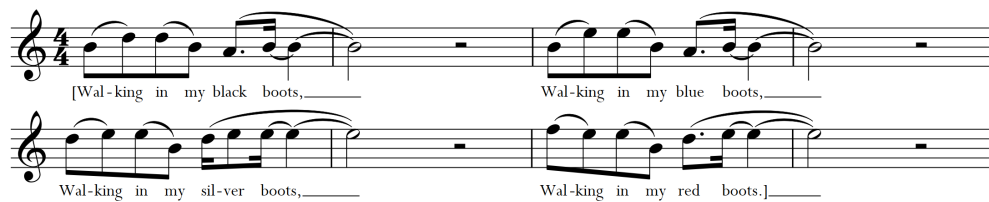


FIGURE 5.13: *Streets* (2019), “Voices,” main instrumental melody at [F]

This moment of arrival is a musical “chorus” moment, but without words. The music is in a regular, simple quadruple meter, with the main melody distributed registrally through the ensemble, offset each time by a crotchet in a of written-out delay. The “walking boots” text remains compartmentalised, even though it could be sung along to the given melody: see figure 5.13 for how they correspond. After we hear the melodic chorus once, in bars 6-14, it is repeated. This time the orchestra commences in rhythmic unison at [G]. The players are then instructed to independently slow down (*molto rit.*) to the end of the movement. Again, aspects of unison and community in the chorus are disrupted with aspects of sonic individuality. This could be considered to form a commentary on how protest movements (Reclaim the Night; Slutwalk; etc.) place massed individuals together in an established social setting to seek and inspire changes to that space.

5.4 Dreams

Just as in *Secret*, the “B-section” is a contrasting passage with a dreamy, transfigured mood, the movement “Dreams” aims for a similar tangential aesthetic. The archival orchestral sketch went through several attempted drafts for this section, one of the main driving factors for abandonment of the earlier work. So it was quite affirming to finally settle upon the musical language that allowed the section to blossom.

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Dreams" from the album *Streets* (2019). It consists of six staves, likely representing different instruments. The music is in 4/4 time. The score shows a complex rhythmic structure with various note values and accidentals. Key features include:

- Staff 1: Treble clef, starting with a 5/8 note.
- Staff 2: Treble clef, starting with a 7/8 note.
- Staff 3: Treble clef, starting with an 11/8 note.
- Staff 4: Treble clef, starting with a 13/8 note.
- Staff 5: Bass clef, starting with a 17/8 note.
- Staff 6: Bass clef, starting with a 19/8 note.

 The score is annotated with bar numbers 5, 7, 11, 13, 17, 19, and 23, indicating specific rhythmic layers or cross-rhythms.

FIGURE 5.15: *Streets* (2019), “Dreams,” prime-number cross-rhythm layers (bars 1-7)

As more layers enter, instruments play duplet gestures, making connective tissue between the layers by using notes in close rhythmic proximity. Combinations of doubling instruments frequently shift, creating subtle changes in timbre. As this process unfolds, the character of the music becomes approximately cyclic over 6-8 bar passages that ebb and flow. While the music is notated in 4/4 time for the convenience of the conductor and ensemble, the use of prime values and multilayered cross-rhythms using broader durational values means the quadruple time never dominates. The movement sounds somewhat “eternal”: the process could have preceded the entry of the movement and could easily continue in the same way after the conclusion of the movement. In this context, it echoes the optimism of “Postlude: Dawn” in *Commute*. An optimistic determination to feel safe is a familiar aspiration for public spaces, and this movement offers a preview of the sonic sensation of this. The movement is a welcome moment of repose before the music returns with full intensity in the bassline-driven “Low.”

5.5 Low

The gritty bassline that opened up the original orchestral sketch is withheld till the final movement of *Streets* and *Sketches*, where it becomes the focal point:

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Low" from the album *Streets* (2019). It consists of two staves, likely representing the contrabassoon. The music is in 4/4 time. The score shows a bassline with various rhythmic patterns and dynamics. Key features include:

- Staff 1: Bass clef, starting with a 4/4 note, marked with a box 'A' above it.
- Staff 2: Bass clef, starting with a 9/4 note.

 The score is annotated with bar numbers 4 and 9, indicating specific rhythmic layers or cross-rhythms.

FIGURE 5.16: *Streets* (2019), “Low,” contrabassoon (bars 4-12)

Sometimes the bassline is distorted with dissonant partials, such as the woodwinds and brass in the opening passage. While the contrabassoon, tuba and double bass drive this repeated groove, the string ensemble

enters with a rhythm simulating a snare drum strike on the second and fourth beats of the bar, that evolves into a hi-hat layer and interlocking rhythms:

FIGURE 5.17: *Streets* (2019), “Low,” strings (bars 13-14)

In the opening movement “Backbeat” the snare drum itself was completely withheld, and the same strategy continues in this movement until we finally hear its familiar rattle at bar 17, slightly anticipated by the percussionist clicking their drumsticks together.

The hi-hat layer of regular quavers is echoed by the oboes and marimba, with a slight melodic inflection. This line enters at [B], and soon begins to fluctuate rhythmically and registrally like the strings:

FIGURE 5.18: *Streets* (2019), “Low,” oboes (bars 13-16)

During the working process for the original orchestral work, I had nicknamed this the “Cypress Hill” line, after the west-coast American hip hop group. However, on further listening I realised the sonic memory and inspiration was closer to the internationally popular *bhangra* track “*Mundian To Bach Ke*” (1998) by Panjabi MC,¹⁶ mainly arising from the flattened second and minor seventh employed:

FIGURE 5.19: Panjabi MC, “*Mundian To Bach Ke*,” opening tumbi riff

¹⁶ Panjabi MC, “*Mundian to Bach Ke*,” from *Legalised*, Nachural Records CDNR0270, 1998, YouTube, streaming video (originally released on compact disc), accessed 01/02/2022, <https://youtu.be/-ilXc0j1iHA>.

This led to a surprising listening journey through a lineage of sampling, a sonic “citation chain” of sorts. Panjabi MC’s track was later rapped over in a 2003 remix by Jay Z,¹⁷ while it samples the bassline from the theme song to the television show *Knight Rider* (1982)¹⁸ via its appearance in a Busta Rhymes song, “Turn It Up (remix)/Fire It Up” (1997).¹⁹ The *Knight Rider* theme song also borrows a brass fanfare motif from the “Cortège De Bacchus” in *Sylvia* (1876) by Delibes,²⁰ and the chain of sonic references flourishes. This expanded background musical inspiration for the oboe line in *Streets* alludes to lyrical and visual tropes of: an heroic television detective; Dionysian festivities; street drugs; women as exotic dancers; competitive suitors in heterosexual pursuit of a lady through scenes of masculine street dancing. This “status quo” of the public urban and pop-music environment is ripe for critique, and in *Streets* the opening bassline is soon destabilised and distorted, becoming unpredictable and queasy, the status quo becoming less certain and dominant.

The regular quaver hi-hat pattern is the first to be disrupted during the passage at [B], stretched and squeezed over triplets or quintuplets in some layers against continued regular quavers in others:

The musical score for 'Low,' in *Streets* (2019) shows five staves from bar 17 to 20. The Oboe 1 & 2 (Ob. 1,2) and Trumpet 1 & 2 (Tpt 1,2) parts feature a regular quaver pattern with triplets (3) and quintuplets (5) interspersed. The Percussion 1 (Perc. 1) part includes a maraca (Mar.) and quintuplets (5). The Violin I (Vln. I) and Violin II (Vln. II) parts feature a regular quaver pattern with crescendos (cresc.) and quintuplets (5). The dynamic markings are *mf* for the woodwinds and *f* for the strings.

FIGURE 5.20: *Streets* (2019), “Low,” disrupted quaver patterns (bars 17-20)

Next, at [C], the meter becomes unstable, similarly stretching and squeezing from 4/4 (8 quavers) to 3/4+3/8 (9 quavers) or to 7/8. In the “Hundred” song in Episode I of *Commute*, a similar process of destabilisation took place via tempo indications, this time the tempo remains stable while the process is written out metrically. At the same time, the consistent tonic of E becomes distorted as the strings and woodwinds carrying the quavers begin to move to neighbouring tones:

¹⁷ Panjabi MC Featuring Jay Z, *Beware of the Boys (Mundian To Bach Ke) (Jay-Z remix)*, Sequence Records SEQ 8012-2, 2003, YouTube, streaming video (originally released as a compact disc single), accessed 01/02/2022, <https://youtu.be/wke0-lj2wzv>.

¹⁸ Glen A. Larson and Stu Phillips, *Knight Rider theme*, 1982, YouTube, streaming video, accessed 01/02/2022, <https://youtu.be/oNyXYPhnUls>.

¹⁹ Busta Rhymes, “Turn It up (Remix)/Fire It Up,” from *When Disaster Strikes*, Elektra EW 851, 1997, YouTube, streaming video (originally released on compact disc), accessed 01/02/2022, <https://youtu.be/3lXGbr58bcc>.

²⁰ Léo Delibes, *Sylvia*, Paris: Heugel, 1876, music score.

21 **C** Becoming disoriented

Fl. 1,2

Ob. 1

C. A.

B. Cl.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cor Anglais

mp

f

norm., marcato

f

f

FIGURE 5.21: *Streets* (2019), “Low,” dissonant shifting of riffs (bars 21-24)

At [D] the bassline returns in the brass and the first flute, across all available registers. It begins in octave unison, then a similar process of shifting pitches creates tension and distortion between the tonic of E, and the “dirtier” upper partials:

28 **D**

Tpt. 1,2

Tbn. 1,2

B. Tbn.

Tba.

ff

ff

ff

ff

FIGURE 5.22: *Streets* (2019), “Low,” dissonant stacked bassline (bars 28-32)

Finally at [E] the musical texture suddenly reduces down to a string quartet where dissonant layers interact in a hocket-like texture, while the four horns remain in an open fifth on E as the only relic of the snare beat. These layers gradually drop out, disintegrating to a sparse, staccato close to the work on just horn and viola. Previously, the *Sketches* ended abruptly at the end of [D], but this closing passage in *Streets* is more ambiguous and open-ended, creating a sense of varied possibilities, sonically and socio-culturally.

At its core, *Streets* is organised around movements I, III and V—“Backbeat,” “Voices” and “Low”—that descend directly from the older orchestral sketches and ideas, compartmentalised into rhythm, chorus/melody and bassline to undergo differing processes of transformation. In terms of rhythm, belly-dance rhythms eventually sneak in and out and around the ubiquitous pop snare drum rhythm in “Backbeat,” but we never hear the actual snare. In “Voices,” a chorus is fragmented into massed individual

whispers of lyrics that will not necessarily be understood, and a tutti melody that unravels as each orchestral instrumentalist slows at their own pace. “Low” begins with a catchy, hip-hop-style bassline that gradually distorts via pitch and rhythm, towards a tentative and ambiguous ending. Meanwhile, movements II and IV—“Circles” and “Dreams”—bring folk-dance aesthetics and an ethereal optimism into the mix, an expansion of the available possibilities and a motivation for transformation. The fracturing of the verse-chorus structure from the original unfinished orchestral sketch was necessary to allow it to be recovered from abandonment. The various strategies of deconstruction have allowed the eventually completed work to transcend the popular music traditions which from the outset it sought to evoke, in a sonic and sensory critique of the gendered landscape of the city, the street.

Chapter 6: *Sonata: Ode* (2019) for piano

The *Sonata: Ode* is a “setting” of an ancient Sumerian cuneiform poem, *The Exaltation of Inana*,¹ by priestess and poet Enheduanna. She is said to be the oldest attributable poet in literary history, and this fact has inspired much feminist and creative visitation of her work. This has included poetic translations of her work by authors such as Betty de Shong Meador,² and compositional homage: *En-he-du-an-na-me-en* (2020) for electronics and voice, by Esin Gunduz,³ on the same poem; *Canto di Enheduanna* (2001) for flute, cello and piano, by Katia Tiutiunnik.⁴

The Exaltation of Inana survives in various cuneiform tablet fragments; modern hand transcriptions of the cuneiform; transliteration of the Sumerian into Roman alphabet; and translations of the poem, including into English. All these formats are readily available for comprehensive perusal from online digital repositories, including the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature⁵ of the University of Oxford, and the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative⁶ collaboration between several institutions.

Sonata: Ode follows the narrative trajectory of the poem, exploring varying architectural relationships between text and music in each movement. There are five movements in total:

- I. Prelude: Crown
- II. Storm
- III. Silencing
- IV. “Be It Known...”
- V. Postlude: Light

“Storm” uses sonata form, “Silencing” is a slow movement, and “Be It Known...” is a more brilliant, flourishing movement. Thus the tradition of fast-slow-fast sonata movements is observed, but bookended by a prelude and a postlude.

¹ I am adopting the generally accepted spelling of “Inanna” to refer to the goddess, and “Inana” in the title of Enheduanna’s poem, as per the usage in the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature.

² Betty De Shong Meador, *Inanna, Lady of Largest Heart Poems of the Sumerian High Priestess Enheduanna* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

³ Esin Gunduz, *Rosie Middleton // En-he-du-an-na-me-en by Esin Gunduz*, Nonclassical, 2021, YouTube, streaming video, accessed 01/02/2022, <https://youtu.be/8YFO1aAoyAc>.

⁴ Katia Tiutiunnik, *Canto di Enheduanna*, Sydney: Australian Music Centre, 2001, music score.

⁵ Jeremy A. Black et al., “The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature,” Oxford, 1998-2006, <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>.

⁶ “Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative,” University of California, Los Angeles; University of Oxford; Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin, updated 05/02/2020, <https://cdli.ucla.edu/>.

In this chapter, each movement of the Sonata will be discussed, with observations on the relationship to Enheduanna’s poem, and some of the media of inscription and journaling that formed the composing process.

6.1 Prelude: Crown

*Mistress of heaven, with the great diadem, who loves the good headdress befitting the office of en priestess, who has seized all seven of its divine powers!*⁷

The Prelude of the Sonata corresponds with the first nineteen lines of the *Exaltation of Inana*, in which Enheduanna addresses the titular goddess reverently, repeatedly referring to the glorious yet terrifying extent of her “divine powers” and her splendid headdress. For this movement of the work, I sought to represent the crown adorning Inanna.

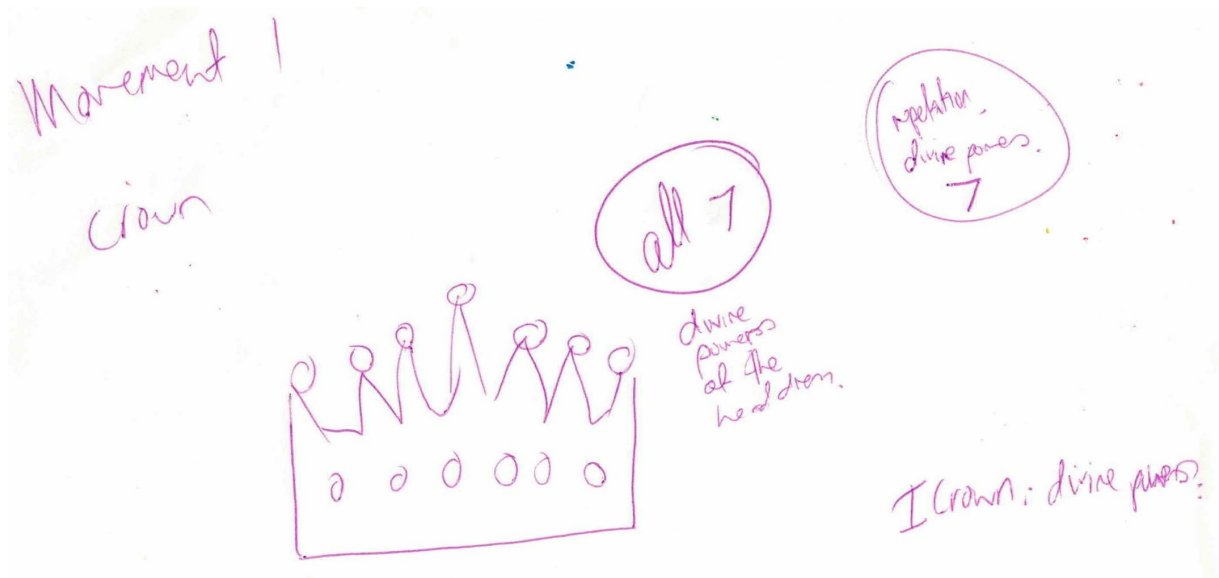


FIGURE 6.1: Scanned pen sketch on loose paper for “Prelude: Crown” from archive folder for *Sonata: Ode* (2019) (undated)

A crown is cold, hard metal, often combining angularity with roundness. It is shining, gold or jewelled, and often very ornate or intricately decorated. I have used several strategies in this movement to evoke these qualities musically. There are some processes of musical increase that are sustained throughout the movement, like a crescendo formation, a horizontal angle, zig-zag or “spike”: <. There are also musical strategies of gradual increase followed by gradual decrease, like a vertical “spike”: ^. This composition predates the COVID-19 pandemic, but there are resonances with the terminology around coronaviruses, with their “spike” proteins being the crown-like feature inspiring their name.

⁷ Enheduanna, “The Exaltation of Inana (Inana B, 4.07.2): Translation,” Edited and translated by Jeremy A. Black. Oxford 1999-2003, <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.4.07.2#>, lines 3-5.

The Prelude is entirely composed of angular downward gestures occurring at different durational scales, evoking the jagged diagonals of a crown. There are recurring downward sweeps on the motivic dimension from various intervals of a fifth in each hand:



FIGURE 6.2: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Prelude: Crown” (bars 16-17)

The overall architecture of the Prelude follows a single, continuous downward pitch descent:

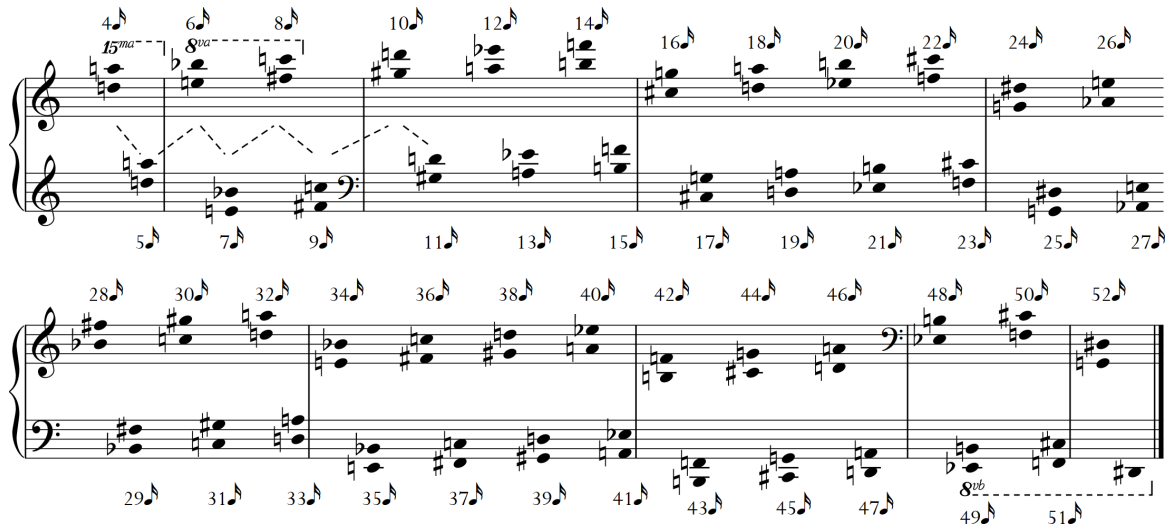


FIGURE 6.3: *Sonata: Ode* (2019). “Prelude: Crown,” overall architecture

This downward sweep in register is reinforced by a continuous durational “crescendo.” The time between starting fifth intervals increases slightly each time, as enumerated in figure 6.3. The Prelude opens with a crotchet value (4 semiquavers) on the interval of a fifth, and the spacing of these elongates by one semiquaver each time until we stretch to the final tone at bars 56-57, having a symbolic duration of 13 crotchets and a semiquaver (53 semiquavers).

The seven-fold motif from *Enheduanna’s* poem enters the tonality of the music. Each downward descent commences on the interval of a fifth. The series of fifths are bi-modal, that is, the opening interval D-A is the starting point for two seven-note modes, D Lydian and A Lochrian, to ascend stepwise. Once the seven steps have been completed, the same series recurs but with the two modes swapping tonics: D Lochrian with A Lydian. This process of alternating modes continues throughout the movement:

Primarily diminished 5ths							Primarily augmented 5ths						
A	B \flat	C	D	E \flat	F	G	A	B	C \sharp	D \sharp	E	F \sharp	G \sharp
D	E	F \sharp	G \sharp	A	B	C \sharp	D	E \flat	F	G	A \flat	B \flat	C

FIGURE 6.4: Modal content of *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Prelude: Crown”

I imagined this modal intertwining resembling the ornate patterning that might appear on a royal or supernatural crown. It is not a process marked by increase or decrease, but one characterised by undulation.

Meanwhile, the alternation of the hands, entering two octaves apart, gives the sonic effect of multiple vertical “spikes,” marked with dotted lines in figure 6.3 above. With even rhythmic values, the right hand remains on stronger crotchet/quaver beats, while the odd rhythmic values in the left hand, give a phasing effect where it alternates between weak and strong semiquaver placement. This further reinforces the zig-zag effect of the alternating hands.

The use of register could be depicted as a single vertical spike across the movement. There is gradual increase then decrease of persistence of registers, so that the extreme registers at the beginning and end of the movement are the most fleeting, and the middle register persists the longest. The barlines marked in figure 6.3 demonstrate the changing durational proportions of these registral blocks. This is reinforced by the rise and fall of dynamics and intensity in the movement.

The level of detail within each individual spike gesture follows the same pathway, where the longer durations between the initial pillars of each spike are filled in with shorter repetition and decoration of the downward movement for the first half of the piece, then this decoration lessens gradually through the second half of the piece in favour of longer sustained intervals:

FIGURE 6.5: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Prelude: Crown,” varying ornamentation

In each of the fuller, decorated downward gestures, the interval of the fifth is imagined as two separate layers, with the upper pitch moving through descending thirds and the lower pitch moving through descending fourths. They alternate the sounding of the given interval between simultaneous chordal execution and sequential melodic performance.

The musical intent here, intertwined with the source poem, *The Exaltation of Inana*, is to be somewhat descriptive or representational of an object: a crown, a “great diadem,” paying close attention to its physical and sensory characteristics.

6.2 Storm

*At your battle-cry, my lady, the foreign lands bow low.*⁸

*Who can cool your raging heart?*⁹

*With the lamenting balaḡ drum a lament is struck up.*¹⁰

“Storm” is the sonata form movement of the Sonata, comprising an exposition with two contrasting subjects, development section and recapitulation. The musical “themes” correspond with lines 20-65 of Enheduanna’s poem, which extensively and graphically describe Inanna’s strength and terrible powers: “Blood is poured into their rivers because of you...”¹¹

The first subject (bars 1-10) has folk-melody qualities. It is an original tune that from a hummed improvisation I captured on my mobile phone voice recorder:

[Online link to sound recording: SonataOde Storm subject.mp3](#)

AUDIO EXAMPLE 6.1: Smartphone voice recording (20/02/2019)

The melody is given a very intimate and fragile treatment at the opening of the movement. Tonally it is in D minor, but hovers on the subdominant and dominant to suggest a mode on a tonic of G: G-A-B \flat -C \sharp -D-E-F-G.

FIGURE 6.6: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Storm,” first subject (bars 1-10)

It is stated three times, accelerating to become dance-like and ornamented in bars 11-20, moving up a tone to a suggested tonic of A, or an E minor tonality. On the final statement (bars 21-31) it returns to the opening tonality and becomes simpler in texture again, gradually slowing down to end on D.

At bar 32, this folk-style theme is stormed, or ambushed, by the second subject, Inanna’s “battle cry.” Contorted strands of chromatic descent intertwine in the hands on the piano. The chromatic scale

⁸ Ibid., line 20.

⁹ Ibid., line 38.

¹⁰ Ibid., line 33.

¹¹ Ibid., line 45.

downwards from D is slightly distorted in each layer, with the pitches G \sharp and A swapped to create a snagging effect. Over this chromatic passage the pianist's voice adds a brutally arresting descending glissando:

32 Severe $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 80$ Battle cry: **ff** (harsh, emotive)

Voice

5th 8^{va}

Ah!

gliss.

Pno.

11th 7th

FIGURE 6.7: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Storm,” second subject opening (bars 32-34)

Prime number values of 5, 7 and 11 allow this passage to create a staggered cross rhythm between the various layers. While the technique is similar to that employed in movement IV. “Dreams,” from *Streets* and *Street Sketches*, the resulting effect here is dramatically different, with a severe and martial, somewhat calculated and strategic effect. This can be seen in some of the sketches for the theme. In figure 6.8, I note the reference to “chromatic tendrils,” which recalls the inspiration of Xenakis in *Evryali* (1973)¹² discussed earlier in relation to *Commute*:

voice

slow gliss

ff

Ahhh

piano-descending chromatic tendrils below this

FIGURE 6.8: Digital sketch of “battle cry” theme, voice material (file date 26/10/2019)

Susan McClary observes and critiques the tradition of designating the first subject in sonata form as “masculine” and the second subject as “feminine.”¹³ “Storm” was composed with this consciously in mind, with a view to the symbolism of a calm, safe “feminine” first subject—the folk tune—being supplanted by a ferocious “feminine” second subject: the battle cry theme. Enheduanna describes Inanna with terrifying qualities, enabling great destruction, violence and fear. The poem is ancient, yet this depiction of feminine

¹² Xenakis, *Evryali*.

¹³ Susan McClary, “Narrative Agendas in “Absolute” Music: Identity and Difference in Brahms’s Third Symphony,” in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 331-32.

violence is relatively strange and unfamiliar. Closer to home, the positioning of these sonata subject qualities is a metaphor for my own challenge at the outset of this project to resist the urge to creatively cocoon and explore themes of danger.

The development section (bars 55-91) moves through two statements of the first subject theme, much thicker in density, more ornate, and continually modulating chromatically.



FIGURE 6.9: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Storm,” development (bars 55-57)

The second of these (bars 67-76) inverts the pitch contour of the original theme, moving upwards, upwards then downwards:



FIGURE 6.10: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Storm,” development (bars 67-68)

Both these developments of the first subject are followed by strong combined statements of the two subjects, alternating in octaves between the two hands as a figurative “tussle” or “battle” between the folk melody (a township?) and the battle cry theme (a descending army?):

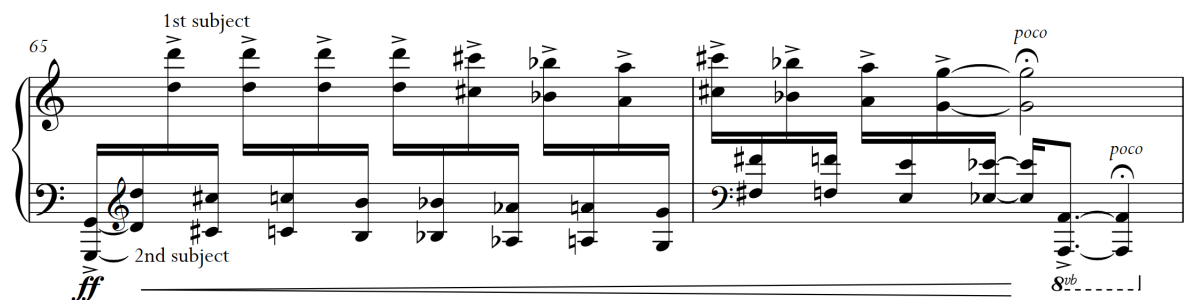


FIGURE 6.11: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Storm,” development (bars 65-66)

From bars 81-91 a muted, subsiding version of the battle cry theme emerges. The pianist’s voice returns, remaining static on a low E-flat rather than tearing emotively through the downward glissando. The piano remains close to this E-flat in the three layers, occasionally rising chromatically to an A-natural:

FIGURE 6.12: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Storm” (bars 83-85)

Bars 92-112 signals a full iteration of the second subject, an ambiguously commencing recapitulation. In the exposition, the “battle cry” descended in chromatic steps from D-natural (to E-flat) each time, here it rises in chromatic steps from E-flat (to D), still with the A-natural and A-flat inverted. This time it is voiceless, Inanna’s “raging heart” is “cooling.” The upper D-natural acts as a leading note into each repeating chromatic ascent, and then eventually into the return of the first subject, also commencing on E-flat. Tonally this suggests G minor but hovering on the subdominant and dominant to suggest a mode on a tonic of C:

FIGURE 6.13: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Storm,” recapitulation (bars 113-116)

By the recapitulation section, the co-dependency of both subjects on C-natural/E-flat recontextualises their certainty in the exposition. The initial G tonic of the first subject suddenly suggests into a dominant relationship to the recapitulation of this theme. Likewise the bold battle cry, descending from D-natural, “dies down” to an inversion of itself, rising from E-flat.

The strategy of obscuring a clear moment of recapitulation is a compositional commentary on sonata form that carries symbolism in terms of the setting of Enheduanna’s poem. While the music here explores the feminine violence described in the text, I didn’t want to glorify this unproblematically: this would reinforce the problems of violence and trauma that this wider project sets out to examine. If Inanna’s “battle cry” motif is an army—or a perpetrator—and the folk-melody theme is an enemy township—or a victim—ultimately the latter, the folk-melody has the “last word” in this movement, in the closing passage of the recapitulation (bars 113-134).

The success of the interplay between the two themes has depended on the contrast between the compositional processes of devising a literal, sonic depiction of a battle cry and a much more rustic or

domestic melody. A descending entanglement between piano strands and raw voice was created through very schematic and calculated hand-drawn planning. Meanwhile, an intimate moment of vocal inspiration and immediacy, recorded digitally, was able to be retrieved for composition and transformation of a heartfelt song- and dance-like theme.

6.3 Silencing

*I, Enheduanna the en priestess, entered my holy ġipar in your service.*¹⁴

*He stood there in triumph and drove me out of the temple.*¹⁵

The third movement, “Silencing,” corresponds with lines 66-108 of *The Exaltation of Inana*. Suddenly Enheduanna describes her own experiences of becoming a priestess of Inanna and then explains that a man called Ašimbabbar has exiled her from the temple and this role. The music is a direct musical transliteration of the Sumerian syllables, with each syllable matched to a pitch or chord in a kind of musical cipher. I imagined the slow painstaking process that archaeologists have undertaken in order to translate and interpret Enheduanna’s poem, and the other numerous yet-untranslated cuneiform sources that have been uncovered, whether poetry, accounting records or musical inscriptions. I also considered the slow ritual of notching a stone tablet with a triangular tool, stroke by stroke. As such, the movement allows each syllable to resonate slowly and contemplatively.

III. Silencing
“He made me walk through the thorn bushes of the mountains.”*

Slow, reflective, ad lib.

Voice

Pno.

Sostenuto pedal down throughout
Sustain pedal can be used sparingly

FIGURE 6.14: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Silencing” (bar 1)

A highly influential precursor is Anne Boyd’s *Angklung* (1974),¹⁶ also for piano. The slow (“*Lento possibile*”), uniform unmeasured passage in Boyd’s work is organised into phrases, while my “Silencing” from *Sonata: Ode* uses stemless notes and dotted measure lines to mark out the phrasing of the poem:

¹⁴ Enheduanna, “The Exaltation of Inana (Inana B, 4.07.2): Translation,” Edited and translated by Jeremy A. Black. Oxford 1999-2003, <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.4.07.2#>, line 66.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, line 104.

¹⁶ Anne Boyd, *Angklung*. London: Faber Music, 1976, music score.

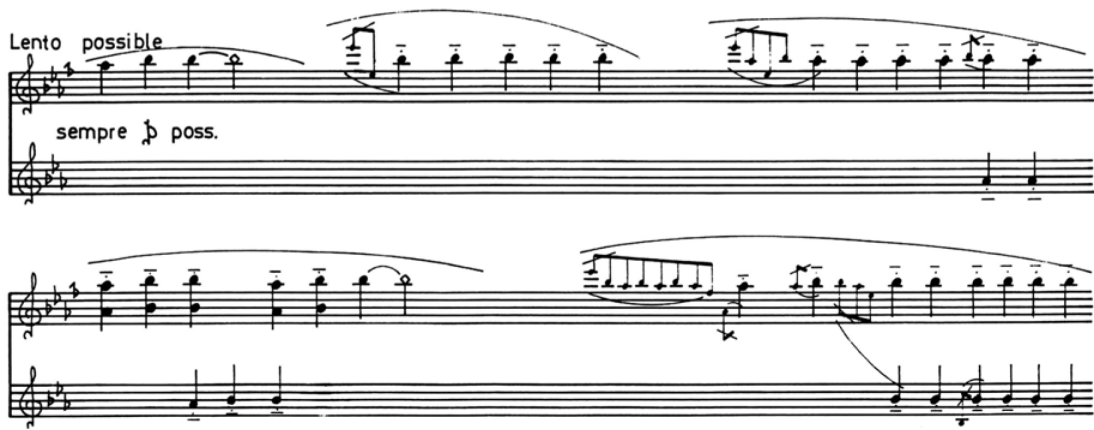


FIGURE 6.15: Anne Boyd, *Angklung* (1974), first 2 lines

Boyd’s restricted palette of four pitch classes (Eb-Fb-Ab-Bb) include an optional instruction to detune the F-flat, bringing it closer to a Javanese Gamelan *pelog* tuning. Meanwhile, “Silencing” remains in equal temperament, but as shown in figure 6.14, the pianist is instructed to depress the middle A-natural and E-natural on the piano throughout using the sostenuto pedal, bringing out harmonic resonances and echoes of some of the sounding pitches and chords.

The resonant strings allude to possible ancient Mesopotamian sounds, played on stringed instruments such as this lyre held in the British museum:



FIGURE 6.16: “The Silver Lyre,” British Museum 121199, personal photograph (29/01/2020)¹⁷

¹⁷ More information and images on the British Museum website:
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1929-1017-2

In “Silencing,” Lines 81-90 and 103-108 from the cuneiform version have been transliterated musically, with a specific note or chord corresponding to a specific cuneiform character. I consulted digital formats of the complete chain of primary source material. High resolution images of the original cuneiform are available via some of the resources mentioned earlier in this chapter. Archaeological pen sketches onto paper rendering the cuneiform characters were very useful, for printing and using colour to decode and interpret:

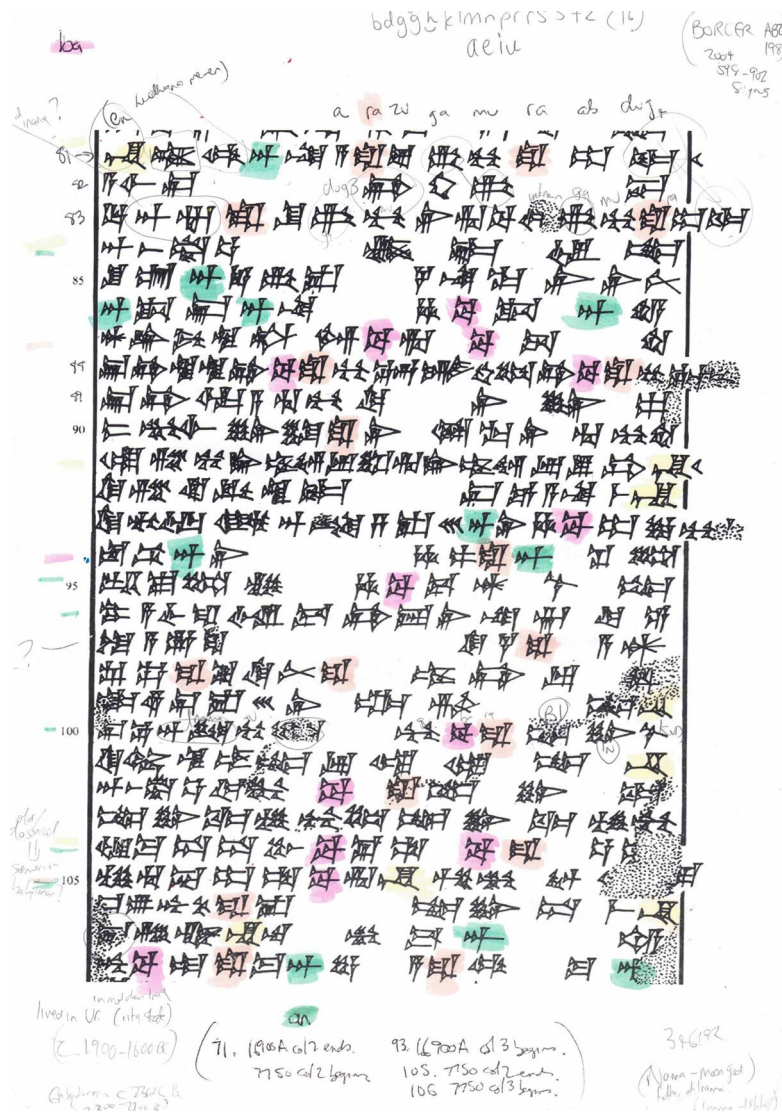


FIGURE 6.17: Pen transcription of cuneiform by Stephen Langdon (1919; PBS 10/4) of Penn Museum Object CBS7847.¹⁸ Printed and annotated with pencil and highlighters (undated).

With most cuneiform characters corresponding to a syllable, a Roman alphabet transcription of the Sumerian proved most useful. I imported this into Microsoft Excel, representing the passage of the poem in tabular form where each row is a line, each syllable is in an individual column. This software environment also allowed the text excerpt to be analysed in terms of frequency of recurrence of particular syllables:

¹⁸ Full line art drawing is available online https://cdli.ucla.edu/search/archival_view.php?ObjectID=P262837

Row Labels	Count of Syllables
ra	19
an	16
ba	14
en	12
mu	11
in	7
da	7
bi	7
gu10	7
na	6
ni	6
a	6
dug4	6

FIGURE 6.18: Microsoft Excel calculation of syllable frequency in preparation in preparation for Sonata: Ode (2019), "Silencing" (file date 26/07/2019)

Handwritten notes and annotations on the Excel spreadsheet include:

- Top right: "sung every En", "I will", "He do", "Note", "Kale", "Mvt 3 silence(d)", "Silencing", "Voiceds", "oppressor".
- Right margin: "81-90. I, En-hedu-ana, will recite a prayer to you. To you, holy Inana, I shall give free vent to my tears like sweet beer! I shall say to her ('your decision!') (some mss. have instead: 'Greetings!') Do not be anxious about Asimbabar." (circled in pink)
- Right margin: "In connection with the purification rites of holy An, Lugal-Ane has altered everything of his, and has stripped An of the E-ana. He has not stood in awe of the greatest deity. He has turned that temple, whose attractions were inexhaustible, whose beauty was endless, into a destroyed temple. While he entered before me as if he was a partner, really he approached out of envy." (circled in pink)
- Right margin: "91-108. My good divine wild cow, drive out the man, capture the man! In the place of divine encouragement, what is my standing now? May An extradite the land which is a malevolent rebel against your Nanna! May An smash that city! May Enllil curse it! May its plaintive child not be placated by his mother! Lady, with the laments begun, may your ship of lamentation be abandoned in hostile territory. Must I die because of my holy songs?" (circled in pink)
- Right margin: "My Nanna has [paid no heed to me] ((1 ms. has instead: [BU₁₀ ba] -ra-bi-in-kud))" (circled in pink)
- Bottom left: "278 200 220", "267 = 260 285", "285 = 271 18 45", "287 = 280".
- Bottom left diagram: A musical staff with notes and a clef, labeled "ra".
- Bottom center: "Mvt 3 silence(d)", "Silencing", "Voiceds", "oppressor".

FIGURE 6.19: Microsoft Excel tabulation, *The Exaltation of Inana* (lines 81-108), printed, annotated and colour-coded using pencils (undated)

Two of the most frequently occurring syllables, "En" and "An," also occur in the poet's name. Every time these occur, they are designated to be sung verbally on the pitches E-natural and A-natural respectively. Similarly, other frequently occurring syllables in close proximity to these pitches are played on the piano, often with an accented staccato, ensuring that some resonance with the open strings occurs. As the frequency of occurrence of Sumerian syllable characters decreases, the musical assignment of chords then of single pitches becomes more remote from this centred open fifth interval.

What sounds contemplative and somewhat randomised is actually a very carefully calibrated musical recitation of the poem fragments, syllable by syllable. Aspects of the secrecy theme surface here again, in

terms of strategies of encoding. This is Birchall's "known unknown"¹⁹: a cognitive awareness of a pianistic recitation of Enheduanna's poem, with occasional verbal correspondences ("En" and "An") that indicate the incomplete sensory correspondence with the textual artefact.

6.4 "Be It Known..."

*Be it known that you have flashing eyes!*²⁰

"Be It Known..." the fourth movement, movement is a setting of lines 109-138 of the poem, and especially the repetitive fragment at lines 122-133:

<p><i>he₂-zu he₂-zu-am₃ ^dnanna li-bi₂-in-dug₄-ga za-a-kam bi₂-in-dug₄-ga an-gin₇ mah-a-za he₂-zu-am₃ ki-gin₇ dajal-la-za he₂-zu-am₃ ki-bal gul-gul-lu-za he₂-zu-am₃ kur-ra gu₃ de₂-e-za he₂-zu-am₃ saj jic ra-ra-za he₂-zu-am₃ ur-gin₇ ad₆ gu₇-u₃-za he₂-zu-am₃ igi huc-a-za he₂-zu-am₃ igi huc-bi il₂-il₂-i-za he₂-zu-am₃ igi gun₃-gun₃-na-za he₂-zu-am₃ uru₁₆-na nu-ce-ga-za he₂-zu-am₃ u₃-ma gub-gub-bu-za he₂-zu-am₃</i></p>	<p>It must be known! It must be known! Nanna has not yet spoken out! He has said, "He is yours!" Be it known that you are lofty as the heavens! Be it known that you are broad as the earth! Be it known that you destroy the rebel lands! Be it known that you roar at the foreign lands! Be it known that you crush heads! Be it known that you devour corpses like a dog! Be it known that your gaze is terrible! Be it known that you lift your terrible gaze! Be it known that you have flashing eyes! Be it known that you are unshakeable and unyielding! Be it known that you always stand triumphant!</p>
--	--

FIGURE 6.20: Enheduanna, *The Exaltation of Inana* (lines 122-133), Roman transliteration and English translation.

The repetition is clearly visible in the cuneiform right-hand-side line-endings, even to non-readers like myself:



FIGURE 6.21: Lines 123-130 from Enheduanna, *The Exaltation of Inana*, in a preserved cuneiform tablet, Penn Museum Object CBS7847²¹

¹⁹ Birchall, "Aesthetics of the Secret," 32-44.

²⁰ Enheduanna, "The Exaltation of Inana (Inana B, 4.07.2): Translation," Edited and translated by Jeremy A. Black. Oxford 1999-2003, <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.4.07.2#>, line 131.

²¹ More information and images on the Penn Museum website:

https://www.penn.museum/collections/object_images.php?irn=439285.

While the third movement followed the poem syllable by syllable, this is a looser setting of the repeating proclamatory text in each line. Each of the twelve poetic declarations of “*he₂-zu-am₃*” (“Be it Known/It must be known!”) are matched with a musical flourish of arpeggios rippling through a 7-tone sequence from three bass-note “syllables” on the same tonic, often with a slight modal modulation in the chordal arpeggio tones as the flourish repeats:

a tempo, freer (c. ♩ = 60)

2
f (loco) L.H. *sim.* *sim.*
f *6* *6* *6* *6*
8vb *8vb*
he₂ *zu* *am₃*
 Be it known

FIGURE 6.22: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Be It Known...” (bars 2-4)

Just as the poem combines repetition of this phrase with variation in each proclamation, these musical flourishes alternate with a modal seven-note series, first announced with chordal accompaniment in regular crotchets, which then becomes increasingly embellished on each return.

IV. “Be It Known...”*

Austere (c. ♩ = 60) *rit.*

1 1 4 5 2 3 6 7
ff dim. *mf*
con Ped.

FIGURE 6.23: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Be It Known...” (bar 1)

The melody is filled out with interceding tones, and the left-hand accompaniment increases in activity each time:

9 (non rit.) *mf dim.* *8va* 23 *p*
5 *5*

FIGURE 6.24: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Be It Known...,” comparison of bars 9-10 and bars 23-24

Bar 37, corresponding with a line from the poem that suddenly describes violence in graphic detail—“Be it known that you crush heads!”—is suddenly triple *pianissimo* and pared back to the barest minimum melody of the opening, in a musical representation of frozen terror.

Modally, the movement adopts similar strategies to “Circles” from *Streets*, where there is an incremental shift in the pitch series with each repetition of a gesture. While in “Circles” the given tonic was persistent throughout, this time, either the modal sequence or the tonic shift. Bars 1-4, one instance of the seven-note melody with the “Be it Known” flourishes, is a neutral/natural Dorian mode on a tonic of D, beginning to move to a D Mixolydian mode on bar 4 with the introduction of F#. Once the flourish at bar 4 descends in sequence to arrive at the new F# in the left hand, this pivots to become the new tonic for a Dorian mode in the following four bars. Over the course of the movement, the harmonies alternate between a D and another tonic, different each time on each new mode. This structure can be represented as follows:

Bars	Tonic	Main Mode	Shifting mode(s)	Pitches
1-4	D	Dorian	Mixolydian	D E F(-F#) G A B C
5-8	F#	Dorian	Mixolydian/ Aeolian	F# G# A(-A#) B C# D#(-D) E
9-15	D	Mixolydian	Lochrian/Ionian	D E F#(-F) G A B(-Bb) C(-C#)
16-22	C#	Mixolydian	Aeolian/Ionian/ Phrygian	C# D#(-D) E#(-E) F# G# A# B(-B#)
23-29	D	Aeolian	Ionian/Phrygian/ Lydian	D E(-Eb) F(-F#) G(-G#) A Bb(-B) C(-C#)
etc.				

TABLE 6.1: Harmonic and modal structure of “Be It Known...” from *Sonata: Ode* (2019)

The series of calls and responses that structure this section of the poem, alternating repetition and variation, correlate with musical processes of departure and return throughout the movement. The correspondences are visual and sonic across the cuneiform, the transliteration, and the translation of Enheduanna’s poem, and the sound and visual scoring of alternating textures and modalities in “Be It Known...”

6.5 Postlude: Light

*Like the light of the rising moon, she exuded delight.*²²

After all the ordeals and violence described in the poem, the concluding lines 139-154 give an elevated, peaceful musical dedication to Inanna. The themes of light, and of the day and night sky suggest a contemplative or meditative state which to me corresponds with spiritual elevation. From an imaginative, not necessarily accurate scientific perspective, I imagine something like a “quantum jump” of molecules through different states of chemical or physical excitation as a metaphor for a mystical ascendance.

²² Enheduanna, “The Exaltation of Inana (Inana B, 4.07.2): Translation,” Edited and translated by Jeremy A. Black. Oxford 1999-2003, <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.4.07.2#>, line 148.

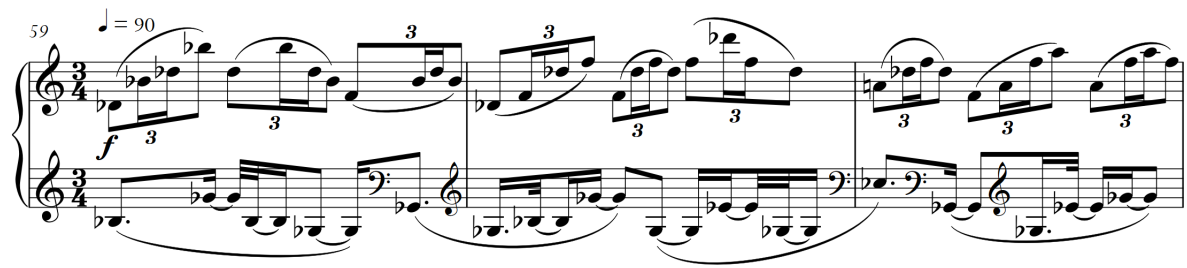


FIGURE 6.27: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Postlude: Light” (bars 59-61)

This soon eases, as the right hand continues in bars 65-70 against a left hand that is somewhat calmed. The triplet tones have subsided while the duplet notes are retained:

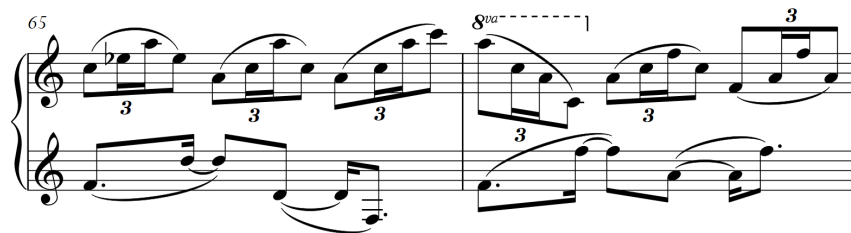


FIGURE 6.28: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Postlude: Light” (bars 65-66)

At bars 71-82, we have returned to the 3:2 cross-rhythm of the opening, with the spiritual and physical excitation subsiding to a baseline level. There is still significantly more registral movement here than in the opening, with octave leaps moving about rather than staying confined:



FIGURE 6.29: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Postlude: Light” (bars 71-74)

From this basic level of energy, the music relaxes even further at bars 83-88, with the right hand paring back to half time, crotchet values, then at bars 89 to the end, with the left hand also slowing to half-time values:



FIGURE 6.30: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Postlude: Light” (bars 87-90)

Eventually only the duplets remain, in a slow ascent from a tonic of the lowest G-flat through octaves and major thirds to end on the highest B-flat. How did an opening on a tonic of D-natural arrive at this point? Harmonically the passages outlined above undulate through rising and falling thirds. Initially, when the

left hand and right hand begin in a fairly simple 3:2 relationship, the harmonic undulations synchronise. At bars 41 onwards, where the musical intensity is elevated through an inversion between hands of the pitch and rhythmic groupings, the harmonic undulations begin to diverge, increasingly more as the passages increase in density and complexity:

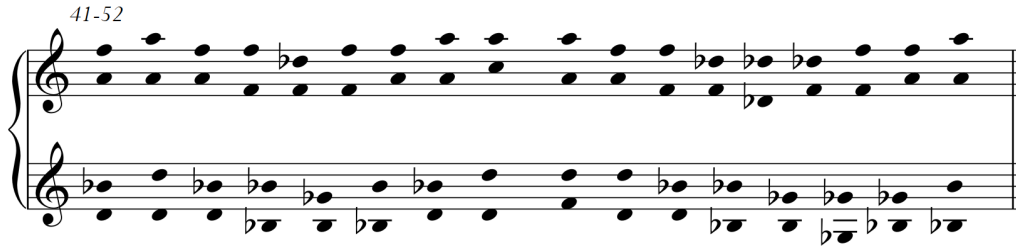


FIGURE 6.31: *Sonata: Ode* (2019), “Postlude: Light,” harmonic structure (bars 41-52)

These harmonic oscillations add further excitation to the given rhythms, stretching and pulling the cross-rhythms through widening registers and synchronisation of more and more remote chords and pitches. The overall impact is of metamorphosis, transformation, a somewhat otherworldly texture that departs from, then peacefully returns to where it began, like a meditative breath in honour of Inanna, or a spiritual awakening.

After a long period of delving within, into personal archival artefacts that have formed creative inspiration, process and output, the *Sonata: Ode* has been a chance to experiment with similar approaches to the initial inspiration of an historic, non-personal archaeological and creative object. Enheduanna’s poem, *The Exaltation of Inana*, reconstructed and interpreted in modern times from numerous tablet copies, possesses an inscribed physicality that has influenced processes of composing this piano work and at times, the character of the musical themes and gestures. “Silencing” and “Be It Known...” form the closest connection with the cuneiform notches on stone tablets, musically emulating recurrence and repetition of characters and poetic text. My own processes of designing the music for “Silencing” in particular, were highly inscriptional, bringing coloured pencil to paper to decode and encode symbols and syllables into sound. As a cultural memory or relic of an unfamiliar, violent femininity, the poem proved to be appropriate inspiration for a movement, “Storm,” addressing these themes through sonata structure. Inanna’s battle cry rings forth from the pianist’s voice against a folk and dance melody. Some of the descriptive aspects of the poem, themes of reign (“Crown”) or of spirit (“Light”) are musically depicted in the Prelude and Postlude movements. My interpretation of these themes and the poem overall, depends on the poem having made its way through the painstaking work of archaeologists from tablet format to transcriptions, transliterations then translations, through physical media into digitised, virtually accessed formats. Themes of violence, war, power and danger intertwine with themes of decoding and revelation.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: “As soon as Dawn appeared...”

What does a secret sound like?

This project began as a journey towards thoughts and ideas I had previously avoided in my music, towards facing vulnerable or dangerous themes rather than crafting a cosy, idealised sonic world entirely within a comfort zone. I wasn't sure if I would become a radically honest discloser, in the vein of much blog writing and sharing, or if the project would reinforce my existing creative instinct to cocoon, against challenging or painful memories and experiences. As it happens, I've danced through the continuum between both these positions, sometimes lightly, other times with a heavier and more careful tread. As the work progressed, prioritising the aesthetic plane allowed the theme of secrecy to exist in its own right, intertwined with the sonic fabric of the works and actually with the writing here, with processes of deciding what to share and how to present or transform it. I found I was able to finely mediate degrees of disclosure, and to play and experiment with this across the various media we have seen here and in the portfolio of scores. Sometimes I have brought to light glimpses of expression that had only ever had a private intent, other times I have shrouded moments or memories in uncertainty, reaching sonically for solidarity with others who have shared similar moments or memories. Meanwhile, I have created the various sounds in this portfolio always with a clear picture of the public audience I would expect to meet at the culmination of the work.

As the process of composing unfolded and the portfolio of compositional output was gradually finalised and assembled, the awareness of the centrality of journaling processes has been a fruitful insight. It has enabled me to trust the spontaneous and instinctive adoption of eclectic formats while composing. Especially interesting and deserving of further attention is the way that the initial medium of journaling or brainstorming of ideas for a work has influenced the compositional processes chosen to create the work. *Secret* (2019) began with a set of old unpublished song recordings that was transformed to create a backing track. When the corresponding flute part was composed, all the technical processes of excavation and veiling that I trialled or adopted in the final work were dependent on analysis and interpretation of the recorded source material. In contrast, the textual beginnings of *Commute* (2018-20) with a libretto inevitably bound the work up in written and spoken materials, from the experimental “talk-aloud” recording through to the weaving of an adapted private journal excerpt into the public-facing libretto. *Street Sketches* (2018) and *Streets* (2019) had an interrelationship of prototype to final work, and both had a lineage back to an old unfinished orchestral sketch. Strategies of musical deconstruction enabled the composition to be completed in alignment with the original thematic intent of providing a critique on the gender dynamics of the urban streetscape, and affirming safety and sex positivity from a feminine

perspective within this landscape. Finally, the *Sonata: Ode* (2019) interfaced between my own compositional motivations and an archival source that was not personally generated, the relatively ancient poem *The Exaltation of Inana* by Enheduanna. This time the literal archaeology of creativity—in an enhanced enacting of Krizek and others’ notions of autoethnography as an archaeological or ghostly phenomenon—became intertwined with different aspects of the source poem in each movement. The physicality of the various formats available for the source poem played a significant part, from the musical interpretation of the repetitive cuneiform inscriptions in the fourth movement, “Be It Known...”, to the musical transcription of the Sumerian syllables in “Silenced.” Angular, diadem-like gestures ripple through “I. Crown,” while the final movement “Light” conflates ideas of increase in spiritual and physical intensity and energy. The pianist’s voice carries verbal fragments of the poet’s name, and the unhinged battle cry in the second movement, “Storm.” I was able to use multimedia processes of journaling across hand-inscription, Microsoft Excel software and voice recording to interpret and respond musically to the poem at hand, creating intimacy and a personal perspective at times despite the chronological and geographical disparity of the present time with the source poem.

The sense of intimacy and the personal sphere has remained crucial to my practice, given that I have been exploring sensitive themes of safety and secrecy with a focus on gendered violence in these compositions. The non-verbal nature of music has been an ideal medium for exploring the uncomfortable sensory and embodied qualities of these themes, affording communicative and expressive outcomes beyond what is possible with text alone. At times I had palpable physical responses—a dry mouth, a weight in the pit of the gut—during the process of composition or when revisiting source materials for inspiration: recordings of my untrained singing voice from over fifteen years prior; leafing through the pages of old diaries or finding (and destroying, shredding!) old unsent letters. Sometimes these uncomfortable feelings stayed with me right through to moments where I shared my work in progress, in verbal presentations, while writing this document, or while audience to the public premiere of some of these compositions. Occasionally, the works necessarily impart a degree of sensory discomfort onto the performers and wider audience in order to evoke environments or experiences of danger; queasy discrepancies between equal temperament and incremental Hertz-values, or the confusion of hearing only fragments of six songs simultaneously. During moments of dread or even panic, some of these symptoms have caused me to wonder whether I am going against instinct, or if the work is on the right track. While this has been challenging, I find affirmation and solace in the following quote from Ellis:

*Believe me, honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and self-doubts—and emotional pain. Just when you think you can't stand the pain anymore—that's when the real work begins.*¹

If popular music is one of the most “public” arenas of sonic creativity, it makes sense that popular music structures and gestures repeatedly crept into the portfolio of compositions. While I was conscious at the outset that there would be an important symbolism in the influences of genres like rebetika and hip hop, I found that these popular music styles could be strongly associated with the urban landscape, especially in *Commute* and *Streets*. In *Secret*, the stretched-out pop song structure for the work was a public vessel for the exploration and transformation of song-writing material. And in *Sonata: Ode*, a folk-like, spontaneous, hummed melody was transformed compositionally from an improvised moment captured on voice recording into the first subject for a sonata. The common thread through all these works was the transformative approach; rather than simply replicate any popular music influences in a notated score environment, styles and structures were consistently reconfigured, deconstructed. This came to represent a desire to see gendered aspects of the urban landscape unravelled, a sonic representation of the motivation for movements like #metoo. Voice and text have found their way into instrumental works more and more, in fragments of speech or singing that vary in degrees of ambiguity or clarity.

A secret sounds like ██████████.

The implications of sonic secrecy (or safety) extend more broadly into the realm of communication. This was clear from the outset in Parpart’s influential reflections on silence in the arena of research and academic writing. There is a rich layer of decision making that occurs before the threshold of communication that can hold a high degree of agency. As a composer it has been instructive to tap into this zone, to reassess and defy my own internal policies of curation, whether related to self-appraisal of my compositional oeuvre, or thematic content for inclusion in my works. Putting forward works, or words, that I had never intended to share was an empowering act of aesthetic vulnerability. I consistently ensured this was mediated by the degree of content shared, whether by rewording actual diary entries, and blurring non-essential passages in photographs of handwriting, or sonically blurring the *Miniatures* so that they became a mass of sound, a conglomerate aesthetic of the recorded collection that fades in and out of silence. The field of secrecy studies has much more to say about these processes of mediation, and to this I would add privacy studies, another cross-disciplinary area of research devoted to aspects of communicative retention which has been beyond the scope of this study but would be worthy of

¹ Ellis, *The Ethnographic I*, xviii.

examination from the sonic perspective. Furthermore, if the discipline of rhetoric embodies very public stylised aspects of communication, the various commentators examining the rhetoric of silence promise a fascinating area of study that could further enrich the conclusions arrived at here. This includes Cheryl Glenn,² along with Krista Ratcliffe,³ who interrogate the intentionality of silence and voids in communication, and for whom a focus on silence overlaps into examining the act of listening.

In undertaking this project, a distinction has become apparent between professional, public creative output and private modes of creativity, that are often informal, spontaneous or amateur. Some people will create exclusively at either end of this spectrum, or even not at all. As a professional composer with a growing body of public-facing works who also dabbles with private forms of expression such as handwritten journaling and song-writing, I found it instructive to call into question the compartmentalisation of these activities and to experiment with blending private-facing material into my public output. Bacon's reflections on journaling as part of writerly artistic research was instructive in demonstrating how scrappy manuscripts were a vital part of her creative process, and I was able to extend this to consider sketches and preparatory material across a range of physical and digital media that formed my own compositional experimentation and working materials. Experimentation with Davidson's talk-aloud for musicians and Cameron's Morning Pages, adapted for compositional process, may have potential to be expanded into more formalised instructional material for composers and other musicians seeking to adopt similar protocols. Ellis' autoethnographic novel includes a practical 32-point guide to personal writing in the appendices that is also a potential candidate for translation to musical practice. Among much valuable advice, Ellis poignantly suggests to students:

*15. If you find the story you have chosen to write to be too painful or to bring up issues you are not yet ready to deal with, come talk with me. Your feelings of safety while writing are of utmost importance.*⁴

While the compositions are conceptually intact, sometimes I have been concerned that the especially hermeneutic mode of this thesis might be at risk of demystifying secrecy in this research, focusing too much on revelation, at odds with the expressed aesthetic intent of this project. I feel that some of this has been addressed by adopting aspects of secrecy into the written format, especially when the register of writing moves into the private, confessional mode. If I have included one of the songs from the *Miniatures* here in its original form, I have withheld the other 32 songs. If I have scanned and added diary excerpts, they are cropped or blurred to only reveal the most relevant material. I opened the thesis with a redacted

² Cheryl Glenn, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004).

³ Cheryl Glenn and Krista Ratcliffe, eds., *Silence and Listening as Rhetorical Arts* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2011).

⁴ Ellis, *The Ethnographic I*, 366.

confession. There are moments where I have had to approach some of the included journal data somewhat systematically and clinically, including date and brief description of a “specimen.” This has perhaps been an antidote to the emotional intensity of the given object, an act of counterbalance that enabled me to push forward with certain inclusions.

A secret sounds like a discrepancy.⁵

The rich continuum between absolute privacy and complete publicity is worth attention: musical, sonic, communicative and beyond. Excitingly, these directions for my work are to-be-continued, moving forwards with the assumption that information or knowledge we withhold is as potent as that which we reveal, and the conditions under which we do so, whether intentional or not, are just as telling.

⁵ Quoted from a plain text smartphone note (10/01/2022).

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