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A SITUATIONAL APPROACH TO COMPOSITION

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Portfolio of compositions and commentary submitted to
the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

December 2013

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Abstract

This commentary presents my compositional work of the last two years. It consists of musical pieces that follow a formal approach emphasising static, self-enclosed musical situations. Designed to avoid processual ways of formal organisation, these pieces present collections of rich instrumental textures that do not evolve; they point toward a music of 'being' rather than 'becoming'.

Drawing on conceptual traces from discussions of Karlheinz Stockhausen's 'moment form' and Helmut Lachenmann's ideas of 'sound as state'; on musical traces from Morton Feldman and Aldo Clementi, and reflecting on similar approaches by contemporary referents such as Harald Muenz and Bryn Harrison, I seek to contextualise the formal aspects of my own compositional practice comprised in what I call a 'situational' approach.

A detailed observation of the musical material and modes of inner organisation used in the construction of these pieces will be necessary in order to reveal the features that give situations their characteristic sense of stasis.

I also seek to explore different effective ways of formal organisation based on the co-existence of situations. I do this by means of juxtaposing either single such situations, or several instances of them, reoccurring in different combinations. Both formal approaches seek to emphasise the syntactic independence and lack of relations of consequence between such segments.

Keywords: composition, situation, situational, texture, stasis, moment, non-processual.

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Portfolio

Fragments after Cioran (2012)

For bass flute, clarinet, violin, piano, vibraphone and piano. Ca. 9 min.

[Premiered on 09.03.2012 by Ensemble Interface conducted by Scott Voyles at Dampfzentrale Bern, Switzerland]

Ibid (2012)

For flute and piano. Ca. 30 sec.

[Premiered on 20.07.2012 by Bettina Berger and Anna D'Errico at the OpenSpace, Darmstadt, Germany]

Fosforesciamo (2012)

For solo harpsichord. Ca. 5 min.

Debris (2012)

For 1/4-tone flugelhorn, tenor trombone, electric guitar, percussion and electronics. Ca. 20 min.

[Premiered on 08.02.2013 by Elision Ensemble, St Paul's Hall Huddersfield, UK]

Two Surfaces (2013)

For alto flute, clarinet, violin, cello and percussion. Ca. 9 min.

[Premiered on 26.04.2013 by ensemble Hand Werk at the Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik, Germany]

Instead (2013)

For solo clarinet. Ca. 7 min.

[Premiered on 25.09.2013 by Heather Roche in Berlin, Germany]

Ver (2013)

For solo piano. Ca. 17 min.

[Premiered on 05.12.2013 by Mark Knoop at University of Huddersfield, UK]

Últimos (2013)

For string trio. Ca. 7 min.

[To be premiered in 2014 by Distractfold Ensemble]

(Total duration: Ca. 75 min.)

Introduction

In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno characterised artworks as having an “immanent processual quality” (1997, p.176). In his view, they are essentially “not being but a process of becoming” (ibid),¹ their processual qualities resting on an inner dialectical tension: “Whatever in the artifact may be called the unity of its meaning is not static but processual, the enactment of antagonisms that each work necessarily has in itself” (ibid).

During my studies in composition I have come across many different formulations of similar ideas, applied in a more-or-less concrete way to the discussion of musical construction and pointing towards the aesthetic need for a processual unfolding as a core factor of 'coherence'. In my compositional work of recent years I seek to problematise this view attempting alternatives to it: How can we do without such dialectics of process in composition? This inquiry is not intended directly as a response to Adorno's claim, but more generally, as a way of exploring alternatives to received compositional criteria that have sustained understandings of musical form since late 18th Century classicism.

Through my portfolio of compositions, I attempt to address ways of replacing the 'enactment of antagonism' that Adorno mentions for a simple display of contrasting situations, among which no relation of causality is at play in order to avoid processual

¹ It is important to note that, in this sentence, the word 'process' is an addition of the translator, as the German original reads: „*Daß Kunstwerke kein Sein sondern ein Werden seien...*” (Adorno, 1970, p.263), literally “That artworks are not a being but a becoming...” This addition, nevertheless, may well be in tune with Adorno's insistence on the processual nature of the artwork. For instances of the idea of artwork as 'becoming' in music concretely, see Adorno 2002, pp.115 and 170-172. On the Hegelian origin of Adorno's opposition 'being'/'becoming', see Paddison, 1993, p.113.

traces on a larger scale. Over the past two years, I have focused on defining a compositional practice around an exploration of limited arrays of material. In so doing, I have narrowed the possibilities for a developmental form of internal organisation in order to convey a sense of inner stasis. I arrived at the term 'musical situations' as a key to understanding such formal prioritisations, looking to highlight both the inner static qualities of the musical segments at play, and their independent coexistence within a musical work.

The 'processual' aspects that I seek to avoid refer to music based on series of changes at the formal level – not necessarily continuous – directed towards a goal; a change from A to B, where both terms are different from each other, and B could be seen as a consequence of A. On the contrary, by 'non-processual' or 'static', I refer to the lack of intelligible relations of consequence between different situations or between any parts within a situation; whichever musical segment we observe exists without becoming anything different from itself. This dichotomy processual/static finds to some extent a parallel in Jonathan Kramer's (1988) conception of linearity in its multiple forms and non-linearity, yet applied here to any musical segment, rather than – as he does – to entire pieces.

The idea of static musical segments, and of pieces composed with them, suggests the need for a new kind of attention that is different from the sort of 'story-following' usually at play in music of written tradition. These non-narrative musical situations, we might speculate, through their static character somehow minimise the role of memory and expectation as coordinates of subjective orientation, rather focusing one's attention on the musical situation as a form of a sheer 'present'.² As such, a music based on a

² For an insightful account on the role of *attention*, *memory* and *expectation* in the experience of contemporary art see Osborne, 2013, p.175.

situational approach points at a new way of experiencing musical time, not proceeding linearly from expectations of the future, via present enactment, to become memories of the past that inform new expectations, but as discrete blocks of 'pure present', as it were, that succeed one another discontinuously. A detailed study of the reception of the music here presented, nevertheless, exceeds the scope of the present commentary, and so the discussion will remain focused on the 'poietic' dimension, i.e. the creative, generative aspects of this music, in both a speculative and practical way.

The pieces included in the portfolio respond to this quest for stasis at diverse levels and with different degrees of radicalness. Some of them might even be seen at times as failing to reflect appropriately such ideas, at which point we must bear in mind that they are not laboratory tests to prove a hypothesis, but rather self-sufficient artworks that attempt different ways of reflecting creatively *on* the ideas presented in this commentary. The model followed is then not one of theoretical ideas applied to composition, nor a subsequent exegesis to what I have composed, but one of aesthetic concerns arising from the compositional praxis, being researched and thereby historically/theoretically contextualised, feeding back into further compositional undertakings in a rapport of mutually informing practice-research.

I must also mention that the instrumentation of the included pieces responds to concrete opportunities of collaboration with performers and ensembles, in order to have the music performed in public, thus completing the cycle of music making. These collaborations, besides the gratifying experience of working with excellent musicians, in some cases informed the compositional process by means of providing technical feedback on the sound result of the materials chosen. This was especially so in *Instead*, where unorthodox instrumental techniques were explored.

The first chapter of this commentary will introduce the concept of musical 'situations' as used in my own work, putting it in dialogue with similar concepts in the recent history of music composition that I consider relevant stylistically and/or conceptually to such an idea. The second chapter will look at the inner construction of 'situations' in the pieces included in the portfolio, analysing in detail the features that contribute to the avoidance of a processual formal organisation within such musical segments. It will also look at the different ways in which such 'situations' are organised to co-exist in the formal plane so as to avoid relations of causality among them. For this purpose, I have chosen to focus on specific works and key examples to elucidate procedures that are most relevant to the discussion rather than analysing each piece in extended detail. Finally, some summary considerations will be provided, assessing the creative journey undertaken in this project, and pointing at possible continuations of my endeavours in view of the present work.

1. Musical Situations and their Background.

In this chapter I will introduce the concept of 'situation' that I employ to refer to the characteristic static formal units in the construction of my music. I will also contrast this approach with similar ones from composers that I consider relevant to such a concept, as means of contextualisation. My intent is not to follow a musicological methodology, but rather to provide a creative dialogue with some selected musical referents.

The first three of these referents represent clearly differentiated generations of German composers with diverse approaches and interests: Karlheinz Stockhausen, Helmut Lachenmann and Harald Muenz. Despite not many evident similarities existing between their music and mine, their relevance in this commentary has more to do with a certain conceptualisation and nomenclature. The chapter will also mention possible touch-points and differences with comparable endeavours by Morton Feldman, Aldo Clementi, and Bryn Harrison. These three composers, whilst not representing a clear lineage like the previous three, seem to address similar key concepts such as the perception of time, textures and repetition. Their work seems to suggest, at least on the surface, a stylistic proximity with my compositional undertakings.

1.1 Situations

In a general sense, the term 'situation' is understood as a 'state of affairs': a determined set of conditions or circumstances that characterise a certain time/space as a unity. The idea of musical situations, as presented through this commentary, refers to segments of instrumental activity that appear as utterly static on a large scale. They can contain a rich detailed definition, with changes in different levels that nevertheless do not affect the general sense of stasis. Such situations hold to a determined identity by elaborating on a restricted set of musical possibilities that 'remain the same'.

It is the variety within the chosen sets of possibilities, as well as the regularity in their deployment in time, that determines the degree of homogeneity of a situation. On the other hand, the more heterogeneous a situation is, the more time it needs to reveal the regularity of its construction, and thereby its static character. Once this aspect is established, the content starts being perceived as redundant. Henceforth it could be argued that a situation's actual duration is arbitrary: rather than being derived from inner considerations regarding the behaviour of materials, it is imposed externally, since such a static continuum cannot have a 'reason' for its beginning or end.

In this sense, to compose means for me to present a collection of invented musical situations as objects of aesthetic contemplation, which can engage the attention of the observer to different degrees. By adopting this approach I deliberately distance my creative practice from traditional criteria of Western music that aim at an 'organic' integration of parts. Any given situation then stands by itself and is not to be seen as a logical consequence of what sounded before, nor the cause for what follows. A sense

of arbitrariness in both a situation's placement and duration is, therefore, a key factor to my music, as will be discussed through this commentary.

Despite not referring to 'situations' at the time, the first piece I wrote addressing similar ideas of formal discontinuity was *'Umbral'* for ensemble (2003), where I presented a collection of textures juxtaposed in a random order, in an attempt to get rid of smooth transitions as a compositional problem to be tackled. Further endeavours in similar directions were pursued in the frame of my Master of Arts' portfolio (2008), though these rather focused the discussion on the structural aspects of paradigmatic and syntagmatic organisation of the material, as well as procedures for overlapping different musical segments. Later on, I addressed ideas of static, non-narrative textural music in the portfolio of my Master of Philosophy (2012), and particularly in the work titled *Interalia* for large ensemble, which presented – in a fragmented way – a unique textural construction characterised by the restriction of parametric elements.³

I deliberately refer to this compositional approach as 'situational' rather than 'situationist' not only to take distance from all the 'isms' and the doctrinal resonances of such denominations, but more specifically to avoid confusion with the artistic/political movement of the same name. With Guy Debord as one of their founding members, the *Situationist International* “formed in 1957, found their métier as inspired provocateurs during the insurrectionary 'events' of May 1968 in Paris, and disbanded in 1972” (Danchev, 2011, p.347).

The situationists defined the concept of 'constructed situation' as "a moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambience and a game of events" (Knabb, 2006, p.51). Given the considerably different

³ For a detailed discussion of this work see Alvarez, 2011.

scope of the situationist movement's agenda when compared to my much narrower use of the term 'situation' in this musical context, an elaborate attempt to link their ideas to mine would be futile. That said, I do find that their concept of a 'constructed situation', taken in a rather abstract way, offers a resounding affinity with the musical approach that I present here. Beyond the mere coincidence in the denomination, the idea of an organised 'game of events' towards the construction of a 'unitary ambience' does indeed overlap with what I pursue in music.

Of additional interest is the use of the word 'moment' in that situationist definition, which carries temporal implications. Taking this idea back to the field of music concretely, I shall consider Stockhausen's use of that term in relation to his famous concept of 'moment form' first introduced in his work *Kontakte* (1966), which seems similar to my idea of 'situations' and their role in my compositional practice. Although at some point in my studies in composition many years ago⁴ I became aware of his conception of discontinuous, self-enclosed sections, these ideas seemed to have stayed submerged in my unconscious until re-discovered at a rather late stage of this research.

⁴ During my private studies in composition with James Dillon in 2006, and by his suggestion.

1.2 Moment form

In his article titled 'Moment Form in Twentieth Century Music', Jonathan Kramer explains such form as "a succession of self-contained sections that do not relate to each other in any functionally implicative manner" (1978, p.179). Similarly, musicologist Arnold Whittall described *Momentform* as "a concept of Stockhausen's which sought to focus maximum weight on the individual structural segments that make up larger wholes" (2008, p.275).

From these definitions, it can be derived that such segments, whilst forming part of larger constructions, do not imply a functional role, but rather remain independent of each other. Sheer juxtaposition seems then the way for 'moments' to coexist within a piece. At least in theory, these ideas coincide with my own to a great extent. The similarities also include the seemingly static qualities of a moment, as Stockhausen himself, when explaining his ideas about these musical forms says that they:

do not aim toward a climax, do not prepare the listener to expect a climax, and their structures do not contain the usual stages found in the development curve of the whole duration of a normal composition: the introductory, rising, transitional, and fading stages. On the contrary, these new forms are immediately intensive, and the main point which is made at once remains present at an equal level to the very conclusion (quoted in Kramer, 1988, p.201).

Often I refer to these static aspects as a 'non-narrative' quality of my compositional approach (Alvarez, 2012), something to which Stockhausen explicitly points regarding his work *Momente*:

This piece tells no story. One can certainly stop listening for a moment if one no longer wishes to or can't listen; for each moment is self-sufficient and at the same time is related to all other moments (quoted in Harvey, 1975, p.85).

Following this idea, it becomes evident that, insofar as there is no musical need to listen to a 'moment' for its whole duration, its actual length is arbitrary. The idea of arbitrariness that I repeatedly mention with regard to both situations' durations and their placement is understood not in absolute terms (pure chance, randomisation), but simply refers to not being derived from any rational calculation. Intuition, nonetheless, can have an incidence in these decisions to some degree, as long as the result can be perceived as arbitrary. In this sense Kramer's account of arbitrariness in the articulation of moment form is insightful:

Since there is no linear logic that connects moments, their order of succession *seems* arbitrary. Actually, the order may or may not be arbitrary, but it must seem so on the surface if the piece is to be heard in moment time (Kramer, 1988, p.50).

These apparent similitudes of my musical situations with Stockhausen's moments stand only partially, since, differently from my approach, he considers that a 'moment' can be either a state (as in a situation) or processual: “[Kontakte] is composed in 'moment form'. Each moment, whether a *state* or a *process*, is individual and self-regulated, and able to sustain an independent existence” (Stockhausen, quoted in Wörner, 1973, p.46, italics are mine). My idea of a situation, on the contrary, aims to exclude any sort of processual unfolding both at the formal level, and within individual situations.

Furthermore, even a moment's self-containment and independence seem only to be relative, as can be observed in Stockhausen's London lectures of 1972.⁵ There he explained the parts of his work *Momente*, suggesting a precisely controlled web of inter-referential and mutually influencing parts. Although not operating in a linear way, these seem to take different functions in the construction of an overall dramaturgy by

⁵ 13th February 1972 at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, filmed and released by Allied Artists, and subsequently reproduced in part in Maconie, 1989.

keeping under strict control the degree and direction of change from one moment to the next. This aspect not only seems at odds with Kramer's description, but also provides a major point of difference from my idea of 'situation'. In any case, all these apparently contradictory aspects of moment form could perhaps be explained by taking into account Robin Maconie's suggestion that Stockhausen's work followed a general "trend away from static structure to dynamic process that began with *Kontakte*" (Maconie, 2005, p.259).

The ambiguity between static and processual sound formations that is observed in the conception of *Momentform* defines its difference with the intrinsically static character of a situation. Such a dichotomy has been insightfully explored by Helmut Lachenmann, as I shall consider next.

1.3 Sound as state

Often when describing the musical situations I write as 'textural', I do not only point at their sensuous characteristics, but also seek to make manifest an aspect that links them, at least partially, to Lachenmann's concept of 'texture-sound' or 'sound-texture' encompassed within what he calls 'sound as state'. In his 1966 article *Klangtypen der neuen Musik*, Lachenmann (2004a) organised a taxonomy of sound – understanding this term in a wide sense, from a single event to a complex sound-construction – that included the category of 'sound as state' (*Klang als Zustand*). He described such a category as having an arbitrary length, independently of its content, as opposed to 'sound as process' (*Klang als Prozeß*), whose duration is equivalent to the development of its properties in time.

The different types of sound-states explained in that article include the so-called 'Colour-sound' (*Farbklang*), namely a sustained, homogeneous sound, for example a held chord or a drone; 'Fluctuation-sound' (*Fluktuationsklang*), i.e. a sound-state composed of a periodically repeating behaviour; and the most complex of these, which he calls 'Texture-sound' (*Texturklang*): “a static experience of time built of a multiplicity of heterogeneous single events, which gives a general impression, virtually a characteristic chaos” (ibid, p.57, my translation)⁶. A texture, under this perspective, is composed of a variety of details that are unpredictable and structurally irrelevant (ibid, p.15). Nonetheless these details add up to the statistical properties of the whole. The dissociation between a texture's overall formal level and its detail is explained by Lachenmann:

⁶ „...aus einer Vielfalt von heterogenen Einzelereignissen gebildete statische Zeiterfahrung, die einen statistischen Gesamteindruck vermittelt, quasi ein charakteristisches Chaos.“

[T]he general property of a texture is not anymore necessarily identical with the momentary innerly audible detailed properties; indeed in the particular sense that the degree of complexity of the resulting general character . . . is mostly smaller than that of the rather casually merging shapes inside the texture, insofar as the mass is usually more primitive than its individual components (ibid, p.17).⁷

A key concept to understand Lachenmann's sound types is that of 'proper-time' (*Eigenzeit*), namely the time that is necessary to convey the properties of a sound (ibid, p.8). Differently from the processual sound, in which its actual duration coincides with such proper time, in the texture-sound the latter could be considered as virtually endless, "...when at some point, eventually the attention on the constantly new detail would not change anymore, in a static experience of statistic general properties" (Ibid, p.14).⁸ This finds a parallel in Kramer's idea of a texture's 'consistency':

Eventually the expectation for consistency turns into virtual certainty, and (in information-theoretic terms) the texture and surface rhythm become redundant. But in retrospect we realize that an unchanging principle of organization, not a progressive linearity, has been determining the texture and surface rhythm . . . Once this consistency of rhythmic and textural pattern becomes a certainty, we start to notice the nonlinearity of the texture (Kramer, 1988, p.42).

Despite their different inner characteristics, all three 'state-sounds' – colour, fluctuation, and texture – are somehow determined by the same kind of proper-time, "which remains undeterminable given the variety of individual cases", and after which such sound constructions are "experienced not anymore as process, but as a state that can be prolonged arbitrarily" (Lachenmann, 2004a, p.15).⁹ In this sense of arbitrary duration

⁷ „...*(daß) die Gesamt-Eigenschaft einer Textur nirgends mehr notwendig identisch ist mit den momentan darin zu hörenden Detail-Eigenschaften, allerdings in dem besonderen Sinn, daß der Komplexitätsgrad des resultierenden Gesamtcharakters, [als oft eher statistisch zu bewertendes Resultat von Häufungen,] meist geringer ist als derjenige der im Textur-Inneren eher beiläufig sich zusammenschließenden Gestalten - so wie eben die Masse meist primitiver ist als ihre einzelnen Komponenten.*“ (N.B.: All translations are mine)

⁸ „*So könnte man die Eigenzeit dieses Typs für unendlich ansehen, wenn nicht schließlich doch irgendwann die Aufmerksamkeit auf das permanent neue Detail wieder umschlagen würde in ein statisches Erlebnis statistischer Gesamteigenschaften.*“

⁹ „*Er wird - nach einer gewissen, unbestimmbaren, weil individuell verschiedenen, Eigenzeit nicht mehr als Prozeß, sondern als beliebig verlängerbarer Zustand erlebt.*“

beyond a critical time that reveals their redundancy, another crucial overlap between 'state-sound' and my concept of musical situation is found.

However, as can be seen in the musical examples that Lachenmann presents in the cited article, i.e. short fragments selected from Ligeti's *Apparitions* and from Stockhausen's *Gruppen*, the characteristic stasis of a *Texturklang* is just relative in practice. If we consider those examples in the broader formal context of the pieces to which they belong, their transitory properties emerge. Under this perspective, a 'state' implies a static-yet-transitory condition, in the same sense that water, for instance, is in a liquid state only *whilst* its temperature does not go below 0° or above 100°C.¹⁰

It is curious to observe that, whilst presenting several examples of 'sound-as-process' drawn from his music, Lachenmann does not include any of his own regarding 'state-sounds' (introducing instead the examples of Ligeti and Stockhausen mentioned above, alongside others as diverse as Penderecki, Beethoven, Chopin, Debussy, Bruckner, and Berg). This, one could speculate, signals to a certain identification of his own work with dynamic, processual compositional procedures, and consequently a distancing from more static ones.

Although it is not entirely clear from the text whether Lachenmann uses the term 'texture' in a general sense or specifically referring to the 'sound-type' mentioned before, he points, in the 1994/95 analysis of his second string quartet, to “an *ordinario*-bowed *tutti* texture that draws (real and imitated) overtone-glissando figures out of a polytonal field, and from there into tonelessness (see the score, mm. 85-112)” (Lachenmann, 2004b, p.62). The score shows how, instead of directing such texture

¹⁰ The German word that Lachenmann uses is '*Zustand*', same that is commonly used to describe the physical states of matter.

towards tonelessness through a linear process, the composer establishes a continuous ebb and flow between pitched and pitch-less sound qualities by means of changes in the bow position going all the way through '*sul ponticello*'.¹¹ However, it can also be seen how some elements break the homogeneity of the texture. The sudden articulation change in bar 90, for example, from legato to *détaché*, together with an increase in dynamics and a single, characteristic ascending figure in the first violin towards bar 93a constitute a sort of unique gesture, that escapes the general textural definition (see Example 1). The dynamic '*fff*' in bar 95 also presents a unique recognisable deviation from an otherwise homogeneous sound construction.

Similar to the previous examples of *Texturklang* that Lachenmann cites, whichever static characteristics we find in this 'texture' seem only relative, always on the verge of stasis. Taking some distance and looking with a broader perspective, such static traces tend to appear at least blurred by larger heterogeneous processes, or even disrupted by contrasting individual elements.

My compositional attempts, on the contrary, seek to minimise the formal relativity of stasis. Textural situations then appear as an extrapolation of the ideal characteristics of the '*Texturklang*' into the formal level, adopting a more radical approach to their stationary, non-processual aspects. They display a sort of utterly static self-containment and general homogeneity, which ultimately derive in their duration being imposed arbitrarily, rather than as a response to an inner structural necessity.

¹¹ Lachenmann means the '*sul ponticello*' indication in a literal sense, actually *on* the bridge, i.e. resulting in a pitch-less noise, as opposed to '*al ponticello*', corresponding to the traditional way of executing the former indication, *towards* the bridge.

Handwritten musical score for Lachenman's *Reigen seliger Geister* (1989), measures 87-93b. The score is written on ten staves, with the first four staves containing the main melodic and harmonic material and the last six staves containing a more complex, dense texture. The notation includes various dynamics (ppp, p, f, ff), articulation (accents, slurs), and performance instructions like "acced. poco a poco" and "real". Measure numbers 87, 87a, 87b, 87c, 87d, 87e, 87f, 87g, 87h, 87i, 87j, 87k, 87l, 87m, 87n, 87o, 87p, 87q, 87r, 87s, 87t, 87u, 87v, 87w, 87x, 87y, 87z, 88, 88a, 88b, 88c, 88d, 88e, 88f, 88g, 88h, 88i, 88j, 88k, 88l, 88m, 88n, 88o, 88p, 88q, 88r, 88s, 88t, 88u, 88v, 88w, 88x, 88y, 88z, 89, 89a, 89b, 89c, 89d, 89e, 89f, 89g, 89h, 89i, 89j, 89k, 89l, 89m, 89n, 89o, 89p, 89q, 89r, 89s, 89t, 89u, 89v, 89w, 89x, 89y, 89z, 90, 90a, 90b, 90c, 90d, 90e, 90f, 90g, 90h, 90i, 90j, 90k, 90l, 90m, 90n, 90o, 90p, 90q, 90r, 90s, 90t, 90u, 90v, 90w, 90x, 90y, 90z, 91, 91a, 91b, 91c, 91d, 91e, 91f, 91g, 91h, 91i, 91j, 91k, 91l, 91m, 91n, 91o, 91p, 91q, 91r, 91s, 91t, 91u, 91v, 91w, 91x, 91y, 91z, 92, 92a, 92b, 92c, 92d, 92e, 92f, 92g, 92h, 92i, 92j, 92k, 92l, 92m, 92n, 92o, 92p, 92q, 92r, 92s, 92t, 92u, 92v, 92w, 92x, 92y, 92z, 93, 93a, 93b, 93c, 93d, 93e, 93f, 93g, 93h, 93i, 93j, 93k, 93l, 93m, 93n, 93o, 93p, 93q, 93r, 93s, 93t, 93u, 93v, 93w, 93x, 93y, 93z. The score is annotated with various performance markings and includes a "Basso" section at the bottom right.

Example 1: Lachenman's *Reigen seliger Geister* (1989) mm.87-93b.

However incidental, it may be worthwhile to mention the use of the term 'situation' in Lachenmann's writings. When he briefly comments on his work '*Ausklang*' from 1984/85, the composer describes the music as "going through a course of situations, that – continuing, contrasting, or qualitatively switching – follow each other" (2004a, p.396),¹² thus implying the possibility for their discreet formal organisation in a somehow similar way to the formal approach I propose. Also when describing the idea behind his work from 1971 '*Kontrakadenz*' in its programme notes, he mentions a "Cascade' of acoustic situations" (ibid, p.385).¹³ This description, as far as I know, remains unexplained, and does not seem to establish a specific concept in the frame of his theoretical apparatus.

¹² „Die Musik durchläuft so einen Parcours von Situationen, die – fortsetzend, kontrastierend oder qualitativ umschlagend – auseinander hervorgehen...“

¹³ „*Gefälle*“ *akustischer Situationen*.

1.4 Acoustic Situations

German composer Harald Muenz employs the term 'acoustic situation' in a much more specific sense than Lachenmann, in order to make manifest his “dealing with the mere physical changes inside a sound” (Muenz, personal communication, 07 April 2013) in some of his works. This is done by exploring a sheer sensorial experience of acoustic changes, rather than an intentionally deployed musical dramaturgy. Far from similar concerns found in the ambit of 'sound-installations' or 'sonic art', he deals with such problems from a compositional perspective, hence his approach seeming relevant to this discussion.

By attempting to untie sensorial attention from a compositionally designed 'plot' to be followed, Muenz points at a “sharpening of the attention by focusing on the individual acoustic event, on the pure presence of 'sounds being themselves’” (ibid). In this way, he also seeks to distance his work from “the 'grand' tradition of European concert music, in which composers stage dramatic courses in their pieces” (ibid), a tradition that would certainly include both Stockhausen and Lachenmann. Such an agenda, whilst evoking some strong Cagean resonances, is nonetheless carried out through the technical resources of that tradition – namely precisely notated, 'composed' music. In one of his articles dedicated to the composer, musicologist Rainer Nonnenmann gives insight into the scope of this approach:

[Muenz] describes a great part of his pieces as 'acoustic situations' in order to replace the historically-affectively loaded concept of music through a 'physical' neutral description, and in this way preventing listeners from becoming artificially and externally emotionalised from the beginning by retrieving traditional musical categories, instead of through the unprejudiced and therefore perhaps more varied perception of the inner sonic course of instruments, speeches, voices (Nonnenmann, 2004, p.35, my translation).¹⁴

¹⁴ “Einen Großteil seiner Stücke bezeichnet er als „akustische Situationen“, um den historisch-affektiv belasteten Musikbegriff durch eine „physikalisch“ neutrale Bezeichnung zu ersetzen

The way in which such situations are presented can be observed, for example, in his piece '*dietro V avanti*' (Muenz, 2011b). In the central section – measures 202 to 273 – a restriction in the pitch and rhythmic materials allows one to focus the attention on aspects of sound such as changing rates of vibrato, timbral modulations and subtle variations in dynamics, as can be seen in the example below.

K Sostenuto, lo stesso tempo (le note lunghe mai accorciare!)

Example 2: Harald Muenz, *dietro V avanti* (2011b), mm. 202-214.

This idea of 'acoustic situations' thus points towards an objectivisation of the listening experience, seeking to avoid an apparent imposition of the composer's intention – in the traditional form of a 'dramatic plot' to be followed – onto the auditor's attention. Instead, the composer pursues a more self-reflective focus on the material's own physical qualities, hence his use of such a neutral denomination, in order to signal a distance from traditional musical categories.

und auf diese Weise zu verhindern, daß die Hörer von vornherein künstlich von außen durch das Abrufen überkommener musikalischer Kategorien emotionalisiert werden, statt durch die unvoreingenommene und deswegen vielleicht bewegendere Wahrnehmung des inneren Klangverlaufs von Instrumenten, Sprachen, Stimmen."

These concerns coexist in Muenz's work with other aspects that, in contrast, go beyond the 'purely sonic' characteristics mentioned above. Such is the case of material loaded with cultural connotations, as can be seen in his 2006 work »*schönes klavierstück*«. ¹⁵ Besides the ironic resonances of the title, the passage shown in the example below is presented as if it was a self-enclosed object, disconnected from the rest of the music. The characteristic figuration not only alludes to “the German mocking term 'Quintolenmusik' ('quintuplet music') for intricate rhythms in new music” (Muenz, 2011d, liner notes), but contrasts it with a banal figuration, seemingly evoking the mechanical, unrefined characteristics of cheap electronic keyboard music, as the composer explains in the programme notes to the piece.

Example 3: Harald Muenz, »*schönes klavierstück*« (2006) bar 24.

Besides the mere terminology used, it is the creative purposes sought by Harald Muenz through his concept of 'acoustic situations' that coincides to some extent with my compositional endeavours presented here. In very general terms, both approaches look for a new form of aesthetic experience, less pre-determined by traditional conceptions of what 'a good composition' ought to be like, and more open to an objectivisation of musical material. What differs, however, is the means by which this is carried out, in my case done through a strict avoidance of processual characteristics in the generation of static segments of textural qualities. These segments, in their turn,

¹⁵ “*beautiful piano piece*”.

work in my pieces like self-enclosed modules with which to construct the musical form. Personally, I approach this with a strong emphasis on speculative compositional procedures, rather than paying attention to the sensorial characteristics of the material, or specific cultural associations, as will become evident through the detailed discussion on the pieces of the portfolio, in Chapter 2.

1.5 Surfaces and repetition

The idea of rather static musical textures and furthermore of composition as the design of patterns of textural qualities are by no means new. An unavoidable name from recent music history that consistently addressed such ideas is Morton Feldman. The static, textural aspect of his work is especially patent in his late period, from the late 1970's until the end of his life, which is characterised by increasingly long pieces and a close association with the visual arts that led him to express his musical ideas with a strong emphasis on visual/spatial metaphors:

My obsession with surface is the subject of my music. In that sense, my compositions are really not 'compositions' at all. One might call them time canvasses in which I more or less prime the canvas with an overall hue of the music (Feldman, 1988, p.4).

In this respect, a pivotal question that Feldman posits is “what is the surface aural plane of music” (ibid, p.2). Quoting a private conversation with painter Brian O'Doherty, he affirms that there is music that has a surface and music that does not; whilst the former “*constructs* with time”, the latter “*submits* to time”, becoming a mere “rhythmic progression” (ibid, p.3). He then concludes that instead of treating time as a compositional element, it “simply must be left alone”. Now, what does this mean, to leave time alone when composing? Feldman points towards “getting Time in its unstructured existence” (ibid). After portraying Beethoven as a 'master of timing' – thus characterising a way of composition that, roughly speaking, consists of placing the right idea in the right time – he suggests an answer: “What if Beethoven went on and on without any element of differentiation? We would then have Time Undisturbed” (ibid, p.4).

This lack of differentiation in an ongoing 'undisturbed time' is mainly what relates these ideas to those of stasis that I seek through the concept of musical situations. Personally, I approach this not only by avoiding a processual organisation, as explained before, but also by preventing 'signposts' that may direct our attention towards the interpretation of formal tendencies within situations. Any element that stands out of the general, statistical web of materials at play must then be neutralised, so as to be devoid of a critical function that may imply formal consequences. An effective way of doing this is through the sustained repetition of such elements, which can be exact, unsystematically varied, or systematically varied (the latter implies a process, and therefore would be excluded from a situational approach). Thus, by repeating an element or behaviour that initially stands out, its potential formal meaningfulness is hindered, transforming it into just a recurring component of the general situation. This solution, however, conflicts with Lachenmann's concept of textural sound presented before, as recursiveness would rather point to a fluctuation type: "It is characteristic of a *Texturklang* that it can constantly change in its acoustic individual properties . . . without repeating itself like the *Fluktuationklang*" (Lachenmann, 2004a, p.14).¹⁶

This tension between texture and repetition, which underlies the construction of most musical situations in my works – as will be seen in their detailed analysis in the next chapter – is a key feature in the music of Aldo Clementi. His work exerted an immediate fascination when I first came across it more than a decade ago in Chile, and has been an important point of reference for my compositional practice ever since.

¹⁶ „Charakteristisch für den *Texturklang* ist, daß er sich in seinen akustischen Einzel-Eigenschaften - im oben zitierten Fall etwa in harmonischer Hinsicht - dauernd ändern kann, ohne sich wie der *Fluktuationklang* zu wiederholen.“

In an article from the early seventies, Clementi described his music of that time as consisting of a rather 'optical-illusory', densely chromatic counterpoint, "eliminating the perception of individual internal movements, which in turn ensured a constant vibrancy" (Clementi, 2009, p. 508). This is meant as a way of avoiding the focus on single details, and thus favouring a "kind of static materiality" (ibid). The dialectics between structured detail and general form is thereby clearly inclined towards the latter by means of a dense polyphonic texture that renders its content difficult to grasp individually. As Clementi himself described it, his music is composed of "mixed-up microscopic details, a *continuum* without direction, a *texture*" (ibid, p.509). The composer explains the creative motivations behind his music's tendency to stasis by pointing out that "The reality around us already moves too much for us to desire to imitate it" (ibid).

As composer Bryn Harrison explains, Clementi's conception relates to that of Feldman in "the ways in which the music asserts its own objectified presence through the repetitive nature of the music" (Harrison, 2011, p.271). This idea, common to both composers, seems close to my way of achieving formal neutralisation via repetition. However, these two composers' approaches to this issue differ from each other in the way time operates in their work: "because each engages our faculties of musical memory to differing degrees" (ibid). This is further explained in the same article:

The figurative and reiterative aspect of [Feldman's] music and the process of segmentation that ensues allows the listener to remember past events, albeit in a rather uncertain and distorted way, and thus creates a sense of *déjà entendu*: have I heard this event before and, if so, was it exactly the same? Clementi, in comparison, gives the listener no such recourse, creating instead a sense of an endless succession of the same event on an ever-slowng temporal plane. When Clementi writes a repetition, he is always suggesting the whole (ibid, p.272).

In a similar strand, Harrison's own compositional work may seem even closer to what I propose, not only from the music's highly detailed 'textural' qualities but also in the way of seeing it as "an imagined sound object which is prolonged over a given period of

time” (Harrison, 2012, p.61). This form of objectivisation of the musical construction lies at the core of my work too. However, my compositional practice points in a different direction by aiming to exclude recourse to processual techniques that form an integral part of Harrison's music, as described in the same text: “these materials become progressively slower and more repetitive as time goes on, generating greater degrees of magnification” (ibid, p.62), a process that can be clearly seen through the score these quotations refer to, namely his ensemble piece *Repetitions in Extended Time* (2008).

The recourse to repetition that is central to the way these composers deal with issues of texture, surface and stasis has a different scope in my work, as will be shown next. In my practice, repetition takes place at the level of partial aspects of sound (single 'parameters') that can fluctuate in a dissociated manner, affecting the inner construction of a texture rather than directly articulating iterations of a sound 'Gestalt', and therefore remaining submerged within such general texture. This is consequently carried out in a more speculative way than Feldman's approach, for instance, which deals more intuitively with the concrete sounding result as a whole.

Also different from my endeavours is the function repetition can have in Harrison's work “as an amplifier, highlighting things that might otherwise go by unnoticed”, as the composer states in a recent interview (Another Timbre, 2013). Furthermore, the profound role that memory plays in the creative undertakings of these composers, which becomes patent in the above discussion, is something alien to my own approach. As has already been mentioned, what I attempt does not seek to address issues of perception from the listener's point of view, but focuses instead on reflections at the level of pure creative speculation.

Further to all these differences, a strong recourse to discontinuity – articulating the musical form through sheer juxtaposition of different situations – distances my compositional approach here presented from those of Feldman, Clementi or Harrison. In contrast, theirs can be characterised – admittedly resorting to an over-simplified description – as subtly changing, rather continuous sound streams that combine processual, textural and fluctuating features.

* * *

So far through this commentary, I have discussed the bases of my compositional praxis with regard to the idea of stasis in its construction. I have also put such ideas in dialogue with selected referents from the last half century that have addressed similar issues, highlighting connections on diverse levels as well as differences, mainly in the scope and implementation that such ideas have in their work. Next I shall show how this agenda is carried out concretely in the musical works that constitute the portfolio.

2. The Construction of Situations

This chapter will demonstrate how I implement the idea of situations in my own work through the analysis of particular cases. I will do this by observing the materials and compositional procedures used in their inner construction, as well as the organisation of different situations in non-processual musical forms. As such, a negation of processual qualities is not the ultimate goal of my compositional endeavours, but a stimulating impulse to creatively explore aspects of music construction. I approach this by attempting to find ways to neutralise or countermand a sense of teleological process both within situations and in the relations among them.

The construction of such situations often involves a superposition of independently structured layers defining, in a highly speculative way, different aspects of the musical material. The very concept of 'material', in its turn, is understood here as the universe of parametric possibilities made available for the design of a particular situation. It will be noticeable through the analysis of the works that the materials chosen are both limited to very narrow ambits and restricted in their flexibility to change. By these means, situations present a strong identity that remains static despite their varying degrees of inner diversity.

Regardless of how static a situation is intended to be – unless it consists of a uniform sound held indefinitely: the epitome of Lachenmann's 'colour-sound' category – there will necessarily be changes within its construction along its duration. However, a 'processual' unfolding of such changes is hindered when they follow an erratic behaviour, rendering impractical their interpretation as having a role in an overall process. Similarly, the processual relevance of inner changes is minimised when they

are confined to such small ambits that their incidence on a formal dimension becomes negligible. This 'purposeful irrelevance' can be favoured compositionally by structuring changes in a recursive manner, in order to neutralise the formal weight that the unique occurrence of an event might entail. Throughout this chapter I will show how these strategies have been applied to the design of parametric aspects, explaining in detail the inner construction of situations in the pieces of the portfolio.

Despite the approach adopted – that of separately focusing on different aspects of the material such as rhythmic definition, articulation, pitch, etc. – loosely resembling that of historic serialism, here the structuring of parameters does not aim to override poles of attraction by giving equal weight to every unit in a set of possibilities. On the contrary, the occurrence of such poles is actively pursued. In the same way, the pitch material used here does not assume the total chromatic scale as the ultimate universe of available possibilities.

It is necessary to bear in mind that these pieces have not been composed following a defined methodology, and so they respond in different ways to the creative concerns discussed in this commentary. They do not seek to prove or refute a hypothesis, but to address in a sensorial, non-verbal form, the issues underlying this way of thinking. These works thus seek to cast new light and explore different perspectives on questions such as: Can musical forms do without a processual organisation? What defines the 'static forms' upon which this non-processuality relies?

In general terms, the formal scheme of the pieces can be classified in two main categories: (a) those that are composed of several individual 'monolithic' situations, for example *Two Surfaces* and *Ver*, and (b) those that are composed of multiple, recurring

instances of situations, such as *Debris* and *Instead*. The possibility of hybrid forms, in which some situations may reoccur whereas others appear only once, remains problematic, since such a differentiation could result in a hierarchisation of situations according to their 'ability' to reoccur (bringing into play the formal function that a *ritornello* implies in a traditional sense). This is to some extent the case of *Últimos*, which presents individual situations in alternation with other recurrent segments.

It is the classification mentioned above that organises the following discussion, rather than the chronological order of the creation of the pieces. The ones that are composed of single instances of situations are discussed first, according to an increasing degree in their extension/elaboration, after which those composed of recurring situations are discussed. Finally other pieces are presented that, whilst composed during my doctoral studies and included in the portfolio, do not clearly follow a 'situational' approach, only partially presenting aspects that relate to it.

2.1 Ibid

The most basic instance of situational composition in the included pieces is *Ibid*. A miniature for flute and piano, it is composed of just two contiguous, short textural situations. Following a parametric construction organised in layers that are defined independently from each other, the resulting musical texture is seen as a remnant of accumulated parametric forces. I have been developing this procedure since my piece *De Mares Antiguos* for saxophone quartet (2009), and it features most notably in *Interalia* for large ensemble (2010).¹⁷

According to this approach, the rhythmic structures involved are the first to be defined, going from the most general aspects to the more specific. Consequently, in *Ibid* the starting point is the bar sequence of numerators: 3, 4, 3, 4, 5, 4, 5, 6, 5, 6. This sequence, when divided in groups of three, shows an increasing pattern as follows: 3-4-3, 4-5-4, 5-6-5, (6-7-6, 8-7-8, etc.)

On top of this, different pulsation ratios were defined for the flute and the piano. In the former, an alternation of basic (1:1, abbreviated 'B') and slower pulsations (abbreviated 'S') takes the form of a repeated sequence [B, S, B]. The two hands in the piano present, in their turn, a pattern alternating Basic, Faster (abbreviated 'F'), Basic and Slower pulsations, yet in different phase, namely [B, F, B, S] in the left hand, aligned with [F, B, S, B] in the right, as shown schematically in the table below.

¹⁷ Included in my MPhil portfolio at Goldsmiths. See also Alvarez, 2011.

	3/8	4/8	3/8	4/8	5/8	4/8	5/8	6/8	5/8	6/8
Flute	6:6	6:8	6:6	8:8	8:10	8:8	10:10	10:12	10:10	12:12
Piano Right Hand	7:6	8:8	4:6	8:8	12:10	8:8	8:10	12:12	12:10	12:12
Piano Left Hand	6:6	10:8	6:6	6:8	10:10	10:8	10:10	8:12	10:10	14:12

Table 1: scheme of bars and their subdivision in *Ibid.* (2012) Basic subdivisions are shown in black, faster ones in blue, and slower in red.

The resulting pulsation grid serves as a continuum of basic units, onto which actual rhythmic values are superimposed following the sequence:

bar 1 to 5 [: 1 1 2 1 1 1 2 :]

bar 6 to 10 [: 2 1 3 1 1 :]

In the piano these have been slightly modified when necessary so that a rhythmic unit always begins on the first beat of every bar. This responds to a compositional decision of having always accentuated chords with all available pitches in every downbeat, as a way of rendering apparent the bar's frame. Here we evidence what I call a 'tension' between different, conflicting structures, i.e. the ongoing stream of rhythmic values versus bars' frame, where the latter imposes its definition over the former.

Through these accumulative procedures in different levels of the rhythmic structure, the idea sought is to give a certain perspectival depth to the situation thus constructed. Processual tendencies, like the increasing nature of the bars' frame pattern, appear in the end as too simple and with not enough time to develop to undermine the otherwise static character of the general texture. Moreover, such unfulfilled tendencies contribute to giving the work a sense of ambiguity that I consider aesthetically valuable.

Example 4: first three bars of *Ibid.*

The situation comprising the first five bars unfolds within an ambit of a minor third (F#4-A4). The actual sequence of notes used in the piano divides the four chromatic pitches in that ambit, giving the upper two (G#, A) to the right hand, and the lower pair (F#, G) to the left one. These pairs follow a simple distribution whereby both notes appear on every downbeat and then alternate individually in the following iterations.

The flute, in its turn, alternates chromatic pitches with a quarter-tone lowering of them, so that G is always followed by a G-1/4flat, G# is followed by G-1/4sharp, and A always precedes an A-1/4flat. F#, being the lowest note of the defined ambit, is excluded from this behaviour. Different permutations of these seven quarter-tone pitches define then the actual notes. These are occasionally preceded by grace-notes that alternate both extremes of the ambit, namely F# and A.

In the second situation (bar 6 onwards) the ambit splits into two minor thirds, equidistant from the former one (D4-F4 and B \flat 4-D \flat 5). The piano then iterates different pairs of notes within each ambit (always playing the total cluster on downbeats), whereas the flute follows a sequence of main notes in the upper minor-third-ambit and grace-notes in the lower one.

This change of register, coordinated with the more subtle change in rhythmic values explained above, and a sudden 'terraced' increase in dynamics, are mainly what identifies these two parts as different situations. However, the closely similar musical materials and procedures used in their construction, together with the short overall duration of the piece, convey again a sense of ambiguity as to the extent to which such narrowly related situations are really independent. This problem is approached in a more unambiguous way in *Two Surfaces*, as will be shown next.

2.2 Two Surfaces

In *Two Surfaces* I planned to construct a form similar to that of *Ibid*, namely a simple juxtaposition of two different situations, yet magnified here. These situations are expanded both inwards – to gain depth from a more elaborate inner construction – and in their extension in time. The two parts were written for the same instrumental combination, and constructed with similar organisational procedures, on which each takes different perspectives, especially through their deployment in time and general textural qualities. Their order of succession was only decided once both situations were fully written.

The construction of the first situation began by defining its rhythmic structure, in what is perhaps the most elaborate case of a rhythmic grid among the pieces in the portfolio. Framed by a recursive structure of bars following the sequence: 3/4, 4/4, 9/8, 4/4; it takes semiquavers as basic units, which are successively grouped in irregular sets of prime numbers. For example, the 12 semiquavers contained in a 3/4 bar can be grouped in the pairs 7+5 or 5+7. Each part, in its turn, can be further grouped into symmetric subsets:

$$5 = [1+3+1] \text{ or } [2+1+2]$$

$$7 = [1+5+1] \text{ or } [3+1+3]$$

Moreover, numbers bigger than 1 can be further divided¹⁸ by the subsequent prime number, so that:

$$5 = [7:5] \text{ or } [1+(5:3)+1] \text{ or } [(3:2)+1+(3:2)]$$

$$7 = [11:7] \text{ or } [1+(7:5)+1] \text{ or } [(5:3)+1+(5:3)]$$

¹⁸ The conventional way of expressing 'tuplets' has been adopted in the examples below to reflect how such divisions appear in the score.

Different combinations of such subdivisions can be observed in the score. For example in the first bar, the flute part divides the 12 semiquavers as 5+(11:7), the clarinet as [1+(7:5)+1]+[(3:2)+1+(3:2)], the violin as (7:5)+7 and the cello as [(5:3)+1+(5:3)]+[1+(5:3)+1].

The image shows a musical score for the first bar of 'Two Surfaces' in 3/4 time. A box at the top indicates that a semiquaver (♩) equals 56 units. The score is divided into five staves: Alto Flute, Clarinet in B♭, Violin, Violoncello, and Percussion. The Alto Flute part features a melodic line with dynamic markings *mp*, *(sfz)*, *pp*, and *mf*, and a bracketed subdivision of 11:7. The Clarinet in B♭ part has dynamic markings *pp*, *mf*, *pp*, and *mp*, with brackets for subdivisions 7:5, 3:2, and 3:2. The Violin part includes dynamic markings *mp* and *(sfz)*, and instructions for 'poco premuto poco sul pont.' and 'suddenly, emphatically stop bow dead on the string.' The Violoncello part has dynamic markings *mp* and *(sfz)*, with brackets for subdivisions 5:3 and 5:3. The Percussion part uses two triangle beaters (later a knitting needle and hard mallet) with dynamic markings *mp* and *mf*, and brackets for subdivisions 5:4 and 5:4.

Example 5: first bar of *Two Surfaces*.

Unlike in most other pieces, no further layer of rhythmic values is superimposed onto the pulsation grid. Only a segmentation of 'melodic phrases' was carried out by deleting some notes, following patterns that alternate groups of 5, 7 or 11 semiquavers with rests of either 2 or 3 semiquavers' duration.

The general effect sought by these means is one of precisely written, subtly-nuanced agogic variety, so as to minimise the rhythmic coincidence of different instrumental

parts. The resulting micro-polyphonic textural quality characteristic of this situation is precisely what differentiates it from the following one in the same piece. There the measures have a different function, constituting basic units for longer sounds to be switched on and off, as if the rhythmic grid was hugely upscaled and rhythmic units became whole bars. The inner subdivisions of these longer sounds define only the varying speed rates in the placement of regular accents, like sudden short increases of air/bow pressure along a continuum. This upscaling of rhythmic dimensions thus allows for textural qualities within the sound to be revealed: a temporal zooming in, as it were.

The musical score is for the beginning of the second movement of 'Two Surfaces'. It features six staves:

- A. Fl.:** Starts with a 4/8 time signature, then changes to 3/8 (marked 'non vibrato!'), then back to 4/8, and finally 3/8. Dynamics range from *f* to *p*. Includes 5-3 fingering and accents.
- Cl.:** Starts with a 3/8 time signature. Dynamics range from *f* to *p*. Includes triplets and accents.
- Vln.:** Starts with a 3/8 time signature. Dynamics range from *f* to *p*. Includes 'gliss.' markings and 'sul pont.'/ 'sul tasto' instructions.
- Vc.:** Starts with a 3/8 time signature. Dynamics range from *f* to *p*. Includes 'gliss.' markings and 'sul pont.'/ 'sul tasto' instructions.
- Gongs:** Two staves (1 and 2) with rhythmic patterns. Dynamics range from *f* to *p*.
- Bass Drum:** One staff with rhythmic patterns. Dynamics range from *f* to *p*. Includes 'edge' and 'centre' markings.

A tempo marking at the top left indicates a quarter note equals 72 (♩ = 72). The score includes various dynamic markings (*f*, *mf*, *mp*, *p*) and performance instructions such as 'non vibrato!', 'gliss.', 'sul pont.', and 'sul tasto'.

Example 6: *Two Surfaces*, beginning of the second movement.

In a similar way to *Ibid*, this work's initial situation occupies the very narrow register of a minor third (D4-F4) shared by all four melodic instruments, with subdivisions of quarter-tones within it. The second situation, in its turn, splits into two ambits of a major second each (G3-A3, and A \flat 4-B \flat 4). Despite all written notes in these two registers being defined in quarter-tones, numerous slow glissandi in the strings contribute to blur this definition within the ambits.

When situations are held for a short duration, like in *Ibid*, such a restricted pitch material does not present *per se* much of a compositional challenge. The present work's considerably longer time-scale, though, in view of this narrow pitch ambit made it necessary to introduce other means of inner differentiation in order to enrich the texture and give it more depth. This is accomplished by contrasting sound qualities that encompass, in an integrated way, aspects such as articulation, dynamics, and timbre, adding a further layer of inner organisation.

In the first situation, it can be observed how the relative textural homogeneity of the first six measures is suddenly broken by a change from *legato* to detached '*ben marcato*' articulation. Simultaneously with this change, the constant timbral alternation between '*poco premuto, poco sul ponticello*' and '*flautato, sul tasto*' sounds in the strings gives way to a stable '*ordinario*' in bar seven, as well as a jump in the dynamics from a fluctuating average *mezzo-piano*, to a steady *forte*. Although described as simultaneous changes in different parameters, these are integrated as unified sound qualities that change as a whole.

The resultant sudden contrast in sound qualities, somehow comparable to the change from the first to the second situation in *Ibid*, is interpreted differently here in view of its

extended recursiveness (occurring every seventh measure), as alternating textural features within a unitary situation, which can be understood as a 'meta-fluctuation'.

Similarly, an overall fluctuation superimposed onto the second situation's instrumental texture modifies it, although here limited to dynamics. Unlike the sound-quality changes in the previous situation, which occur abruptly, this general fluctuation is 'smoothed-out' by means of *crescendi* and *diminuendi* between *piano* and *forte*. The resulting 'meta-fluctuation' unfolds irregularly, alternating cycles of eleven and twelve bars. Other smooth transitions occur locally in both string instruments, namely long *glissandi* and timbral transitions between *sul ponticello* and *sul tasto*. By being more extended in time than those in the detail of the first situation, they somehow have the effect of reducing the gap between local and general changes.

Sharing narrow coordinates between alto flute, clarinet, violin and cello, the instrumental writing of both situations results in textures that can be perceived as compact wholes, submerged wherein instrumental differences become irrelevant. The effect is that of a single 'meta-instrument', as it were. As a counterpart, the percussion line consists of a stream of impulses running in parallel to such a 'meta-instrument'. This is not only organised and distributed independently from the rest, but also makes use of a completely different palette of sounds, i.e. non-pitched, resonant, extremely bright metallic impulses (with the addition of a bass drum in the second situation).

A loose correspondence that could perhaps be perceived between these two independent sound streams is the constant fluctuation in the percussion's density and in its dynamics at a similar scale to, but not coinciding with, that of the alternating contrast in sound qualities in the rest of the instruments. Once again the result is what

could be called a 'meta-fluctuation'. This fluctuating aspect in the percussion, however, is not superimposed onto other aspects of this instrumental part as a modifier, but actually structures its own utterances. Despite such a degree of independence, the sudden change in the percussion instruments used and in their rhythmic structure, coordinated in time with the rest of the ensemble at the turning point from the first situation to the second, denotes its belonging to the general situational definition.

Two Surfaces was premiered by Cologne-based ensemble *Hand Werk* at the *Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik* (26th of April, 2013). Subsequent performances have taken place in Vienna (*Hand Werk*, on 26th of October, 2013), Santiago (*Compañía de Música Contemporánea*, 21st and 27th of November, 2013), and coming up in Melbourne (Syzygy Ensemble, July 2014).

2.3 Ver

This piece for solo piano presents a sequence of individual situations in a similar fashion to the pieces previously commented on. What is new in *Ver*, however, is a different formal perspective achieved through the highly dissimilar proportions of the situations at play, which to some extent respond to considerations about their inner construction.



Example 7: Formal scheme of *Ver*.

The initial five situations appear as rather homogenous textures, with durations ranging from eight to thirty-three seconds. These durations seemed intuitively appropriate for the characteristics of the material and its organisation into a textural continuum to be realised.¹⁹ At the same time, they have not been over-extended beyond their exhaustion, this is, the subjective duration-threshold beyond which a situation's redundancy may seem excessive.

Comparatively, the following '*Situation VI*' – with a duration of thirteen and a half minutes – is constructed with a much wider variety of elements, which are also deployed in a more irregular way. Three different registral strata running in parallel articulate this situation's structure.

¹⁹ Close to their 'proper time' as defined in Chapter 1.3

(A) In the lowest register, three chromatic clusters spread at intervals of a minor sixth, as shown in the figure below.



Example 8: Lower-register material of *Ver: Situation VI*.

Their temporal placement has been defined taking whole 2/4 bars as basic units, i.e. they only appear on the downbeat of bars. These rhythmic units are grouped following a sequence of prime numbers that can be read either horizontally or vertically:

1	3	7	2	5
7	2	3	5	1
3	5	2	1	7
2	1	5	7	3
5	7	1	3	2

(B) In the middle register, two tetrads described by the sets [0, 1, 3, 4] and [2, 3, 5, 6], i.e. two quasi-clusters separated by a whole tone:



Example 9: Middle-register material of *Ver: Situation VI*.

These are rhythmically placed on a grid consisting of either the second or fourth quintuplet-semiquaver of every beat – therefore never coinciding in time with any other element in other strata. This slightly irregular pulsation is then used as a basis for the actual durations to be defined, following the same sequence of prime numbers of the previous stratum.

Further to this, the resulting continuous stream of alternating chords in this stratum has been subjected to periodic deletion, following a pattern that interrupts fragments of 5, 3, 11, 2, 5 bars' duration, with pauses of durations in the sequence 5, 2, and 11 bars, which combined result in the pattern:

7 (5) 3 (2) 11 (11) 2 (5) 5 (2)
 7 (11) 3 (5) 11 (2) 2 (11) 5 (5)
 7 (2) 3 (11) 11 (5) 2 (2) 5 (11)

By taking whole bars as units, such a pattern never matches an exact number of whole rhythmic units as defined by the previous structure. This mismatch, together with the continuous use of the sustain pedal that fills with resonance both the long rhythmic durations and deleted bars equally, contributes to blur the contours of this pattern. The actual sounding result then is a residual product of the accumulation and conflict of all the forces involved, and therefore does not reflect clearly these underlying structures.

(C) In the upper register, four pairs of alternating dyads run in parallel, like independent fluctuations superposed at different ratios and hugely spread over time.



Example 10: Higher pitch material of *Ver: Situation VI*.

Each pair has been distributed following its own rhythmic definition. The first and second of these 'sub-strata' take quavers as units, whereas the other two have dotted-semiquaver basic units. Taking these basic units as pulsation, sequences of prime

numbers of vastly dissimilar magnitudes determine the actual rhythmic values of the dyads:

- First pair: 17, 41, 11, 31, 5, 23, 2
- Second pair: 3, 29, 7, 37, 13, 43, 19
- Third pair: 19, 43, 13, 37, 7, 29, 3 (retrograde version of the second)
- Fourth pair: 2, 23, 5, 31, 11, 41, 17 (retrograde version of the first)

Further to their rhythmic definition, three variations to the form of attack of a dyad succeed each other in the sequence shown below, using the first dyad as example.



Example 11: Attack variants in higher pitch material of *Ver: Situation VI*.

By offering a wide range of changes and contrasts to focus the attention on at a local level, this greater variety in the inner construction of *Situation VI* has the effect of concealing its static aspects to some extent. It appears then, at least in its beginning, not so much as a homogeneous texture but as somewhat closer to a 'sound-structure'.²⁰ Such ambiguity is especially favoured by the occasional concentration of particular elements (or negatively, their absence), for example only high dyads in bars 116-121, 'empty' bars like 90-91 or 104-105, etc. These, however, do not correspond to stages in a process, but are simply statistical results of the mechanisms of rhythmic distribution at play. Hence this situation's 'proper time' being necessarily longer than that of simpler ones, so that the listener is given enough time to evaluate it with such a statistical perspective, beyond its local diversity. Only after such a longer time do the limitations of the materials used and of the way they behave, as well as their lack of

²⁰ Lachenmann's '*Strukturklang*' mentioned in Ch. 1.3.

significant formal consequences in the long term become evident. It then allows the sum of all the elements at play to be understood as static, encompassed within a 'super-texture', as it were.

With a duration more than twenty times longer than the longest of the previous situations, *Situation VI* has been extended deliberately – beyond just the necessary time to gain a statistical perspective – into the realm of its exhaustion. This turn in its extension is further enriched by yet another turn, namely the introduction of new material on top of the ongoing situation at about eleven minutes through this section. The comparatively extreme length for which *Situation VI* is held before the introduction of this new material allows the former's identity to be firmly established, and therefore favours the perception of the latter as something independent running in parallel, rather than a modification to the ongoing situation.

(Situation VI + VII)

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system begins at measure 265. The top staff (treble clef) contains notes with dynamics *ff*, *p*, *mp*, *p*, and *ff*. The bottom staff (bass clef) has a sustained pedal point marked '(Red. sustained throughout)' and dynamics *ppp*, *ppp*, and *ff*. The second system begins at measure 269. The top staff has dynamics *ff* and *ff*. The bottom staff has dynamics *ppp* and *pp*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Example 12: Appearance of *Situation VII* superimposed onto *Situation VI*.

What in principle seems like an intrusion of alien material consisting of a repeated whole-tone-dyad of decreasing intensity, when re-iterated as a whole several times at intervals of nearly one minute, allows us to realise its regularity and thereby establish its identity. Moreover, such a widely spread placement of every iteration makes these characteristic figures seem ambiguous as to whether they are individually inserted recurring events, or the constitution of a continuous situation spread in time.

It is not until after the sudden change of *Situation VI* into subsequent, altogether different ones (numbers VIII and IX) that the sustained repetition of such material, keeping the same pace over the new situations, can be understood as an independent, continuous situation superimposed onto the rest. This situation – labelled *VII* – is comparable to a 'fluctuation-sound' in Lachenmann's nomenclature, yet expanded in time into the formal sphere; a 'meta-fluctuation' not as part of an ongoing situation – as was the case in *Two Surfaces* – but constituting a parallel Situation on its own.

As discussed in Chapter I, one of the characteristic features of my initial idea of musical situations is the creation of a sense of 'arbitrary' duration. However, as has been shown in this piece, it is no coincidence that *Situation VI* occupies the longest duration whilst also being the most heterogeneous. What can be inferred from this piece is that the more heterogeneous a musical situation is, the more time it needs to be perceived as static, and therefore it can be maintained for a longer time before its exhaustion. Simpler, more homogenous situations, on the contrary, have a much shorter 'proper time', consequently exhausting themselves more quickly.

In order to explore the relation between a situation's inner constitution and its extension, it has been necessary to push the boundaries of my own definition of

situation. In doing so, contradictions to my original situational idea, such as the possibility of a differentiated formal hierarchy among situations and consequently the possible emergence of a perceived 'narrative' out of such hierarchy may arise. Far from a failure in my conception of a situational approach to composition, I see the result as full of forces in tension: an essential feature of an artistic praxis that does not seek to exemplify or prove theoretical ideas, but rather test them, even beyond the 'safe zone' of tautology.

Ver was written in the summer/autumn of 2013. It was premiered by pianist Mark Knop at St Paul's Hall, Huddersfield, on the 5th of December 2013.

2.4 Últimos

Últimos is a piece for string trio that consists of a recurrent formal construction labelled *Context*, interspersed between single segments, labelled *Situation I*, *Situation II*, and *Situation III*.

Context's rhythmic organisation, as well its general appearance and function, resembles the similarly deployed chordal sections of *Fragments after Cioran*.²¹ It consists of 'downbeats' only, in different permutations of a sequence of 3/16, 4/16, and 5/16 bars: a slightly irregular, constant pulsation. It contains four chords repeated in different permutations, three of which correspond to the pitch material at play in the three situations respectively. All four chords are concentric, having E_b5 as their axis – which is, however, never present as an actual note.

The function of this 'contextual' construction is to provide very short hints of the situations, constantly re-iterated in a pseudo-random way. Implied within each chord is the possibility of a situation to be triggered, which becomes concrete at seemingly arbitrary points and that is pursued for arbitrary durations. I see these sections not only as asserting the contextual space in which situations exist, but also as expressions of the potentiality for their existence. The one chord used in *Context* that has no corresponding situation (m. 3, 5, 9, etc.) remains then as an open question. This conveys a sense that something is missing, making the established relation between *Context*'s chords and situations remain partially unfulfilled, and thus it avoids the formal obviousness that such fulfilment would entail.

²¹ See Chapter 2.7

Situation I elaborates on double-stops, presenting constant quarter-tone *portamenti* between tritone-dyads, descending a whole tone and rising back in a fluctuating sequence that takes eight iterations to complete.



Example 13: Pitch content of *Últimos: Situation I*.

The rhythmic structure is constructed following a sequence of durations: 5, 7, 11 demisemiquavers, which alternate with rests in the sequence 2, 3 for the violin; 2, 4 for the viola, and 3, 4 for the cello, each thus taking six iterations to complete:

Violin: 5 (2) 7 (3) 11 (2) 5 (3) 7 (2) 11 (3) = 61 demisemiquavers.
 Viola: 5 (2) 7 (4) 11 (2) 5 (4) 7 (2) 11 (4) = 64 demisemiquavers.
 Cello: 5 (3) 7 (4) 11 (3) 5 (4) 7 (3) 11 (4) = 67 demisemiquavers.

The timbral aspect is defined by a sequence of four discrete points of bow action, namely *Sul Tasto*, *Ordinario*, *Poco Sul Ponticello*, and *Sul Ponticello* (numbered 1 to 4). Also integrated into this structure is the possibility of deletion (D) of a dyad. Sequences of seven iterations of these elements are then applied to each instrument respectively:

Violin: 1 2 3 4 3 2 D
 Viola: 1 2 3 4 D 3 2
 Cello: 1 2 D 3 4 3 2

These three cycles (sequence of dyads, their duration and their timbral characteristics/deletion) operate on the same level, i.e. sharing single chord iterations as common basic unit, in the proportion 6:7:8. Therefore the combination of these cycles would repeat on each instrument after the iteration of 168 dyads. Given the slightly different durations of rests on each instrument's rhythmic sequence, this combined cycle can be expressed in actual rhythmic values as:

Violin: 427 quavers.

Viola: 448 quavers.

Cello: 469 quavers.

The Least Common Multiple of these three parallel cycles – expressed in quavers – is 1,830,976. This means that only after such a duration would the combination of rhythmic sequence, pitch, and timbre repeat as a whole, coordinated in all three instruments (however displaced within 3/8 bars).

On a different level – taking whole 3/8 bars as unit – a series of dynamics was defined:

ppp, p, mf, ff, organised in four different permutations:

ff, p, mf, ppp

mf, ff, ppp, p

ppp, mf, p, ff

p, ppp, ff, mf

Groups of five measures were split in different proportions following the sequence 4+1, 3+2, 2+3, 1+4, 2+3, 3+2. Each of the sub-groups then takes one dynamic of the sequence above. This results in four measures *ff*, one measure *p*, three measures *mf*, two measures *ppp*, and so forth. The sequence completes its cycle after 120 measures – i.e. 360 quavers.

Combined, the cycle of pitch+timbre+duration (1,830,976 quavers) and the cycle of dynamics (360 quavers) result in a 82,393,920-quavers' total cycle. At quaver = 72, it would run for nearly 2.2 years. In practical terms this means that, albeit composed with relatively simple repetitive sequences, their combination produces results of virtually endless renewal in the detail, whilst always maintaining a general sense of stasis. By being deployed at different rates, defining partial aspects of sound, these cyclic

behaviours are not immediately apparent in the way a 'fluctuation-sound' would be according to Lachenmann's categories. They produce what could be called a 'poly-fluctuation', whose appearance comes across as textural. In fact, this type of construction, pursued in a rather intuitive way, underlies to different extents most of the situations in my recent works. Only here have I effectively calculated the conjunction of cycles and their theoretical periods.

Situation II and *Situation III* are constructed following the same kind of poly-fluctuating structures. They are much simpler in appearance, however, mainly due to the utterly static pitch content, or rather the alternation between such pitch content and pitch-less sound, as well as more stable dynamics. Even the construction of *Context* follows similar procedures by superimposing different cycles determining the succession of bars' lengths, the permutations in the sequence of chords and the alternation of dynamics.

What differentiates situations and *Context* is the already mentioned relation of reference that exists between both, whereby each chord of the latter (or rather 3 out of 4) refers – in a metonymical way – to the pitch content of the situational sections. This relation, on the contrary, does not appear between situations, and gives *Context* a distinctive formal function.

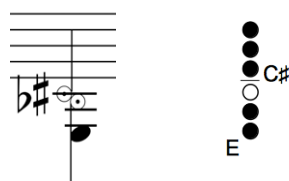
Últimos was the last piece to be composed during my PhD studies. It was written for *Distractfold Ensemble*, who will give its premiere during 2014.

2.5 Instead

Unlike the formal approach shown in the works previously discussed, *Instead*, for solo clarinet, explores several situations in a fragmented, recursive way. Four original textures of undefined duration were written separately, from which fragments of different lengths were cut to be alternated as situational segments in the final formal organisation.

All these original textures, or 'proto-situations', explore similar unorthodox instrumental techniques as source of material. The clarinet is taken here as a 'found object', to some extent deliberately disregarding its characteristic tradition of high technical sophistication and flexibility. Using the lowest five chromatic notes of the instrument as basic fingerings, simple alterations to them by means of opening higher holes on the instrument's tube produce 'cross-fingerings', which usually result in rich inharmonic sounds.

The notation adopted is a hybrid one, not entirely depicting 'notes' in a traditional sense, nor 'tablature', but using normal noteheads to point out the basic low fingering, and round white noteheads for the corresponding holes to be opened on top of the former.



Example 14: Notation used for an altered fingering with its corresponding fingering-diagram.

I first used this form of notation in my piece from 2011 '*Untitled on Canvas*' for two baritone saxophones,²² in which it proved to be an efficient way of notating these instrumental actions that was intuitively clear for the performers. In that piece, though, these resources were integrated in a general context dominated by 'normal' notes, in a dialectics between traditional and altered fingerings. Here I have adopted a more radical approach, taking the latter as the only means of dealing with pitch throughout the piece.

A limited number of such fingerings were combined in different ways, with varying dynamic and rhythmic definitions, giving birth to four 'proto-situations'. Then five fragments were extracted from each, of durations 7, 14, or 21 seconds. Only one of these fragment – placed in the beginning – has an exceptionally long duration of 91 seconds.²³ The purpose of such a dissimilar duration is to destabilise an otherwise too neatly proportionate form – a resource somewhat comparable to the unbalanced extension of *Situation VI* in *Ver*, or *Situation I* in *Últimos*, yet within the different context of reoccurring situations.

The fragments were then juxtaposed in different combinations, repeating utterances of the same texture with two or three different ones interspersed before the next reoccurs. The resulting basic formal scheme is shown in the following figure:

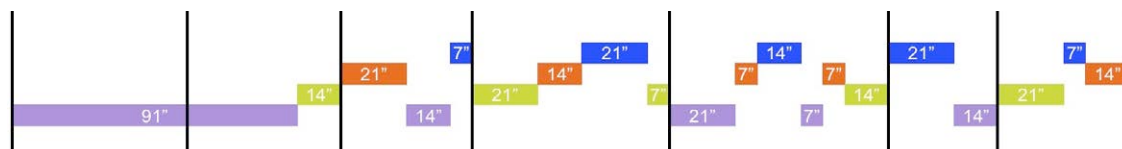


Example 15: formal layout of fragments in *Instead*.

²² Included in my MPhil portfolio at Goldsmiths.

²³ Still a multiple of 7: a 'basic duration unit', as it were.

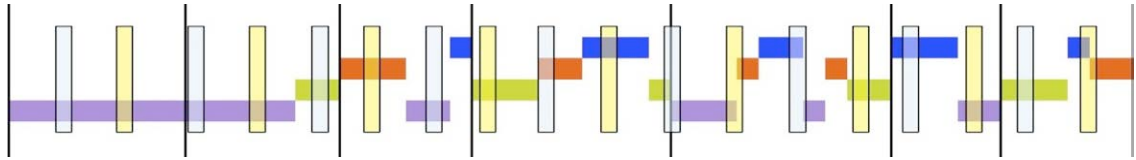
Further to the formal scheme above, a distorting element was superimposed in the form of sudden interruptions to an otherwise continuous sound stream: a momentary 'switching off' of sound introduced at different time intervals. During these gaps, each with a flexible duration within the range of five to eight seconds, the performer must remain immobile.



Example 16: formal layout plus placement of interruptions.

The result is then subjected to the superposition of a unifying layer, transversal to all situations: a periodic alteration of whatever is being fingered, by means of (a) opening the 'register' key, or (b) modifying the embouchure in order to force the production of multiphonic sounds. Multiphonics appear elsewhere as a result of the cross-fingerings and dynamics anyway, but only under such modified 'multiphonic-enforcing' embouchure are they actively favoured.

Such periodic alterations, sustained for five seconds, appear at regular intervals of about twenty seconds, alternating embouchure modification and added 'register' key each time. Despite these two means of alteration being the same for all textures, the different fingering combinations and dynamics in each texture will respond differently to them. By being deployed regularly throughout the piece regardless of the individual situation occurring at the local level, such procedures convey a sense of unity to the whole.



Example 17: Formal layout, plus interruptions, plus alterations, shown as vertical blue blocks (multiphonic embouchure) and yellow ones (additional register key).

From a more global perspective, the whole combination of reoccurring textural fragments juxtaposed in different combinations, interrupted by pauses and with periodic alterations superimposed onto the total resembles a texture in itself: a complex yet stable combination of a limited number of elements that could be prolonged for any duration without affecting its identity. Since this takes place in the formal dimension, and being itself composed of textural parts, it could be called a 'meta-texture'.

The recursive situational approach to composition shown in *Instead* opens new questions, such as to what extent the reoccurrence of situations is meant as interruptions to a virtual ongoing continuum, or rather as individual segments belonging to the same class. From an artistic point of view, I find it more interesting to dwell on these questions rather than attempt to clear them by seeking more univocal formal solutions. Such questions, by conveying a certain sense of ambiguity, reveal an underlying tension that can be creatively fertile.

2.6 Debris

Debris was composed in late 2012 for Elision Ensemble, in a formation including a quarter-tone flugelhorn, tenor trombone, electric guitar, percussion and electronic sounds.

Similarly to *Instead*, this work's formal construction consists of sequences of recurring situations, constantly rearranged in their succession and extension. Here, though, the fragments are gathered in groups organised following a classification of the situations at play according to their pitch content.

In order to sustain the larger scale of *Debris*, the point of departure was a more elaborate organisation of pitch than in previous works. The idea of narrow ambits underlying most of my pieces is extended here to four variants, starting from a basic pitch ambit of one and a half semitones (four notes at intervals of a quarter-tone) from E \flat 5.



Example 18: *Debris*' register 1.

In a similar fashion to the splitting registers in *Ibid* and *Two Surfaces*, a second version of the pitch structure is achieved by transposing the basic register a descending tritone and adding a transposition of it at an interval of 11 semitones above. This results in a two-fold register in which the last pair of notes in the upper part mirror, at an interval of an octave, the first two of the lower part.



Example 19: *Debris'* register 2.

A third version is obtained by replicating the original single ambit at an interval of eleven semitones both above and below the original, resulting in three parallel such ambits.



Example 20: *Debris'* register 3.

Finally, the second version is also expanded with two further registers added at eleven semitones' distance, one above the top and the other below the bottom, resulting in four parallel registers.



Example 21: *Debris'* register 4.

Excluding the percussion, whose material is organised in parallel to this, six instrumental textures, or 'proto-situations' of undefined duration were devised independently of each other, based on these four sets of pitch material: one with single, two with double, two with triple, and one with quadruple registers.

2/4 $\text{♩} = 60$

132

Flug. *f* *pp* *pp* *f* *pp* *f* *pp*

Tbn. *pp* *f* *pp* *f* *f* *pp* *pp*

E. Gtr. (II:5) (II:4) (I:5) *pp* *f* *pp* *f* *pp* *pp* *f* *pp*

Example 22: an instance of Texture A (single register)

2/4 $\text{♩} = 60$

485

Flug. *pp*

Tbn. *pp*

E. Gtr. *pp*

Example 23: an instance of Texture B (double register)

4+3/8 $\text{♩} = 128$

265

Flug. *mp* *mp*

Tbn. *mp* *mp*

E. Gtr. (II:10) (III:7) *mp* *mp*

Example 24: an instance of Texture C (double register)

Example 25 is a musical score for three instruments: Flute (Flug.), Trombone (Tbn.), and Electric Guitar (E. Gtr.). The score is in 3/8 time with a tempo of 110. It begins at measure 288. The Flute part starts with a *pp* dynamic and features a melodic line with slurs and ties. The Trombone part also starts with a *pp* dynamic and plays a similar melodic line. The Electric Guitar part is shown in standard notation with fret numbers (13, 14, 15, 16) and a *pp* dynamic. The guitar part includes a wah pedal effect, indicated by a dashed line with a '+' sign above the staff.

Example 25: an instance of Texture D (triple register)

Example 26 is a musical score for three instruments: Flute (Flug.), Trombone (Tbn.), and Electric Guitar (E. Gtr.). The score is in 7/16 time with a tempo of 128. It begins at measure 190. The Flute part starts with a *mp* dynamic and features a melodic line with slurs and ties. The Trombone part also starts with a *mp* dynamic and plays a similar melodic line. The Electric Guitar part is shown in standard notation with fret numbers (12, 13, 14, 16) and a *mp* dynamic. The guitar part includes a wah pedal effect, indicated by a dashed line with a '+' sign above the staff.

Example 26: an instance of Texture E (triple register)

Example 27 is a musical score for three instruments: Flute (Flug.), Trombone (Tbn.), and Electric Guitar (E. Gtr.). The score is in 4/8 time with a tempo of 160. It begins at measure 276. The Flute part starts with a *mp* dynamic and features a melodic line with slurs and ties. The Trombone part also starts with a *mp* dynamic and plays a similar melodic line. The Electric Guitar part is shown in standard notation with fret numbers (7, 9, 10) and a *mp* dynamic. The guitar part includes a wah pedal effect, indicated by a dashed line with a '+' sign above the staff.

Example 27: an instance of Texture F (quadruple register)

Whilst being constructed with different pitch material, textures B and D respond to procedures similar to those explained in previous pieces, producing textural situations out of an accumulation of rhythmic structures (measures' frames, pulsation's grids, relative rhythmic values and selective deletion). Next to these, textures such as C and F seem much simpler in their construction. This responds to the need for a wider variety of contrasting situations to compose a work of a larger scale.

Situations of odd-numbered registers – i.e. textures A, D, or E – and of even-numbered registers – B, C, or F – alternate in such a way that no two consecutive situations have pitches in common, thus maximising the contrast from one to the next. The pitch structures on which *Debris*' textural situations are constructed not only play a key role in their individual identity, they have an incidence in the general formal organisation. Fragments from these six 'proto-situations' of 5, 7, 13, 23 or 41 seconds' length were cut at arbitrary points and deployed diachronically in groups of five, following such alternating criteria. The durations were arranged in different permutations, yet always adding up a total of 89 seconds for each section. The following figure shows schematically the ten groups of five textures each that constitute *Debris*.



Example 28: Groups of recurring situations combined in different proportions in the formal scheme of *Debris*. Parallel horizontal lines show their pitch ambits; colours differentiate situations of same register.

Dynamic definitions are distributed independently of the particular textures, as a sequence of three levels (*pianissimo*, *mezzo-piano*, and *forte*). They are superimposed onto the general succession of situations, in a similar way to the 'alterations' of embouchure and addition of register-key that modified the general sequence of situations in *Instead*.

These three dynamic values, nonetheless, affect situations in different ways: whilst situations of type B, C, D, and E adopt them in a straightforward, 'terraced' way, those of type A always oscillate between *pp* and the said dynamics (only *pp*; *pp* to *mp*; and *pp* to *f*); situations of type F, in their turn, make each chordal utterance have a different dynamic in ranges approximate to those three main values (*pp-mp*; *p-mf*, and *mp-f*).

Disruptions to the carefully designed structures explained hitherto were randomly interspersed between some situations, with durations of either 1.5 or 2.5 seconds.

These take the form of short improvised outbursts, in which the performers (minus the percussionist, and enhanced by similar qualities in the electronic part) are asked to play “as noisy and saturated as possible”. 'Noisy' is understood here not necessarily as 'pitch-less' but rather as an unintelligible interference to the rationally designed construction: an amorphous 'something', alienated from the rest of the musical discourse. This highly unrefined conception of the 'noisy' addresses a personal search for alternatives to what I perceive as a widespread fetishisation of noise *qua* harmless compositional material, integrated into the composer's sound-palette. Instead, it is taken here as an instance of the irrational and undefined: a material of endless, unknown possibilities.

Similarly to the case in *Two Surfaces*, here a continuous stream of impulses in the percussion has been added on top of the ongoing instrumental situations. The exact combination of sound sources, though, has been left to the choice of the performer. Five different metallic instruments/objects are asked for, of sharp, bright, resonant, inharmonic sound qualities. Regardless of the performer's choice, the five instruments used must remain consistently assigned to the five lines/spaces of the percussion part throughout the piece. For the premiere performance, percussionist Peter Neville chose a small piece of metal pipe, a very small 'nipple' gong, a small Chinese hand-cymbal, a small Peking gong and a rustic Indonesian cow-bell for this purpose. All these were laid on a table, i.e. cymbals and gongs were devoid of their 'normal' long resonance, in order to have a narrower, more compact palette of metallic sounds.

One such instrument maintains a regular pulsation; both the exact main instrument and its pulsation ratio change together, coordinated with the switching from one situation to another. Accents were then superimposed onto the resulting pulsation stream, affecting individual impulses at a rate that periodically contracts and expands in time.

Additionally, single utterances of other instruments are interspersed, following also a fluctuating rate of density. Thus, three fluctuations operate at different levels structuring the percussion part, which can be seen once again as a 'poly-fluctuation'.

An instrumental peculiarity of *Debris* is the tuning of the electric guitar. It presents a very altered scordatura, in which strings II, IV and VI remain in their 'normal' pitches (B, D, E), while strings I, III, and V are lowered down to almost replicate their lower neighbours, a quarter-tone above them.



Example 29: Electric Guitar's *scordatura*.

By lowering some strings so much whilst leaving others tuned normally, an element of destabilisation is introduced in the instrument not only in pitch, but also in timbre, dynamics and tactile sense of the strings' tension. Given the potentially disorienting scordatura used, a hybrid notation is provided that combines a 'normal' 5-lines staff showing the actual pitch,²⁴ below which an additional tablature is deployed showing the string and fret number suggested in order to obtain such notes.

Further to all the materials and procedures that determine the instrumental writing described, a sort of 'harmonic reinforcement' comes from electronic means. *Debris* is the only piece in the portfolio that includes electroacoustic material, and the first use I have made of such resources for the last seven years.²⁵ I produced four sound files

²⁴ Sounding an octave lower, as is the convention for the guitar.

²⁵ My undergraduate portfolio (2004) consisted of an ensemble piece with live electronics. A couple more such works were pursued in the following two years, abandoning the use of electronics thereafter. None of those works are currently considered in my catalogue.

with an accumulation of material from unidentifiable sources and processed them with an FFT Filter, letting pass only narrow bands of frequencies that correspond to the ambits of pitches used in the instrumental situations. The files are then triggered with a Pure Data patch, to coincide with the situations of matching 'harmony'. The resulting drone-like sounds are always present yet relegated to the background. They remain sounding after the groups of instrumental situations stop, as an extension or rather a vestige of the last situation of the group, filling the gaps between such groups. Only then, in absence of instrumental sounds, can these drones be clearly heard.

An exceptional alteration of the above mentioned procedures deserves attention, which modifies the instrumental part of Texture B in the second-last group. It consists of a general *ritardando* from a tempo of crotchet = 60 to one four times slower (semiquaver = 60), and an *accelerando* back to the initial tempo (mm. 492-501). I introduced this resource intuitively as a unique instance of purposefulness to subtly disrupt the objectivised construction. After such a long time re-asserting the situational construction explained hitherto, this unique hint for different possibilities remains an open question, an instance of perplexity.

2.7 Other Pieces

The two other pieces included in this portfolio are *Fragments after Cioran*, for chamber ensemble, and *Fosforesciamo*, for solo harpsichord. Having both been composed at the beginning of my doctoral studies, in 2012, they only partially demonstrate aspects of a situational approach.

Fragments after Cioran is a collection of aphoristic fragments first sketched in early 2011, for a combination of bass flute, clarinet in B \flat , violin, violoncello, vibraphone and piano. It was composed in its present form between January and February 2012, and premiered by Ensemble Interface at Dampfzentrale in Bern, Switzerland on 9th March that year.

The original fragments can be found integrated into the piece in the following sequence:

- I. = mm. 66 – 69
- II. = mm. 110 – 113
- III. = m. 187
- IV. = mm. 225 – 238
- V. = mm. 319 – 320
- VI. = m. 361
- VII. = m. 362
- VIII. = m. 391

Filling the gaps between them, an irregular pulsation takes place, analogous to that explained in *Últimos*, yet constructed here with only one chord, and with a more flexible rhythmic organisation than in the string trio. Several means of 'colouring' that continuum were introduced, such as a legato texture constructed with the same pitches

of the chords and superimposed onto them (in the woodwinds and strings, while piano and vibraphone keep the chords' pulsation). Extremely subtle holding of selected notes of the chords (mm. 327, 332, 335, 337, etc.), and almost imperceptible glissandi between some others (mm. 90-107, 197-205) serve this same purpose. The 'compositional need' for variations of this kind was resisted in the comparable 'contextual' sections of *Últimos*, somehow signalling a more radical approach when confronting a similar creative issue, almost two years later.

Despite the materials and their handling being very similar to those of the pieces discussed before, processual characteristics can be observed both in the original 'fragments' and in the recurrent chords' pulsation. For example, general dynamic tendencies like the *tutti diminuendo* in the first 16 measures and details such as the gradual increase in the separation of pairs of chords in the piano and vibraphone in the first fragment (mm. 66-68) both contradict a situational principle of stasis, showing clear – if basic – processual tendencies.

It could be argued that this piece has more 'spontaneous' and perhaps less radically situational aspects; its composition was carried out in a much more intuitive way than any other of the ones in the portfolio, and before having conceptualised the bases of a situational approach as presented in this commentary.

Similarly, *Fosforesciamo*, for solo harpsichord, was written during the process of identifying and conceptualising this approach, and presents only vague resemblances to it. The work is constituted of four clearly differentiated parts, the independence of which remains ambiguous in a similar way to *Ibid*, given the parts' noticeable sharing of pitch material and rhythmic organisation.

The first movement seeks to highlight the characteristic percussive qualities of the harpsichord's mechanism when releasing the keys. The chords' attacks are diffused into arpeggios and then abruptly cut to produce a 'negative attack', as it were, when executing the rests. Variations to the kind of texture thus constructed are introduced by means of (a) diverse proportions between chords and rests; (b) an alternative, rhythmically-precise figuration of the arpeggiation, for example in bars 12, 20, etc.; and (c) sustaining pairs of notes from chords, beyond the immediate release of others, for example in bars 5, 16, etc. These variants are distributed evenly throughout, and therefore do not follow a process. What indeed gives a processual sense is the gradual slowing down from quaver 176 to quaver 90 along this movement.

The movement that follows explores a different focus on the same idea of arpeggiated chords released synchronically. Despite being spread in different time proportions, this similarity combines with the use of the same pitch material in a different register to give a sense of continuation from the first to the second movement, which compromises their 'self-enclosedness'.

The third movement presents a different type of surface, yet still using the same chordal material – with a few inversions – in a wider ambit than those of previous movements. The process of slowing down from quaver 176 to 90 seen in the first movement is replicated here, though not in such a linear fashion.

The absence of arpeggiation in the chords, as well as a continuity of both register and tempo from the end of the third to the beginning of the fourth movement creates a relation, despite their different kinds of textural surface. This last movement is pervaded by a dialectic opposition between a whole chord on the downbeat of bars and its

omission. Albeit not following a gradual process, this is dominated towards the end by such omissions.

This concise description of the four parts constituting *Fosforesciamo* points not only to their lack of 'self-enclosedness' by means of continuity at different levels across the piece, but also shows basic processual traces within its movements. These features have the effect of separating this piece from a situational approach, despite stylistic similarities with properly 'situational' pieces discussed before.

Final Considerations

I have deliberately avoided titling this last section 'Conclusions', for I do not think the nature of a compositional project such as this allows me to draw certain conclusions in the way scientific research, for example, would. Instead, what is gained from this journey, besides the addition of original pieces to the repertoire, is a new perspective in view of the compositional work carried out, the ideas it reflects on, and new ideas it may trigger. The ending of this project does not entail an arrival point, but only a transitory stage in a longer creative journey that will continue in unknown directions; therefore the considerations below are, by nature, partial.

The question that has led this creative endeavour, asking how musical forms can do without a processual organisation, has been dealt with focusing on one solution, consistent with my personal compositional style, and without detriment to there being many others possible. This question – an answer to which Stockhausen somehow attempted through his idea of moment form – is tackled here with a similarly 'modular' formal approach, which consists of self-contained segments of musical construction. What is original in my solution is a double 'non-processual' nature that operates at both the inner construction of segments and in their deployment next to each other to build discontinuous musical forms.

In this way, what I propose differs from the historical referents cited by attempting a more extreme approach to the idea of stasis within musical segments: it follows the premises of what Lachenmann calls 'sound-as-state' (particularly the sub-category of 'sound-texture'), yet it is implemented more radically. The general stasis achieved on the surface – beyond the inner movement and diversity of the detail – is only

interrupted by discontinuous changes, abruptly switching into a different such sound construction at any given time.

Despite attempts – with varying degrees of success – to reveal a sense of arbitrariness in the particular placement and duration of situations, it becomes evident in the discussion of the pieces that the range of such durations is not arbitrary in absolute terms. Even beyond the 'proper-time' of a situation, this is, the minimum time needed to realise its static constitution, there is a co-relation between the complexity/diversity in the construction and the extension it calls for. The degree of inner elaboration of a situation is asserted by means of superimposed structures determining different aspects of material – what I call metaphorically its 'depth' – and the variety of that material. Such elaboration influences then both a situation's 'proper-time' and the time range within which seems intuitively reasonable for it to be extended. For example, if I held a situation like either of the ones in *Ibid* for a duration such as those of *Two Surfaces*, the situation would be exhausted much earlier; or if any of the – rather simple – first five situations of *Ver* were extended for the duration of *Situation VI*, the result would trigger a different type of exhaustion, carrying connotations of absurdity.

By not leading the attention through a 'narrative' thread given by processes, the music thus composed does not appeal so much to the faculties of memory and expectation, but calls for a state of contemplation, or rather, multiple kinds of contemplation responding to different situations. This points towards a need to find new forms of aesthetic experience, to which the approach here presented responds attempting a personal, original view. I am well aware, nevertheless, of the unavoidable tendency for the listener to interpret these or whichever musical forms in processual terms through an unconscious effort to (re-)construct a narrative even if it is not there. However, my compositional approach seeks to obstruct such 'processual' ways of hearing to trigger

means by which we can question ourselves, our assumptions, and ultimately our way of understanding music.

In total, if we observed the pieces in chronological order, a general process of 'radicalisation' can be seen, going from pieces such as *Fragments after Cioran*, or *Fosforesciamo*, which only partially address the ideas here explained, through the more strictly 'situational' *Two Surfaces*, towards the more elaborate situational forms of *Debris*, *Ver*, and *Instead*. This journey can be interpreted in view of the increasingly precise conceptualisation of the ideas underlying the approach described along this commentary: ideas that reflected on the compositional work and informed it in return.

As mentioned before, this project is not the conclusion of a journey, but one concrete stage that indeed opens many more questions to be addressed in future endeavours. Its continuation, I envisage, may entail upscaling the scope of my compositional pursuits by attempting longer, more ambitious works for larger instrumental forces. This, though, will largely depend on concrete opportunities for such projects to be carried out. Also as a possible continuation, I would not rule out looking for ways to integrate processual segments, provided that I can find ways of doing so without sacrificing the aesthetic achievements developed so far. Another exploratory strand might seek to integrate my peripheral work as an improviser into my compositional endeavours, which could result in pieces constituted of both composed and improvised situations.

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Appendix I: Biography

Pedro Alvarez was born in Chile in 1980. He studied Hindustani classical music, as well as several Western instruments from an early age. He then entered *Universidad de Chile*, studying both Philosophy and Composition, and pursuing the latter towards the obtention of a Licentiate degree in 2004, and a Master's in 2008.

In 2006 a Chilean Arts Council (Fondart) scholarship enabled him to travel to London, where he studied composition privately with James Dillon. In 2007 he obtained a scholarship from *Universidad de Chile* to pursue a short research residency in Mexico under Julio Estrada. In 2009 a Chilean Research Council scholarship (*Becas Chile – CONICYT*) allowed him to return to the UK for further postgraduate studies (MPhil at Goldsmiths, University of London, and later PhD studies at University of Huddersfield).

Besides formal studies, Alvarez has also attended several seminars across Europe, including a course in live electronics at the Venice Conservatory (2003), *Injuve* (Málaga, 2005) *Centre Acanthes* (Metz 2010), *Internationale Ferienkurse für neue Musik Darmstadt* (2010 & 2012), *Akademie Schloss Solitude* (Stuttgart 2011), *Matrix* (Freiburg im Breisgau 2011 & 2013 / Amsterdam 2012 / Warsaw 2012), *Donaueschingen's 'The Next Generation'* (2011 & 2013) and *Impuls* (Graz 2011).

Alvarez's music is being performed by established specialised ensembles, as well as a new generation of exceptionally talented musicians, so far having been presented in concerts in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Chile, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK and USA. It has featured at festivals such as the Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik, HCMF, Connect, ISCM World Music Days, ME_MMIX, as well as broadcast on radios in Austria, Belgium, Chile, Germany and Portugal.

Upcoming projects include an artistic residency in Vienna (Austrian Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture), and collaborations with Ensemble CrossingLines from Barcelona, Distractfold from Manchester and with members of Ensemble Dal Niente from Chicago.

Appendix II: CD contents

1. Two Surfaces (2013) – 8'57"

Ensemble Hand Werk.

Recorded at the Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik. 26th April, 2013.

2. Ver (2013) – 17'36"

Mark Knoop, piano.

Recorded at St Paul's Hall, Huddersfield. 5th December, 2013.

3. Instead (2013) – 6'42"

Heather Roche, clarinet.

Recorded in Cologne, Germany. 13th December, 2013.

4. Debris (2012) – 21'42"

Elision Ensemble.

Recorded at St Paul's Hall, Huddersfield. 8th February, 2013.

5. Fragments after Cioran (2012) – 8'51"

Ensemble Interface, conducted by Scott Voyles.

Recorded at Dampfzentrale, Bern. 9th March, 2012.

(Total Time: 64')

N.B. There are no recordings of *Ibid*, *Fosforesciamo* or *Últimos* available to date.