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**Framing Subjectivity in Music Composition** 

## **Chikako Morishita**

A portfolio of compositions and commentary submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2019

# **Table of Contents**

Table of Contentsi
List of Figuresii
List of Worksiv
Copyright Statementvii
Abstractviii
Acknowledgmentsix
Introduction
1. Prestudy – The Japanese Aesthetic of <i>Ma</i>
1.1. Definition of <i>Ma</i>
1.2. Other Compositional Articulations of <i>Ma</i>
2. Phase 1 – A Musical Analogue with <i>Ma</i> in <i>Lizard</i> series (2010-11)
2.1. Fragments and Silences
2.2. Determinacy-Indeterminacy
2.3. Spatial-Temporal Architecture
2.4. Performative Indeterminacy
2.5. Phase 1 Conclusion
3. Phase 2 – Network of Lines in <i>Skin, Gelatine, Soot</i> (2013)25
3.1. Network of Lines
3.2. Reversals
3.3. Other Compositions in the Portfolios
3.4. Phase 2 Conclusion
4. Phase 3 – Theatre of Strangeness in <i>One Arm</i> series (2014-17)
4.1. Problematisation
4.2. Theatricality
4.3. Ventriloquism Effect
4.4. Phase 3 Conclusion
Conclusion
Appendix50
Lizard (2010-11) for clarinet in B flat, viola and 13-stringed koto
Bibliography62

# **List of Figures**

```
figure i.1 Yuko Kamei's text on the exhibition Platonic Obsession booklet
```

figure i.2 Excerpt from the score of *Rokudan* (masterpiece for koto) in *Ikuta* notation and a transcription in Western notation

figure i.3 Excerpt from the score of Richard Barrett's Opening of the mouth

figure i.4 Excerpt from the score of Liza Lim's Burning House

figure 1.1 Construction of the kanji character of ma

figure 1.2 Hiroshi Sugimoto's Theatre - Carpenter Centre

figure 2.1 Construction of the kanji characters for Lizard

figure 2.2 Fermatas in Luigi Nono's Fragmente-Stille, an Diotima

figure 2.3 Lizard for 13-koto, fragment I

figure 2.4 Lizard (shadow & light), fr. III

figure 2.5 Lizard (s&I), fr. V

figure 2.6 Lizard (s&I), fr. X

figure 2.7 Lizard (shadow), fr. II, bar 1-3

figure 2.8 *Lizard* (s&I), fr. II, bar 1-2

figure 2.9 Lizard (s&I), fr. VII

figure 2.10 Excerpt from the score of Ray Evanoff's notables

figure 2.11 Excerpt from the score of Joji Yuasa's interpenetration

figure 2.12 Excerpt from the score of Chaya Czernowin's Anea Crystal

figure 3.1 Skin, Gelatine, Soot rev., 1st movement

figure 3.2 SGS rev., 2<sup>nd</sup> mvt, bar 29-33

figure 3.3 SGS rev., 3rd mvt's last bar

figure 3.4 SGS rev., 4th mvt

figure 3.5 SGS rev., 5<sup>th</sup> mvt's 1<sup>st</sup> bar

figure 3.6 SGS rev., 5th mvt, bar 115

figure 3.7 *SGS* rev., 3<sup>rd</sup> mvt, bar 69-70; 2<sup>nd</sup> mvt, bar 29; 1<sup>st</sup> mvt, bar 15-16

figure 3.8 SGS rev., 5<sup>th</sup> mvt, bar 110-111

figure 3.9 SGS rev., 3<sup>rd</sup> mvt, bar 70; 5<sup>th</sup> mvt, bar 104; 5<sup>th</sup> mvt, bar 92

figure 3.10 SGS original ver.,  $3^{rd}$  mvt, bar 75 – Samuel Dunscombe's interpretation of a multiply-layered space

figure 3.11 SGS rev., 5<sup>th</sup> mvt, bar 123

figure 4.1 One Arm 1, bar 1-11

figure 4.2 OA1, bar 78-97

figure 4.3 *OA1*, bar 102-112

figure 4.4 OA3, bar 28

figure 4.5 Excerpt from the score of Simon Steen-Andersen's Study for String Instruments #1 (2007)

figure 4.6 Stills from Two New Duo's performance of Simon Steen-Andersen's *Study for String Instruments #1* (2007)

figure 4.7 *OA3*, bar 10-11

figure a.1. Lizard, score

## **List of Works**

## Phase 1 – *Lizard* cycle (2010-12)

Lizard series (2010-11)

#### Lizard (shadow) for solo clarinet in B flat (7')

Premiered by Heather Roche (HIAP Portrait concert (Finland)) Written as part of HIAP/Tokyo Wonder Site residency program

#### Lizard for solo 13-stringed koto (6')

Premiered by Nobutaka Yoshizawa (Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (UK)) Written as part of HIAP/Tokyo Wonder Site residency program Commissioned by Nobutaka Yoshizawa

#### Lizard (shadow & light) for clarinet in B flat, trumpet and trombone (9')

Premiered by Richard Haynes, Paul Hübner and Stephen Menotti trio (University of Huddersfield (UK))

# House of the sleeping beauties for flutes, clarinets, electric guitar, accordion and percussion (9') Premiered by Icarus ensemble (Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (UK)) Written as part of HCMF/ECPDP (Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival/European Composers Professional Development Program)

## Phase 2 – Skin, Gelatine, Soot cycle (2013-14/18)

#### *Name* for three percussionists (10')

Premiered by Aleksander Wnuk, Víctor Barceló and Roberto Maqueda (Impuls (Austria)) Written as part of Impuls academy

#### **Skin, Gelatine, Soot** for solo bass clarinet (18')

Premiered by Carl Rosman (University of Huddersfield (UK))

#### **Duo** for trumpet, trombone, 'cello, electric guitar and percussion (6')

Premiered by Ensemble Ascolta (Dian Red Kechil (Singapore))

Written as part of Dian Red Kechil summer academy

#### **Etude 1** for solo percussionist (5')

Premiered by Simone Beneventi (Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (UK))

#### **Soot** for solo piano (4')

Premiered by Mark Knoop (University of Huddersfield (UK))

### The Silence for alto flute, bass flute and orchestra (13')

Premiered by Maarika Järvi, Monika Mattiesen and Vanemuine Symphony Orchestra conducted by Lauri Sirp (Estonian Composers Festival (Estonia))

Commissioned by Estonian Composers Festival

#### **Etude 2** for contrabass clarinet (6')

Premiered by Heather Roche Commissioned by Heather Roche (Café Oto (UK))

## Phase 3 – *One Arm* cycle (2014-17)

**One Arm series** (2014-17)

#### One Arm 1 for trombone and 'cello (11')

Premiered by Two New Duo (Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (UK)) Commissioned by Two New Duo

#### One Arm 2 for solo voice (8')

Premiered by Jeffrey Gavett (University of Huddersfield (UK))

## One Arm 1+2 for voice, trombone and 'cello (16')

Premiered by Peyee Chen and Two New Duo (City University of London (UK)

## One Arm 3 for flutes, bass clarinet, violin, 'cello and piano (13')

Premiered by Ensemble Lemniscate (Unerhörte Musik BKA Theatre Berlin (Germany))

## **USB drive: Recordings**

- 1. **Lizard (shadow)** for solo clarinet in B flat (performed by Heather Roche)
- 2. Lizard for solo 13-stringed koto (performed by Nobuataka Yoshizawa)
- 3. **Lizard (shadow & light)** for clarinet in B flat, trumpet and trombone (performed by Richard Haynes, Paul Hübner and Stephen Menotti)
- 4. *House of the sleeping beauties* for flutes, clarinets, electric guitar, accordion and percussion (performed by Icarus ensemble)
- 5. **Name** for three percussionists (performed by Aleksander Wnuk, Víctor Barceló and Roberto Maqueda) \*video recording
- 6. **Skin, Gelatine, Soot** for solo bass clarinet (performed by Carl Rosman)
- 7. **Duo** for trumpet, trombone, 'cello, electric guitar and percussion (performed by Ensemble Ascolta)
- 8. **Etude 1** for solo percussionist (performed by Simone Beneventi)
- 9. **Soot** for solo piano (performed by Mark Knoop)
- 10. *The Silence* for alto flute, bass flute and orchestra (performed by Maarika Järvi, Monika Mattiesen and Vanemuine Symphony Orchestra conducted by Lauri Sirp)
- 11. **Etude 2** for contrabass clarinet (performed by Heather Roche)
- 12. **One Arm 1** for trombone and 'cello (performed by Two New Duo)
- 13. One Arm 2 for solo voice (performed by Jeffrey Gavett)
- 14. **One Arm 1+2** for voice, trombone and 'cello \*video recording special concert performance with interruptions and setting changes in the middle, and also at the end
- 15. *One Arm 3* for flutes, bass clarinet, violin, 'cello and piano (performed by Ensemble Lemniscate)

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## **Abstract**

This thesis discusses my exploration of a musical language in which the performer's and audience's subjectivity plays a key part in the formation of a composition's core meaning. Following an introductory chapter elaborating on a constellation of concepts surrounding the Japanese aesthetics of ma, the chapters correspond to three phases of research. The first phase considers strategized ideas of silence, the relations of determinacy-indeterminacy, and spatio-temporal architecture examined in the Lizard series within a framework informed by the ma concept. In the second phase with the Skin, Gelatine, Soot cycle, I use paradoxical states, such as sounds-silence and elements of indeterminacy to extend concepts of an architecture of presence and absence into a more complex polyphony of lines. This chapter also describes how the theatricalization of the performer's body and their vocalisation are used to challenge linear thought. In the final chapter with One Arm series, I discuss ventriloquism effects between the performer and their performance as a means to bring an interplay of paradoxical sensibility onto the stage. Shifting performative modes between a kind of first and third-person stance result in a slippage or interstice in which the performer might 'communicate' with him or herself. In conclusion, I summarize my quest for certain qualities of aesthetic experience and where this might lead me musically and aesthetically in addition to giving a perspective on how my viewpoints on 'culture' and 'identity' have been established and transformed.

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To Toshio and Eiko Morishita.

## Introduction

A traveler is walking towards a monument that stands over the horizon. It is approximately five kilometers away on a flat land. An hour later, he is standing at the bottom of the gigantic structure. He wonders whether it is the size, the perfect symmetry or the sleek surface that evokes the sublime. He remembers that a tetrahedron is the simplest, yet strongest structure, but never imagined in this scale. A while later, he realizes that it arises from a crevasse of an enormous rock. "This is a crystal after all." He is now absorbed into the abyss of time.

- Yuko Kamei, Platonic Obsession

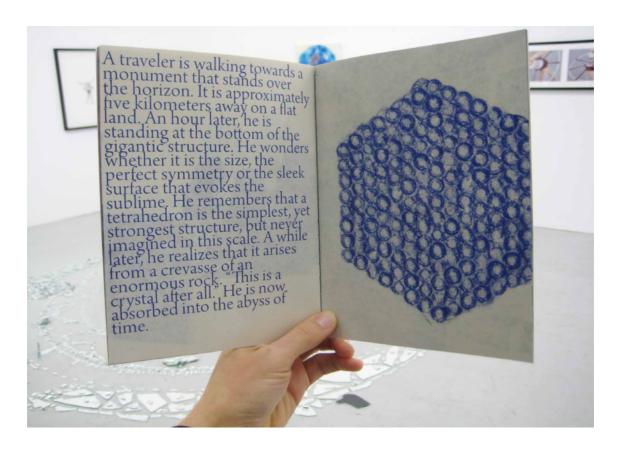


figure i.1 Yuko Kamei's text on her exhibition booklet (©Yuko Kamei:

http://yuccak.net/document/PlatonicObsession Booklet.pdf)

There is an object. It's big and stands on a flat land. At first it looked like a monument but now it does not look like an artificial structure anymore; it is a crystal.

This shift in recognition occurs as the distance between the object and the person changes; walking five kilometres enables the traveller to stand at the base of the object, and to observe its size, shape, and surface smoothness. It also allows him to look at the object from every direction, and to understand that it is a three-dimensional shape, not just a projection. It dawns on him that the object is a giant crystal.

In this text by visual artist Yuko Kamei, 'he', as the subject, moves, thinks, and experiences. He travels for an hour, examines the object, and experiences the sublime as something beyond imagination through the scale and perfection of the object's form. An abyss of time is opened to him as he 'senses' the elapsed time for forming such a gigantic crystal. What Kamei describes here is an experience of the sublime brought about by shifts of spatial recognition, and an act of imagination with regard to time.

I am interested in composing music that creates situations like this in which one is invited to experience something through shifting perceptions of space and time, to imagine the context, and to project these into the art. In particular I am intrigued by creating an interpenetrated or dissolving identity through unexpected, paradoxical dialogues between categories of spatial, temporal and expressive scale. One remarkable cultural frame by which I understand an aesthetic experience like this is the Japanese concept of *ma*.

The point of departure for my research was a conversation with Satsuki Odamura, koto player of the Australian ELISION Ensemble. In November 2009 at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, the ensemble performed Richard Barrett's *Opening of the Mouth* (1992-97). I attended the rehearsals and during a break Odamura posed an intriguing question to me: *what is the role of the conductor in music making?* I understood it as a question addressing how Western concepts of timing and those of the performance practice of the koto differ. She, as a performer active in a wide range of musical contexts, from traditional Japanese music to jazz, to working as a solo artist with orchestras, and various forms of improvised music, confronts the aesthetics of centralized control of timing in Western musical traditions. The demands of performing pieces like Barrett's, written in complex Western notation, requiring a conductor were a constraint on her fundamental understanding of aesthetic concepts of playing the koto. In such a situation, the freedom of the performer to relate musically to their own inner sense of time needs to be subordinated to external sources of measurable time (see figure i.3 for excerpt of Barrett's *Opening of the Mouth* with bass koto).

According to Willem Adriaansz's *The Kumiuta and Danmono: Traditions of Japanese Koto Music* (1973), koto music was almost exclusively taught by rote until quite recently and retention and perception were developed to a high degree aided by the use of a mnemonic system consisting of onomatopoeic syllables. Building upon such a tradition, printed music has been notated in a form of tablature, providing pitch and rhythmic information that acts as a 'guide' for the performer rather than completely fixing the details of how to realize the score. For instance, the upper notation in figure i.2 indicates the beginning of *Rokudan*, one of basic repertoires for koto practitioner, in Ikutaschool notation (turned 90 degrees in the sake of readability)<sup>1</sup>. The music is written here in vertical columns divided into rectangles; each of the rectangles represents one time-unit without specifying exact timings for the notes. A set of four rectangles corresponds to one bar in 4/4 in the transcription in Western notation given at the bottom of figure i.2.



**figure i.2** *Rokudan* in *Ikuta* notation (top) and a transcription in Western notation (bottom) (Adriaansz, 1973, p. 46)

Odamura mentioned Liza Lim's *Burning House* (1995) for koto and voice (1 performer) which, in her words, gave her an opposite feeling to Barrett's piece. Lim's work composed specifically for Odamura uses calligraphic tablature, close to standard koto notation style, which, for Lim, visually represents how the sounds 'float' in space (Morishita, 2010): rather than specifying which note is exactly played in which timing, it tells which string the performer touches and how the performer vibrates it within the framework given by an approximate timeline (see figure i.4 for Lim's score). This circumstance in which spatial information related to pitch and phrasing is also temporal requires the performer to apply their personal sensibility to all aspects of the music, creating a situation in which there is no separation between the subjectivity of the performer and the aesthetic meaning of the piece. The point Odamura stressed about the externally imposed counting of time in

3

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The music is usually read down the columns and from right to left.

Barrett's ensemble piece was that it was confusing for her because it contradicted the framework within which she understands how musical meaning and value of the music are created.



figure i.3 Richard Barrett's Opening of the Mouth (1997, p. 113)



figure i.4 Liza Lim's Burning House (2000, p. 4)

#### **Research Overview**

Composing 'Narrative Dissolution': Framing Subjectivity in Music Composition is a discussion of my compositional and aesthetic journey to develop a musical language in which the performer's and audience's subjectivity play a key part in the composition's core meaning. The term 'narrative dissolution' refers to Richard Pilgrim in his essay Intervals ('Ma') in Space and Time: foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic paradigm in Japan in which he describes that the aesthetics of ma is a paradoxical state that offers the viewer or listener, or performer in the case of the performing arts, the opportunity to construct their own narratives. Examples include Yasujiro Ozu's film Tokyo Story (1953) which 'foregrounds the empty spaces or times' and 'uses the narrative action, events or forms of the art' (1986, p. 261) to enable the perceiver's individual imagination and meaning-making to be projected onto the scene; Noh theatre is called the art of ma in which the moment of 'no-action' reveals the underlying 'strength of the actor which unremittingly holds the [viewer's] attention' (Zeami-Motokiyo cited in Pilgrim, p. 258).

I aim in this research to examine how dissolving narrative or making narratives of ambiguity in my music can open up spaces for imaginative projection and participation for listener and performer alike; making space for silence, interrupting temporal flow through repetition and reversals, and opening up unexpected gaps in the flow of action are the key techniques that I employ in my compositional practice to offer paradoxical aesthetic experiences by undoing rather than doing something. In addition, I discuss how the influence of the sensibility that my cultural background provides has changed over the course of these years of research where my focus as a composer has moved away from a specific cultural (national) ideology.

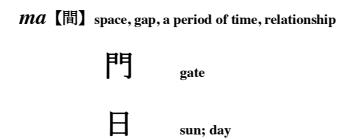
Indeed, my investigation reflects the urgency I felt on leaving Japan to question my personal identity as I grappled with issues of communication not merely on the level of language but at the deepest core of interpersonal communication. I encountered a stark difference between the relative linearity of Anglo-European cultural thought and expression and what I felt to be the more circuitous and indirect style of Japanese expression. During the first phase of my research, I therefore relied entirely on the question of how my perception is influenced by the unique sensibility that my cultural background provides, and thus *ma* as a socio-cultural concept provided a framework for clarifying my identity as a composer and consequently, the logics and poetries lying beneath my scores. However, such a deliberation on 'Japaneseness' has been less and less central to me over the course of my research leading to a pure quest for an aesthetic experience of a certain structural pattern; I aimed at developing formal musical designs to promote dialectic thinking as my

perspective for 'identity' has changed from mono, static, inherent to polyphonic, fluctuating, the mix of inherent and extrinsic.

#### **Thesis Content**

The thesis is divided into four chapters: an introduction focusing on the aesthetics of ma followed by commentary on three phases of research dated from 2011 to 2018. Thus, the discussion follows practice according to its chronological development. The first chapter (prestudy) elaborates a constellation of the concept of ma focusing upon the key terms 'framing' and 'interpenetrated identity' which provide a way of understanding the aesthetics of a heightened sense of presence. The second chapter (phase 1) delineates the centrality of Japanese aesthetics and the concept of ma to my thinking and my early explorations of this culturally coded idea in the Lizard series with particular focus on strategized ideas of silence, the relations of determinacy-indeterminacy, and spatio-temporal architecture by means of placements of compositional and gestural elements. The third chapter (phase 2) looks at Skin, Gelatine, Soot which takes these ideas into more abstract territory, moving away from ma as a concept that relies on this East-West dichotomy or symbol of Japaneseness. Building upon simpler relations between sound and silence and elements of indeterminacy, I extend the architecture of presence and absence in these pieces into a more complex polyphony of lines that necessitate the performer weaving the texture of presence and absence themselves. The body takes on a more potent presence in this second phase and this became a rich area of exploration for me in the third phase centred around the One Arm pieces. The focus of the fourth chapter (phase 3) is on ventriloquism effects between the performer and their performance as means to bring an interplay of fiction and non-fiction onto the stage. Shifting performative modes between a kind of first and third-person stance result in a slippage or interstice in which the performer might 'communicate' with him or herself. In conclusion, I summarize my quest for certain qualities of aesthetic experience and discuss where this has might lead me musically and aesthetically in addition to giving a perspective on how my viewpoints on 'culture' and 'identity' have been established and transformed.

# 1. Prestudy – The Japanese Aesthetics of Ma



**figure 1.1** Construction of the kanji character of *ma* (©Cambridge dictionary online: https://dictionary.cambridge.org)

#### 1.1. Definition of Ma

I began my research with an exploration of musical analogues to the Japanese aesthetics of *ma* understood as a constellation of knowledge about space and time. Richard Pilgrim, scholar of Japanese religio-aesthetics, indicates that this richly ambiguous term carries both objective and subjective meanings. As a descriptive reality, *ma* basically means an interval between two or more spatial or temporal things, events or phenomena: a room can be called *ma*, for instance, as it is a space between the walls; a rest in music is also *ma* as the pause between the notes or sounds. In contrast, *ma* as a subjective, experiential term suggests a particular mode of experience in which mutual opposition is to be perceived simultaneously and identically (1986, pp. 255-256). The architect Arata Isozaki's description of the differences between historical notions of Japanese and Western conceptions of space-time helps to illustrate what simultaneous recognition would mean:

While in the West the space-time concept gave rise to absolutely fixed images of a homogenous and infinite continuum, as presented in Descartes, in Japan space and time were never fully separated but were conceived as correlative and omnipresent...In Japan space could not be perceived independently of the element of time [and] time was not abstracted as a regulated, homogenous flow, but rather was believed to exist only in relation to movements or space.... Thus, space was perceived as identical with the events or phenomena occurring in it; that is, space was recognized only in its relation to time-flow (cited in Pilgrim, p. 256).

Ma is thus not merely something objectively located in intervals in space nor time, it is where the boundaries between two or more distinctive worlds are experientially operational and bridged; the simultaneous awareness of the concepts of binary oppositions is coupled with an individual's cognition and is enabled only in relation to time-flow. This is clearly suggested by the representation of ma in its Japanese written form (kanji or Chinese ideograph) which consists of the character for gate and the enclosed character of the sun shining through the gate (figure 1.1). While sunshine presupposes something invisible and indefinable yet somehow concrete, the gate, a fixed object, functions as the framework to illustrate the existence of something unstable or indefinable (Pilgrim, 1986). Another good example is Hiroshi Sugimoto's Theatres, a series of photographs, which actualizes this ma concept through exposing a photographic film for the duration of a motion-picture projected on the screen (figure 1.2). The result is a reflection of the time and motion on the film, a white rectangle on the stage, within the framework given by the theatre's architecture. Time and motion are literally exposed whose residual traces illuminate the fixed architecture.



**figure 1.2** Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Theatre - Carpenter Centre* (©Hiroshi Sugimoto: <a href="https://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/new-page-7/">https://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/new-page-7/</a>)

What I particularly find interesting in this concept is that *ma* is not polarized around an idea of 'the invisible' or 'the indefinable' as pure negative space but can be perceived in a more graduated area between positive and negative and fixed and unstable. There is the creation of 'an interpenetrated identity', a fluctuating boundary between opposing qualities (or the subject's and object's identities), behind this concept. By referring to Takao Suzuki, scholar of sociolinguistics, Augustin Berque describes the character of Japanese subjectivity as an 'open status' which has no clear figure unless the distance or nearness between objects is specified: the subject's recognition of the object, and valuation of the quality of the space between the object defines the subject's being. 'Interpenetrated identity' is polarized around the subject's personal acts of perception, realization and specific situation — being aware of some changes in the internal state of the body brought about by external objects — measures the distance from the object by means of impressions made upon the senses. The scope for these subjective perceptual acts is grounded in the state of affairs that are described by situation, mode or context (1994, pp. 42-44). Therefore, *ma* can be understood as an individual cognitive space, which is created by an interaction of subjective/internal and objective/external worlds within a framework given by the state of affairs.

In seeking to find structural analogues congruent with the concept of *ma*, I thus find the following challenges in focusing upon the architecture of ambivalent states in my composition portfolio. Some aspects of *ma* can be found in:

- (i) A performer's open receptiveness in a continuous time-flow where the performer's sensibility both defines and is framed by musical phenomena
- (ii) Creation of situations for interpenetrated identity in which the qualitative aspect of events is foregrounded (relies on an act of individual cognition or valuation brought by an interaction of internal and external space)

My challenges for creating a musical language reflecting these concepts can be summarized as following:

- (a) Musically framing a situation in which subtle changes in performance mode can reflect the performer's changing sensibility
- (b) Organizing spatio-temporal structures which have an indeterminate element that invites the performer to make judgments as to how they navigate materials and their placement or timing

(c) Creating a music language which foregrounds transitional, unstable and fluctuating phenomena

## 1.2. Other Compositional Articulations of Ma

Half-Japanese violinist Anne Akiko Meyers, in regard to her experience of performing music by Japanese modern composers, says that 'the Japanese just love the space in between the notes, it's almost more important than the note itself' and 'that kind of quietness and reflection is like an identity stamp.' (cited in Yoshihara, 2007, p. 208) An example of this aesthetic position includes Toshio Hosokawa's *Sen I* (1984) for flute solo, where sounds arise from and disappear back into silence. For Hosokawa, absence is as significant as the presence of sound and he defines silence as a matrix for chaos as a formless and disordered state of energy (Kimura, 2018). The music of Toru Takemitsu has been described as 'timeless, non-developmental, arrhythmic, full of space' (Chanette, 1985/2008, p. 26). *Garden Rain* (1974) for ten brass instruments requires the coordination of tempi proportionally and not by durational measurement in a music that reflects the performers' collaborative decision of how fast/slow it could be. A similar idea is examined in Joji Yuasa's *interpenetration* (1963) for two flutes where the fluctuating threshold between two flutists is brought about by mobility of duration and performing speed (see also 2.4. for more details) (Narimoto, 2013).

Among these and other composers, I particularly found Liza Lim's and Steven Kazuo Takasugi's approaches interesting with their sublimation of the idea of *ma* beyond specific cultural forms to a more abstract level. According to Rutherford-Johnson, Lim refers to the architect Christopher Alexander's theory of pattern languages in her use of a cultural complex which defines the pattern of a cultural object as something that 'may be approached and understood through its underlying pattern' (2017, p. 155):

Alexander defines a 'pattern' as an abstracted, highly generalized solution to a design problem – creating a place for waiting, for example – that is made up of a balanced collection of forces and desires. So, for example, a waiting place requires an entrance, room for those waiting to congregate, some form of comfort, and so on... The key is that functions and forces are what make up the pattern, whereas concrete objects are possible design solutions. (Ibid.)

This is well exemplified in her kinaesthetic approach to composing for zither e.g. *koto* (Japanese zither) and *goqin* (Chinese zither) which, for her, is a form of instrument which can chart and register

very subtle levels of vibration and inflection (Morishita, 2010). There the performer's physical gestures are outward signs of an inner strength, suggesting 'the spiritual dimension of music beyond its actual physical sounding manifestation.' (Saunders, 1999)

The Japanese-American composer Steven Kazuo Takasugi shows elements of his Japanese heritage in *Iridescent uncertainty* (1997-99) for electronic samples of both Japanese and Western instruments as well as in *Diary of a Lung* (2016-17) for eighteen musicians and electronic playback having a subtext centred on the Japanese folktale *Urashima Taro*. My fascination for his art extends beyond a surface cultural identity connected to specific instruments or a folktale to the aesthetics of contradiction and paradox which can be explicitly seen in *The Jargon of Nothingness* (2001-03) for various sampled sounds. In Ming Tsao's analysis, the work searches for a 'void' through destabilisation of contradictory perspectives: the notion of line and distance explored through magnified/focused sounds and shattered/infected reverberations provides a paradox of perspective which is then destabilised by turning the sounds and the spaces they inhabit inside-out and changing their spatial relations. One hears sounds which could be understood interchangeably as being in either close proximity or distant or indeed both (2004). This either/or/and opens up interstices of meaning which I understand as something similar to the experiential quality of *ma*.

# 2. Phase 1 – A Musical Analogue with *Ma* in *Lizard* Series (2010-11)

**figure 2.1** Construction of the kanji characters for *Lizard* (©Cambridge dictionary online: <a href="https://dictionary.cambridge.org">https://dictionary.cambridge.org</a>; ©Tangorin dictionary online: <a href="https://tangorin.com/">https://tangorin.com/</a>)

Lizard is the title of the works written between 2010 and 2011. This series for various instrumental combinations investigates musical analogues with the concept of ma in quite direct ways. One way of writing the term for lizard (tokage) in Japanese consists of the kanji characters for gate and for shade that metaphorically represent something being kept secret but somehow concrete (figure 2.1). This 'shade of the gate' or, in my terms, 'hidden emotion' or 'choking inarticulacy' as if under the animal's cold skin, or alternately, forms consisting of audible and inaudible dimensions, was something central to the series' conception. There are four works in the series:

- The first piece *Lizard* (2010/11) for B-flat clarinet, viola and 13-stringed koto consists of twelve fragments that examine fluctuating boundaries between three players which brings an intimate quality in the performative space. (As this work was written before I began my research, I exclude it from the discussion.)
- Lizard (shadow) (2011) for solo B-flat clarinet explores the performer's interpretative sensibilities through the use of multiple layered phrases, which highlights each performer's unique way of 'lightening' and 'shading' spaces. It is composed of ten fragments.
- Lizard (shadow & light) (2011) for B-flat clarinet, trumpet and trombone is composed of eleven fragmental pieces, each of which articulates a fluctuating hierarchy between the three instruments.

• In *Lizard for solo 13-stringed koto* (2011), the interplay between contrasting spaces such as sound and silence, dynamic and static gestures, and objective and subjective spaces is explored. The piece consists of six fragments.

## 2.1. Fragments and Silences

All works in this series consist of fragmentary pieces. What I attempted to create with this fragmentary structure is 'a series of overlapping and associated, discrete image worlds' that are separated by the space called *ma* (Pilgrim, 1986, p. 260). In *Lizard*, each fragmentary piece is bridged by silence in the form of various types of fermatas some of which even involve the gesture of a pageturn. This structural pattern of indeterminate durational negative space in between concrete musical phenomena was a way for me to explore forms of narrative dissolution – the deconstruction of the cause and effect of narrative order. Silence is a device opening up the space for the players' and the audiences' own narrative constructions in connection with situational, conditional energies. This, for me, is a framing of individual sensibilities and a compositional analogue to the aesthetics of *ma*.

#### (Observation: Fragments and Silences)

'[N]ot the sound, but the listening is the piece' says Peter Ablinger about his *Stuhl-Projekte* (chair-projects) (1995-2007) (<a href="https://ablinger.mur.at/docu01.html">https://ablinger.mur.at/docu01.html</a>). The seating, the sixth act of *Cityopera Graz* (2005) is a mobile procession of thirty-six chairs set up in a public location in the city, inviting people to enact *Sitzen und Hören* (sitting and hearing) and to enjoy the given situation as a concert. This is a good example of turning the absence of intended, artificial sounds into some sort of art — the 'silence' turns into a 'framed moment' or 'made situation' where 'possible metamorphoses of the links between the public sphere and auditory experience' is framed. The composer describes this as 'the relationship between the listener (the subject) and the sound (the object) has the quality of being art in its most immediate sense.' (Ibid.)

For me, silence or *ma* is where one opens into the immediacy of the ever-changing moment by which a rich reality of presence is revealed. In that sense it is not 'empty' space but rather negative space filled by imagination which Pilgrim describes 'pregnant nothingness'. Liza Lim sometimes speaks about the aesthetics of the Chinese guqin (zither) in relation to what silence means for her. Lim explains that guqin music is traditionally played for oneself or in the company of a true friend (defined as the 'perfect listener') (Saunders, 1999), serving to create an intimate quality in the performative space by activating their keen perception within the elusive zone between sound

and non-sound. Similarly, Evan Johnson's compositions deal with the threshold between audibility and inaudibility. In his *vo mesurando* (2012) for four high voices, 'the music reaches a point of almost total erasure' (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017, p. 178) as the composer writes in the program notes that '[t]he material and energies of the work are "private", quite often simply inaudible' (Johnson cited in Rutherford-Johnson, p. 178).

## 2.2. Determinacy-Indeterminacy

The concept of narrative dissolution for me is further enhanced through the relation between determinate-indeterminate durational space. This series' scores use various fermatas to indicate an opening up of both sound and silence to another kind of attention. While determinate space is defined as counting, measurable, standardized or objective time, in that notated time is countable, the space indicated by a fermata offers players the opportunity to define 'what is a shorter or longer time' within a framework given by a context. It is an individual act brought about by an interaction between subjective and objective aspects which leads to a more sensitized space which can register fine nuances of interpretive subjectivity.

#### (Observation: Determinacy-Indeterminacy)

In his only quartet *Fragmente–Stille*, *an Diotima* (1979–1980), Luigi Nono strives to create a 'not-finishable, not-completed' musical architecture 'where sound consists not only of what it is, but also of what it could be' (Mazzolini, 2013, p. 370). One of the prominent strategies he used is an array of fermatas (and breaths), given in figure 2.2, that are, as the composer writes in the preliminary page, 'always to be felt differently with free imagination/of dreaming spaces /of sudden ecstasies /of unutterable thoughts /of tranquil breathing /and of silences to "sing" "timelessly"' (Nono in Mazzolini, p. 375). It is explained by Mazzolini that the aim is to 'upset the isochronic periodicity of the tactus, dissolving the measurable, chronometric, finite time into a space–time that is not measurable, not finite' (p. 375). This is a great example of how an indeterminate, unstable space can 'serve as an empty "ground" or basis against/within which the forms or "figures" of the art function.' (Pilgrim, 1986, p. 260) Space-time, however, is not only stretched by the use of the indeterminate durational spaces of fermatas but also by hidden linkage between spaces across time in the *Lizard* series.

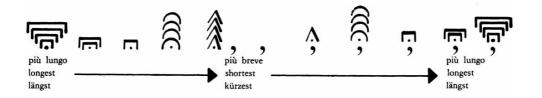


figure 2.2 Fermatas in Luigi Nono's Fragmente-Stille, an Diotima (cited in Mazzolini, p. 374)

## 2.3. Spatial-Temporal Architecture

In order to explore the concept of *ma* as the collapse of binary oppositions, I sought to create an interplay of ambivalent expressions – subjective and objective, spatial and temporal, and silent and violent, or in Mazzolini's words, 'a disturbing and acentric panorama in which nearby and distant, above and below, before and after are no longer clearly separated, but rather mixed with one another in a perennial diaspora of forms' (p. 374).

Looking at the nature of positive and negative space, negative space can be defined as a space just before or after a unit of performance produced by dynamic activity of performer: silence, for example, is a space just before or after sounding space. The performer's location of entry points and other placements within a situation of more open timing creates a shifting sense of before and after that can also suggest the quality of *ma* because of the ambivalence of the context. In these examples, the performer's internal sensation of time is modified by the location of determinate and indeterminate durational spaces. In particular, at the space of contact of two distinctive types of time: a measurable space just after an indeterminate durational space, such as bar 4 (fragment I) of *Lizard for 13-stringed koto* where the performer's inner sense of counting is influenced by the indeterminate durational silence indicated with very long fermata symbol right before the bar. There is also a non-measurable space just after a countable space in which the subjective definition of 'shorter, normal and longer' is changed by the tempo as well as expressive energy of the gestural movements coming into it, e.g. the very long silence after clearing out the gesture of the glissandi along the koto string in the end of bar 3 (figure 2.3).

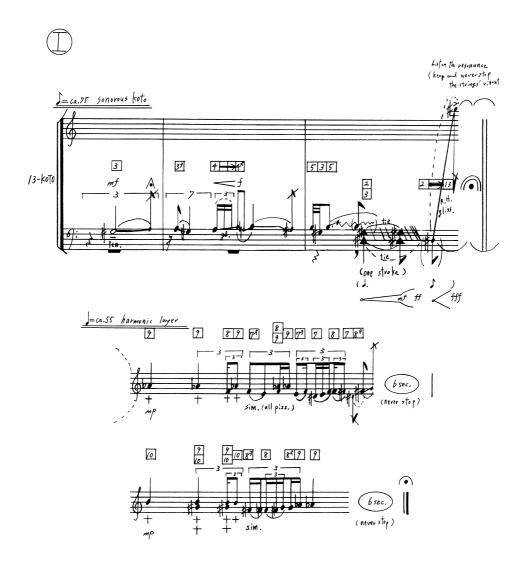


figure 2.3 Lizard for 13-koto, fragment I

However, not only the spaces contacting each other, but also the spaces across the phrases, sections and instruments can have interactive qualities in terms of context or location. A compound of determinate-indeterminate durational spaces allows the performer to consider time and timing across micro and macro scales.

In *Lizard (shadow & light)*, what emerged for the players from the performances of, for instance, fragment III (figure 2.4), fragment V (figure 2.5), and fragment X (figure 2.6) where the materials are shared, is the act of linking the sections by looking at clues either by direct or intuitive considerations of recurrent patterns of the gestures and fermata symbols. The annotated figures (below) show the disposition of gestural 'alphabets' between these three fragments and, in working with the performers, much of our discussion revolved around the meanings of such relations. For instance, both fragment III and fragment X have ternary form, i.e. composed of ABA' sections. The

clarinet's and trombone's flanking gestures in fragment III, marked with <u>blue</u>, move inward in fragment X whereas the trumpet's tremolando gesture, marked with <u>green</u>, is retained in the same location in the fragment X; the trumpet's cyclic and descending gesture, marked with <u>pink</u>, appears across three fragments in slightly different figures, and, in fragment III, it is even performed by the clarinet which forms a canon with the trumpet; the gesture marked with <u>orange</u>, rhythmic unison between three instruments, appears in both fragment V and fragment X; these two fragments also share the trombone's ascending slide gesture, marked with <u>yellow</u>.

Because the fragmented form makes the music more 'object-like' for the performer, and the gaps allow contemplation of the object, I found that the performers became more attuned to questions around the placement of events. In such a way, this kind of structural patterning may open up more opportunities for the performer to develop a performance practice around sensitive responses to time, to the spacing of events both sequentially and in parallel with others. Here the act of locating something within time-space presents itself not only in the moment, but also in dynamic relation to what has already gone by and what is to come. These individual and shared or collaborative acts of engagement make, to my mind, the performing situation interpenetrative and intimate, and this memory architecture can allow the performance to have an emergent quality through these shifting, ambiguous conjunctions of active spacing and timing rather than merely being understood in a more static or flat-planed way of thinking of spatial or temporal organization.

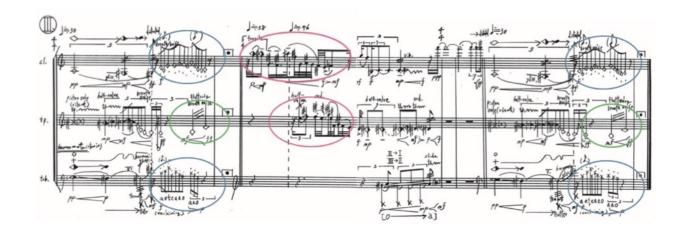


figure 2.4 Lizard (shadow & light), fr. III

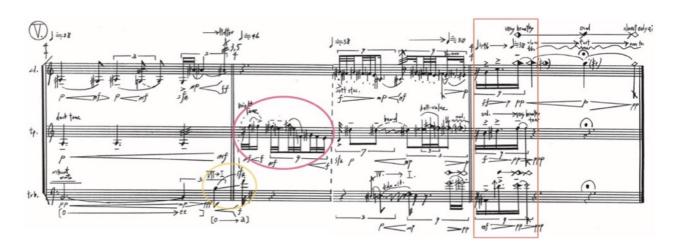


figure 2.5 Lizard (s&I), fr. V

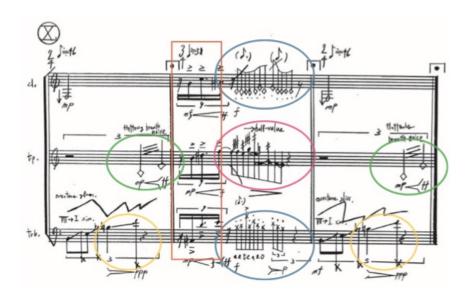


figure 2.6 Lizard (s&I), fr. X

## 2.4. Performative Indeterminacy

In addition to the use of various indeterminate durational spaces notated with fermatas, various levels of performing indeterminacy are employed in the *Lizard* series, enhancing the sense of spatial time. In fragment II of *Lizard* (*shadow*) for solo clarinet in B-flat, where multilayered lines appear, the clarinettist is given the opportunity to negotiate a polyphony of material within the score and to decide how to orient the musical gestures (figure 2.7) as playing both lines simultaneously is physically not possible.

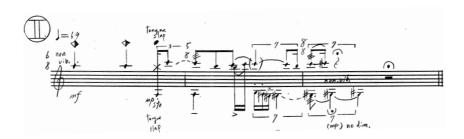


figure 2.7 Lizard (shadow), fr. II, bar 1-3

In the case of the *Lizard* for three players, there is an alienation between the instrumental groupings that corresponds to this idea of indeterminate placement that relies on the performer deciding on the orientation and placement of events. In fragment II of *Lizard* (*shadow & light*) for clarinet in B flat, trumpet and trombone, the clarinettist is given a flexible tempo whereas the trumpeter and trombonist play together as a kind of meta-instrument at a fixed tempo (figure 2.8).

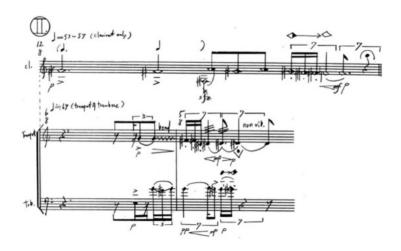


figure 2.8 Lizard (s&I), fr. II, bar 1-2

In fragment VII, the entrance of trumpet and trombone duo is indeterminate as indicated by the instruction of 'start to play any time after the clarinettist starts to play' (figure 2.9). The result is that the interdependency between the two instrumental groups becomes transitional but is still relevant as the performer's decision making relies on their interpretation of the performing situation.

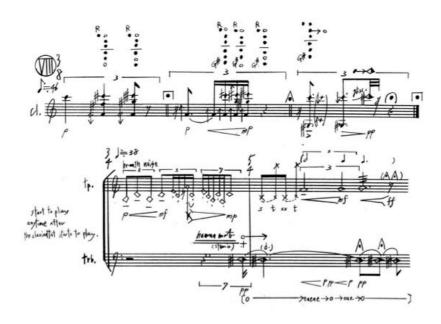


figure 2.9 Lizard (s&I), fr. VII

The first score I wrote after completed the *Lizard* series is *House of the sleeping beauties* for five players. The first movement begins with an accordion solo and the conducted trio (bass flute, bass clarinet and electric guitar) joins the solo at an indeterminate time. The result is a fluctuating, breathing structure, reflecting the conductor's 'live' decision.

### (Observation: Performative Indeterminacy)

Ray Evanoff's *notables* for piccolo and E flat clarinet (2013-14) employs both unison and independent tempo changes (figure 2.10). From bar 49 on page 8, two performers are rhythmically uncoordinated until the indication of 'resync' is given at bar 69/70 on page 12.

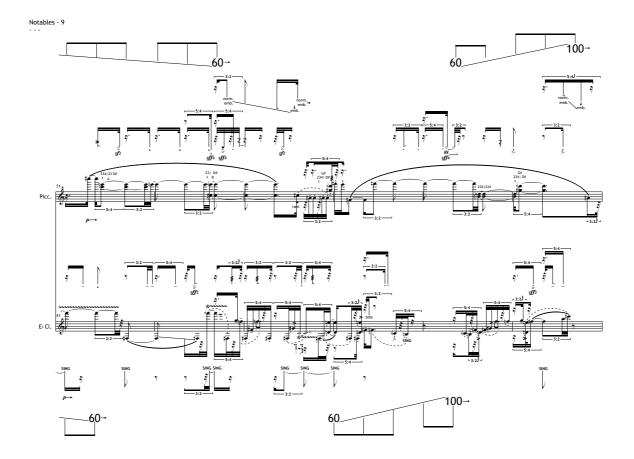


figure 2.10 Ray Evanoff's notables (2014, p. 9)

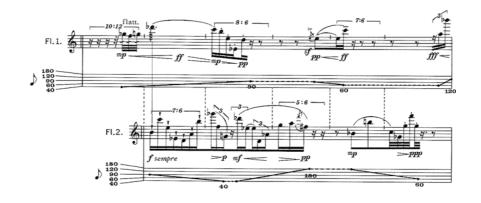
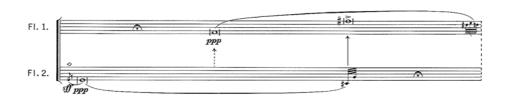


figure 2.11a Joji Yuasa's interpenetration, 1st movement (1998, p. 4)



**figure 2.11b** Joji Yuasa's *interpenetration*, 2<sup>nd</sup> movement (1998, p. 10)

In *interpenetration* (1963) for two flutes, Joji Yuasa frames a fluctuating boundary through mobility given by the interaction of performing speed and duration. In the first movement (figure 2.11a), each of the two flutists' performing lines individually fluctuates between six given tempi, requiring both performers, to be keenly alert to each other's motion in order to identify where they start and/or end their phrase; the notes enclosed in short straight lines in the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement (figure 2.12b) are to be sustained as long as they can within a single breath resulting an 'open' duration relying on the flutists' physical capacities and collaborative interactions between the two (Narimoto, 2013).

A unique approach can be seen in Chaya Czernowin's chamber works. *Anea Crystal* (2008) is composed as two string quartet works that can be played separately or combined to form a third work for string octet (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017, p. 85) (figure 2.12). She also writes in *Six miniatures and a simultaneous song* (1998) for a self-conducted trio (non-operatic female voice, guitar and viola) coordinated with a conducted quartet (bass flute, bass clarinet, alto saxophone and cello) that one is 'a fragile line-texture, very continuous, refined and highly articulated' and another is 'discontinuous, abrupt, boisterous, crude, at times grotesquely expressive', and that the two ensembles unfold 'as a counterpoint to each other' and merge 'into a strange third piece', emerging 'into a lopsided structure where their different weights, expressions, and dynamism interact.' (Czernowin, 1998)



figure 2.12 Chaya Czernowin's Anea Crystal (2009, p. 10)

## 2.5. Phase 1 Conclusion

The first phase of research into a musical engagement with the Japanese aesthetics of *ma* has allowed me to examine my cultural context and how I might approach musical structure, specifically the framing of events or phenomena. One useful definition of the *ma* concept is the quality of 'interpenetration' understood as an experiential situation where ambivalent statuses and opposite worlds are crossed and merged. In the *Lizard* series, this is brought about by means of silence and the relations of determinate-indeterminate space further to which a certain kind of performer subjectivity is actually rather controlled in terms of working with sequences of material and their placement. A more complex situation arises in an ensemble when a number of players are asked to negotiate timing with both fixed and less-fixed elements; I was particularly intrigued by what could be offered by this kind of multiplication or polyphony of timings in both solo and ensemble situations.

## 3. Phase 2 – Network of Lines in *Skin, Gelatine, Soot* (2013)

Skin, Gelatine, Soot for bass clarinet solo was written in early 2013 and premiered by Carl Rosman in April in the same year. The title comes from an imaginary picture of skin calligraphy. During the course of writing the score for this eighteen-minute long piece, I had a photograph-like image vaguely stuck in my mind. It was of the shoulder and arm of a woman on whose skin abstract brush patterns with Chinese ink were drawn with great contrasts in density and lighting. One day when I told my friend about this image which I had already kept for a while, she said that the ink is made of gelatine and soot, both of which are, in her words, alternative forms of lives: gelatine is obtained by heating and refining skins, bones and tendons of animals, and soot is produced when plants burn incompletely. This notion of hidden existences behind the image struck and overwhelmed me. I then wondered – are animals' and plants' memories, probably the woman's, too, still stored up in this picture? If so, do I, as a person thinking of myself looking at it, actually look at them, or am I looked at by them?

Following on my practices of an aesthetic of paradoxical architecture informed by the Japanese concept of space-time of *ma*, my interest shifted to the exploration of multiplicity, more precisely multiple identities. I searched for the degree to which one instrument or a piece of music can hold contrasting voices. I also wondered how discrete musical personalities can fuse together to create a new composite identity. This was a projection of my personal shift from the viewpoint of an individual having an aesthetic background of Japanese cultural sensibility to seeing that identity is something developing and polyphonic rather than permanent. At the same time, it was an expansion of my music language. Elizabeth Grosz addresses in relation to Bergson's and Deleuze's exploration on 'difference' that dualisms or relations of binary opposition, on which *ma* is grounded on, 'do not involve two terms at all, but two tendencies or impulses, only one of which is the ground of the other', the force which 'generates a term (or many) that maps, solidifies and orders this ground according to its terms' (2005, p. 6).

Indeed, the music of *Skin, Gelatine, Soot*, as it refers to the skin calligraphy with numerous lives concealed behind as its metaphor, comprises multiple 'different' strands of materials, indicating a series of phrases or gestures that generate discrete energy through 'moving' and 'growing'. The following section exemplifies various strategies for working with multiple instrumental lines. The discussion includes:

- (i) How materials differ from each other and how they themselves change in the course of the work (I categorise them into eight types for the sake of discussion although there is no clear demarcation as their relationship changes as they move and grow)
- (ii) How materials relate to each other and if an interpenetrative quality arises in performance and listening

In addition, I will also discuss:

(iii) How the work forming its shape as a web of strands might cause narrative dissolution in one's mind

### 3.1. Network of Lines

The performing materials used in this work are characterised as gestures of movement and growth – or 'becoming' – which recursively appear across sections or the five movements. For instance, *Material A*, which begins the 1<sup>st</sup> movement, is a slow, fragile trajectory featuring both narrow and wide multiphonics that unfold into a wider register and increases in density through looping (figure 3.1). At bar 17, *Material B*, a rather fast rotating gesture, replaces it; *Material A* reappears but in the form of a series of sustained wide multiphonics at bar 22. In addition, the *Material B* in the middle is expanded into a harmonic rotating gesture with slap tongue and extensively delineated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement, such as at bar 29-33 given in figure 3.2. *Material A* further develops into a short, concise form in the 4<sup>th</sup> movement which alternates with *Material C*, a regular pulse surrounded by inflections around the repeating notes (figure 3.4). This *Material C*, showing a clear connection with the last bar of the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement (figure 3.3), gradually transforms *towards* the first bar of the 5<sup>th</sup> movement (figure 3.5) over the course of which the material decreases in density and volume and increases in the number of semitone inflections.



**figure 3.1** *Skin, Gelatine, Soot* rev., 1<sup>st</sup> movement

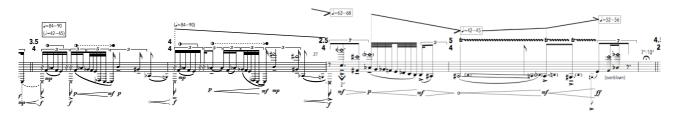


figure 3.2 SGS rev., Material B in 2<sup>nd</sup> mvt, bar 29-33

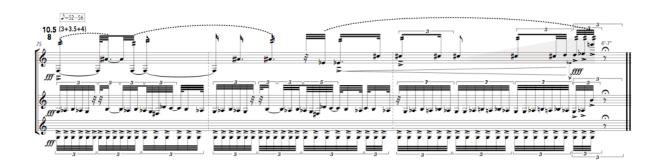


figure 3.3 SGS rev., 3<sup>rd</sup> mvt's last bar

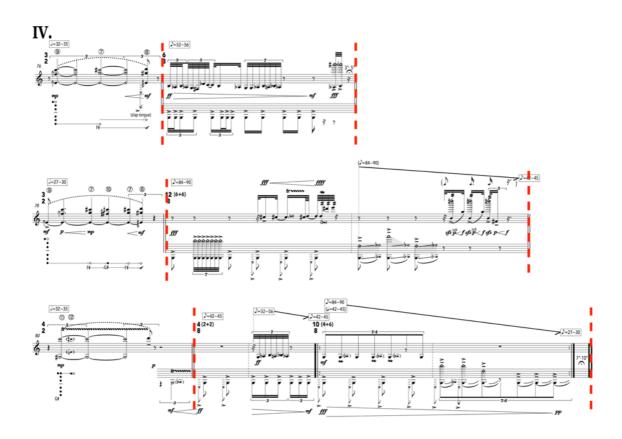


figure 3.4 SGS rev., 4th mvt



figure 3.5 SGS rev., 5<sup>th</sup> mvt's first bar

These links and connections between lines of performing materials are often signified by shared tempo or those variously relating to it. From the above-discussed instances, *Material A* given in the beginning and also ending of the 1<sup>st</sup> movement are both at *minim=32-35* (figure 3.1) while the first and third *Material A* in the 4<sup>th</sup> movement (bar 76 and 80) are also at *minim=32-35* but five beats slower thus at *minim=27-30* in the second in bar 78 (figure 3.4); in case of *Material B*, bar 17 in the 1<sup>st</sup> movement is at *crotchet=42-45* (which is ten beats faster than the *Material A*'s original tempo but in a different counting unit) (figure 3.1) while it is also doubled so that it proceeds at *crotchet=84-90* in bar 29 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement (figure 3.2).

Figure 3.6 shows a phrase of two bars consisting of fragments of or excerpts from *Material A* and *Material B* to be repeated for four times in bar 115-118 in the 5<sup>th</sup> movement. Here each fragment is at their associated tempo so that the music smoothly shifts between crotchet=32-35 (*Material A's* original tempo but in *crotchet* not in *minim*), 42-45 (*Material B's* original tempo), and 64-70 (the double of *Material A's* tempo).

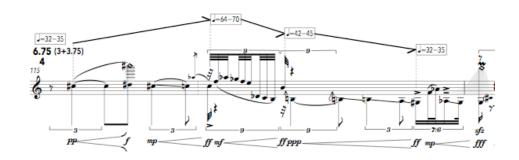
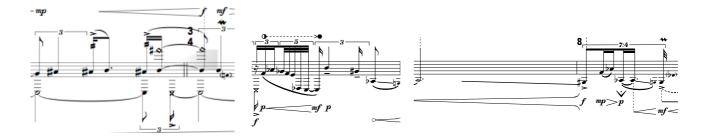


figure 3.6 SGS rev., 5th mvt, bar 115



**figure 3.7** *SGS* rev., *Material A* in 3<sup>rd</sup> mvt, bar 69-70 (left); *Material B* in 2<sup>nd</sup> mvt, bar 29 (middle); *Material A* in 1<sup>st</sup> mvt, bar 15-16 (right)

More direct linkage between gestures across sections and movements can be found in bar 110-111 in the 5<sup>th</sup> movement in which *Material D*, *Material E* and *Material F* are multi-layered; each has been delivered in the preceding bars such as bar 70 in 3<sup>rd</sup> movement, bar 104 in 5<sup>th</sup> movement, and bar 92 in 5<sup>th</sup> movement. Here the performer is required not only to recall how they performed each line earlier but also to define what and how to manipulate the given music in that space since producing all of these lines at once is physically impossible (figure 3.9).



figure 3.8 SGS rev., 5<sup>th</sup> mvt, bar 110-111



**figure 3.9** *SGS* rev., 3<sup>rd</sup> mvt, *Material D* in bar 70 (top); *Material E* in 5<sup>th</sup> mvt, bar 104 (middle); *Material F* in 5<sup>th</sup> mvt, bar 92 (bottom)

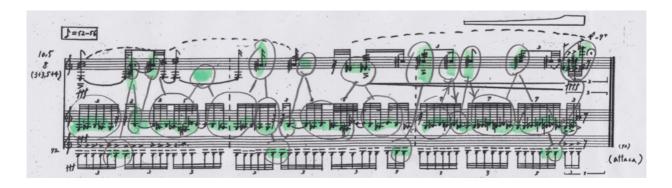


figure 3.10 sgs original ver., 3rd mvt, bar 75 – Samuel Dunscombe's interpretation of a multiply-layered space

The above figure 3.10 shows how Samuel Dunscombe interpreted and organized his performance of the last bar of the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement with its stratified space created by navigating multiple lines. According to Dunscombe his practice had three steps that were: to learn the three lines separately, to examine physical control and define how to simultaneously orient the three lines, and to practice the lines all together with the aim of producing the sonic (and choreographic) phenomena that he imagined and planned in the second stage. These processes enabled him to achieve a composite, collaborative identity rather than securing independency or clarity of lines; his decision making put the priority in how the 'interdependency' of lines could be controlled rather than minimalization of lost notes in the performance. (S. Dunscombe, personal communication, April 2017).

Tim Ingold writes in his book *Lines* that 'to tell a story' is 'to relate, in narrative, the occurrences of the past, retracing a path through the world that others, recursively picking up the threads of past lives, can follow in the process of spinning out their own' (2007, p. 103). This music as a tying together of lines of materials, or of the *traces* of growth and movement, forms its shape through the performer's and listener's memory architecture, an interweaving of their past and current inner experience: the lines as constituents of larger or integrated identity present themselves not only at that moment but also connect past and future. This forward, backward movement in order to generate or retrieve connections is crucial for the instrumentalist in terms of considering their interrelationship with the past memory and future appearance(s) of a musical element; for the listener, this structural pattern of networking of directional movements developing and recursively intersecting over the course of the piece triggers the inner linkage across time within the framework given by the context.

#### (Observation: Network of Lines)

Chaya Czernowin's piece *Die Kreuzung* (1995) for  $\hat{u}$  (Japanese mouth organ), saxophone, and double bass, is described as having multiple strands of estranged, isolated attempts. Further to this:

[T]he three instruments attempt to melt into one, but it is a fragile unity. The three attempt to hold their new identity together, but keep falling back into their old separated musical personalities. The whole piece is a struggle between the force that pushes the three to become one and the force that pushes each back, to be itself, true to its origin, alone. (2008, p. 3)

I understand this as a musical manifesto of her belief in 'unfolding', seeing identity as something never permanent but developing and heterogeneous in some degree. This is to imply that 'one must develop the capacity to recognize and live multiple identities' by means 'to create internal dialogue among them.' (p. 4)

Indeed several composers worked intensively with multiple, contradictory layers of information in their highly determined works that 'require a constant negotiation between performer and score that does not permit a casual deferral to "the composer's intentions" (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017, pp. 85-86). The solo part of the piano concerto Synaphaï (1969) by lannis Xenakis is notated on an average of six staves, requiring the pianist's coordination as if each finger moves as an independent entity, capable of directing its own outcome (Couroux, 2002, p. 54). The piece later influenced Evryali (1973), a controversial piano solo which 'deliberately oversteps the body, transgresses it, by projecting an austere "outside-time" phenomenon into the abyss between performer and instruments' (p. 37). Evan Johnson employs multiple rhythmic-melodic layers in his composition. He states this in the preliminary page of his piece Ground (2010) for contrabass clarinet that the performer must 'communicate' with the superabundant materials. Johnson requires the performer to project the situation in these passages through making every possible attempt to convey all the material on the page even if it is not literally playable. It is important that he specifies that the way of projecting the situation is 'not in any overtly theatrical or satirical manner, but through the choice of playing techniques and through the force of the attempt to succeed' (Johnson, 2010). Aaron Cassidy particularly places a high value on the 'unexpected conflicts, frictions, and "accidents" that lead to unique sonic outcomes' (Cassidy cited in Gottschalk, 2016, kindle. 2440-2441) which he seeks out through 'introducing layers and layers of procedural, interpretive, and translational distortion.' (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017, p. 108) In his bass clarinet solo metallic dust (1999), two lines of music are given to the instrumentalist, the pitch line and another indicating dynamics, breath, tonguing, and articulation, that are in counterpoint to each other, making the sounding results unpredictable.

Rutherford-Johnson describes the sound of Cassidy's music as 'a surface warped, folded, and scored beyond all recognition' the listening experience of which renders one's ear to struggle 'to grasp a semantic structure, patterns of repetition or opposition that would suggest an underlying grammar, and instead listens in the moment, hearing the motion of continual uprooting.' (p. 104)

Among many other composers working in this area of creative-research I found Brian Ferneyhough's invocation of a conventional paradigm interesting. He states in his *Collected Writings* that many players often fail to realize that most of the textures in his works are 'to a large degree relatable to gestural conventions already familiar from other contexts.' What is unfamiliar is 'the unusual rapidity with which these elements unfold and succeed one another', 'the high level of informational density in notational terms' and 'the extreme demands made throughout on the performer's technique and powers of concentration.' (1998, p. 372) Marc Couroux responds to this complexity from a pianist's perspective saying that in Ferneyhough's case 'the compositional focus steadfastly remains on the material, exploded into a "welter of surface detail," but which still nevertheless taps into the classical performer's reservoir of learned physical gestures' (2002, p. 54).

#### 3.2. Reversals

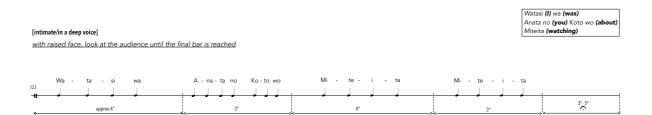


figure 3.11 SGS rev., 5<sup>th</sup> mvt, bar 123 (continued)

The music of *Skin, Gelatine, Soot* is a web of strands where people construct their own narrative by performing or listening to the lines and their interactions; the narrative or interpretative path could appear to them when they trace the lines and weave the things that have arisen in the past, through what is occurring in the moment, and that projects into the future. However, there is no single point at which such a memory construction starts and ends (even though there is a point at which the music starts and ends) because the act of finding one's own interpretative path is an exposure of the process of living which is not just limited to the duration of music. In designing the narrative

structure of this work, I thus reached the conclusion near the end of my composition process that the only possible way to close the music would be to transfer or to replace the space of instrumental strands with something completely different by doing something unforeseen which one's act of imagining would not include or would have dismissed.

The work is designed in a highly asymmetrical way: the first part is purely instrumental lasting approximately seventeen minutes; it is followed by approximately one minute involving the performer's recitation of Japanese text 'watashi wa/ anata no koto wo/ mite-ita' which could be translated as 'I have been watching you (with the nuance of keeping an attention to your (surface) form, behavior and condition as well as your surroundings)' accompanied by the choreographic gesture of raising their face and maintaining a gaze with the audience. Whilst the long instrumental section creates a sense of directionality through intricate entanglements of linear forces, here the established time-flow is problematized, evoking the sense of a veil being shifted between realities of presence, or in my terms, series of 'reversals':

- The opening section presents one performative reality in which physical effort is mediated by the instrument whilst the short closing section removes the instrument leaving the 'nakedness' of the performer's unique voice here the audience will be 'betrayed' by the fact the clarinettist has a voice that speaks because he/she is "expected" to be silent as a servant of music' (Saiki, 2017, p. 47), probably by 'silences and regulations [that] are [historically] imposed upon the instrumentalist's body' (Schlosser cited in Saiki, p. 47).
- Whilst the physical body and its movements are present during the purely instrumental section, the recitation of the text and the sound of speech reveals the performer's personhood in which the voice's relatively direct semantic, sonic and gestural articulations dissolves the somewhat distancing technicalities of instrumental performance In the opening chapter of *Lines* Ingold points to the perceptual shift that occurs that privileges words and their semantic meanings over their sonic content as that musical sound 'gives shape or form to their very perception of the world' as it 'permeates the awareness of listeners' whereas 'the attention of listeners is not drawn to the sounds of speech in themselves but rather to the meanings conveyed by them and which they serve, in a sense, to deliver' (2007, p. 6). Yet our perception of meaning is also coloured by vocal inflection, by the many qualities of the speech that give us cues about the emotional content attached to the words and these include timbre, pacing and inflection. I am interested in the very subtle space in which one's perception of words rest neither in 'pure sound' nor semantic communication, that is, a more unstable, perhaps uncanny territory of

perception which I define as a 'theatre of strangeness'. This became one of the central themes in my composition portfolio during the succeeding phrase.

- The layering of multiple sonic pathways in the first part of the solo work creates a complex and dense shroud to the performer's more 'naive' presence which is then foregrounded with the sudden falling away of instrumental density into a simple act of recitation.
- Furthermore, the performer's act of recitation directed through the gesture of gazing at the audience implies the reversal of the performer's and audience's role the person who was watched by the audience suddenly transforms into the one who is watching them; the people who were watching the performer metamorphose into those who are being watched by him/her as if 'I' and 'animals and plants' were in a fragile and reversible relationship in the fantasized image of the calligraphy on skin.

I am reminded of Zhuangzi's famous story of *Butterfly Dream* in which a man found himself on the blurred edge of distinction between I (subject) and a butterfly (object), in response to which Hsüan Ying pointed out that that can occur because they are in the world of transformation:

#### (Zhuangzi's story)

Once upon a time, I, Zhuangzi, dreamed I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of following my fancies as a butterfly, and was unconscious of my individuality as a man. Suddenly, I awaked, and there I lay, myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then Zhuangzi dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether a butterfly is now dreaming it is me. Between Zhuangzi and a butterfly there is necessarily a barrier. This is called transformation of things. (translated by Han, 2010, p. 5)

#### (Ying's commentary)

Looking at them in their ordinary appearance, there was necessarily a difference between them, but in the delusion of the dream each of them appeared the other, and they could not distinguish themselves! Kâu could be a butterfly, and the butterfly could be Kâu; — we may see that in the world all traces of that and this may pass away, as they come under the influence of transformations.' (Ying cited in Tzu, 2011, p. 217)

## 3.3. Other Compositions in the Portfolio

In addition, the following pieces were composed during the second phase, framing contrasting musical and/or physical phenomena; the works explore aspects of formal disruption through the layering and intercutting of materials as well as some prototypes for theatrical ideas. I have chosen not to discuss these in detail because they are not as resolved as the other works in the portfolio illustrating my key concepts. But they have been included in order to demonstrate the larger context of the process of evolution of my ideas.

- Soot (2013) for solo piano extracts three materials from Skin, Gelatine, Soot, and layers those
  materials having different time concepts; Kintsugi (2013) for solo percussionist also looks at the
  manipulation of these kinds of multi-layered gestures.
- In *Etude 2* for solo contrabass clarinet, seemingly seemingly opposite types of performing patterns are juxtaposed, and is a further exploration of ways of creating perceptual gaps for the listener.
- The Silence (2014) for alto flute, bass flute and orchestra divides the orchestra into three groups, each representing static/repetitive, explosive/circulating, and increasing/evolving patterns. Both strategies, multilayering and juxtaposition are employed in this work, exploring more complex polyphony of gestural patterns.
- Name (2013) for three percussionists is a structured improvisation focusing on the contrast
  between the performers' dynamisms and uses multiple notational devices in order to show
  progressive alterations in the instructional score as well as giving prototype instructions for
  elements of music theatre (change of performing positions) that I explored in later works.
- Duo (2013) for trumpet, trombone, 'cello, electric guitar and percussion is a 'bridging' piece
  which allowed me to move towards the third phase of research. The work explores disruption of
  instrumental patterns in which the performers shift their mode of performance quickly and
  suddenly.

#### 3.4. Phase 2 Conclusion

The research during the second phase explored the concept of multiple identities in response to my musical aesthetics of ambiguity. In *Skin, Gelatine, Soot*, narrative dissolution and abstraction of the work's certainty is triggered by complex network of multiple strands, and problematisation of the built time-flow as well as semantic meaning, opening up the space for the player's and the listener's individual narrative construction in relation to the contrasting performing acts presented successively. In addition, the player's physical movement was essential information for the performance and was examined in the recitation section.

# 4. Phase 3 – Theatre of Strangeness in *One Arm* series (2014-17)

'I can let you have one of my arms for the night', said the girl. She took off her right arm at the shoulder and, with her left hand, laid it on my knee. 'Thank you.' I looked at my knee. The warmth of the arm came through.

- from Yasunari Kawabata *One Arm* (trans. by Edward Seidensticker)

A composer friend who came to see the first performance of *One Arm 3* (2016) said 'stranger than I thought it could be' describing the element of distancing from the real world as he was intermittently immersed in the performance. The score for five players juxtaposes three 'looping' patterns which tend to disrupt each other mid-flow. In his observation, he created hypotheses or expectations about how things would unfold in time and for what this music could be about as he was listening. But he realized that his assumption had failed after a while when the pattern was disrupted by other patterns or different types of events and an immediate construction of a new hypothesis became crucial. This happened a few times. The strongest impact eventually left to him was the experience of estrangement – the experience of multiple shifts in perspective and sensibility in the course of the work generated a feeling of alienation (B. Sherouse, personal communication, April 2016).

Under the title *One Arm* referring to Japanese writer Yasunari Kawabata's short novel of the same title, four works have been written so far: *One Arm 1* (2014) for trombone and 'cello, *One Arm 2* (2015) for solo voice, *One Arm 3* (2016) for five players, and *One Arm 4* (2017) for voice, trombone and 'cello. The sections below discuss the compositional principles shared across these works and how those might frame one's construction of a specific narrative pattern.

#### 4.1. Problematisation

One of the main explorations in the *One Arm* works is an 'interruptive' structural pattern that problematises the construction of a linear narrative. In *One Arm 1* for trombone and 'cello, each three instrumental pattern encloses the repeats of a series of gesture(s) among which Pattern A and Pattern C are indicated by dashed slurs of differing appearance encompassing single cycles. The performers are required to project cycles as if taking place in a single breath; when the beginning and/or end of a dashed slur is not attached to a note, the gesture should sound incomplete.

Pattern A, for instance, is a hyper-complex interweaving between trombone and cello delineating a large arch form over a series of four bars [3/16, 5/8, 8/8, 7/16] (figure 4.1). At bar 10/11, for instance, the moving trace of Pattern A is disrupted by Silence, considered to be another 'performing' material, and stops at the fourth bar although two semi-quavers shorter than the original 5/16 bar. At this moment, namely when the music enters the Silence, both performers immediately stop playing their instruments, quickly raise their faces and look at the audience and start to recite the text in unison.

Pattern B is composed of a unison gesture in 3/8 with a concluding 2/8 bar (figure 4.2). At the shift from Pattern B to Pattern A at the bar 96/97, both of the circulations of material are cut off in the middle of their cycles: the foregoing Pattern B stops a 16<sup>th</sup> beat shorter than usual [5/16] whereas the subsequent Patten A starts from the fourth bar [7/16] of the cycle of four bars, i.e. the whole arch form is not delivered. From the performative perspective, here the trombonist and cellist quickly break off their repetitive and synchronized movement and change their performing mode into the delineation of the hyper-complex gestural arch of Pattern A.

Pattern C is a circulation of a concise interlocked gesture in a 3/8 bar: a seven-tuplet beat in a crotchet and a quaver rest (with fermata) (figure 4.3). At bar 105/106, when Pattern C replaces Pattern A, its first bar is shortened: the first two beats in the seven-tuplet in a crotchet are omitted and the pattern starts from the middle of the cycle, providing a sense of 'suddenness' as well as 'incompletion'.



figure 4.1 One Arm 1, Pattern A to Silence (Recitation), bar 1-11

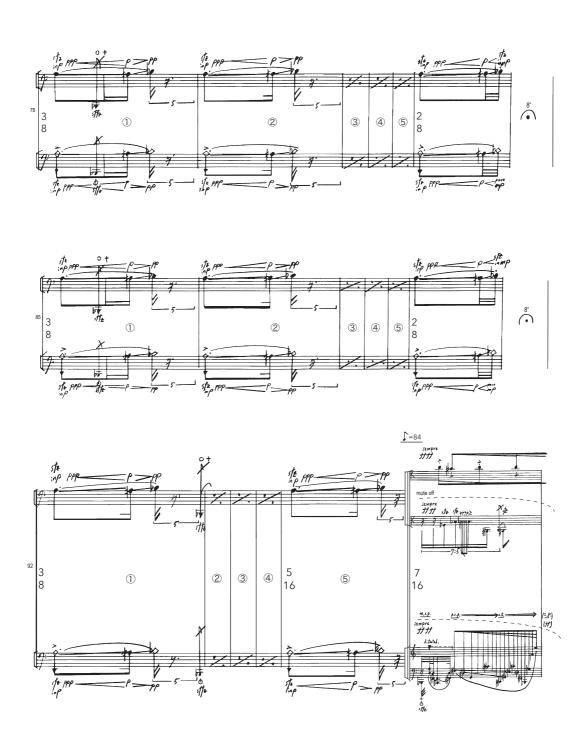


figure 4.2 OA1, Pattern B to Pattern A, bar 78-97

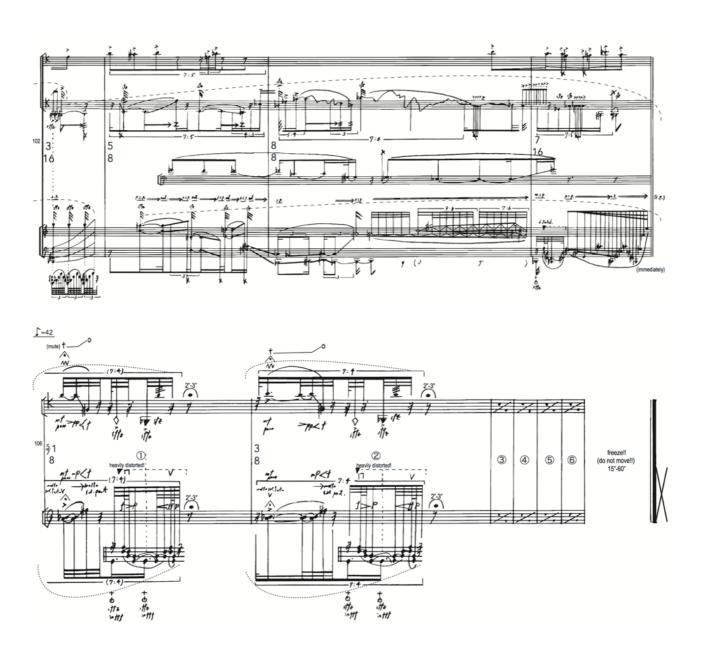


figure 4.3 OA1, Pattern A to Pattern C, bar 102-112

The narrative pattern which this and other *One Arm* pieces offer to the audience – with the structural pattern of deliberately thwarting, restarting and redirecting the performing actions – is an experience of going *across*, a journey without trails: the looping patterns are disconnected and in rupture so that the performer and audience should go 'across; not however stage by stage, from one destination to the next, but from one point of rupture to another' (Ingold, 2007, p. 167). Such a lack of point-to-point connectors or line guiding one's creation of narrative path would enable them to reassemble the fragments – or 'field' or 'places' – into larger wholes and to complete their imaginative picture by joining up those distributed components. This integration process, fitting fragments into structures of progressively greater inclusiveness (p. 94) is different from the previous cycles by neither linking short or non-directional object-like gestures (*Lizard*) nor going along with lines (*Skin, Gelatine, Soot*).

#### (Observation: Problematisation)

Rutherford-Johnson critiques Ferneyhough's recent works aiming to disrupt 'pathways of memory, overloading, thwarting, or redirecting them' (2017, p. 177). For instance, *Incipits* (1996) for viola and small ensemble has seven discrete 'beginnings' that 'draw the listener into a set of expectations that they must keep having to drop and reboot' thus memory is forcibly wiped clean at each beginning (Ibid.). Similarly, thousands of tiny samples of instrumental sounds in Steven Kazuo Takasugi's *Iridescent Uncertainty* (1997-99) cut up any sense of continuity or directional flow of movement so that every event or element becomes a new 'now' to the listener's ears. By extension, his *Strange Autumn* (2003/04) for reciter/vocalist, percussionist, and electronic playback applies this hyper cut and paste method into text recitation as well where the recorded speaking voice of English and German texts crosscut each other failing or confusing the delivery of semantic meanings. I examined such a disrupted recitation in my *One Arm* series although not just for thwarting one's linear understanding of the spoken text but also for creating a distancing effect as one makes judgements as to what to look at, what to listen to, and what to imagine (see 4.3. for further details).

# 4.2. Theatricality

Another layer that might serve in forming a narrative quality in the piece is the notion of unison in a sliding scale of degrees of exactitude. The three patterns in *One Arm 1* for trombone and cello show different degrees of unison which are explicit both in sounds and visual cues: intertwined between a series of highly complex and independent gestures (*Pattern A* in figure 4.1 & 4.3), in complete unison

with very simple gestures (*Pattern* B in figure 4.2), and interlocked between short and concise gesture (*Pattern C* in figure 4.3).

Silence can be another moment in sync at which the performers should remain motionless, not losing the tension. At bar 28 in *One Arm 3*, for instance, all five performers freeze their motions and keep that posture for twenty-five seconds. Preparation such as fingerings on cello happens immediately after the twenty-five seconds, not during it.

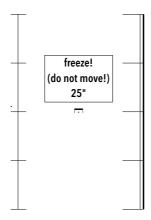


figure 4.4 OA3, bar 28

#### (Observation: Theatricality)

This idea of exploring unison states of different degrees was influenced by Simon Steen-Andersen's *Study for String Instruments #1* (2007) specifically the version for trombone and 'cello arranged and played by the Two New Duo (for whom the series' initial work *One Arm 1* was composed). Steen-Andersen's piece, originally written for indeterminate string instrument solo, uses a form of tablature notation. The trombonist Stephen Menotti plays the score with his instrument completely timed in unison with 'cellist Ellen Fallowfield, resulting in their hands and arms moving in sync: his gesture of stretching the right arm to extend the slide synchronizes with her right arm moving with the bow while the gestures to open and close his mute with his left hand correspond to the her left hand moving up and down on the instrument's fingerboard (see three positions in figure 4.6).

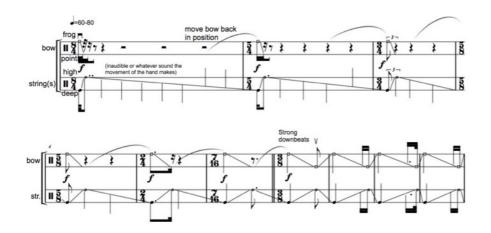


figure 4.5 Simon Steen-Andersen's Study for String Instruments #1 (2011, p. 1)



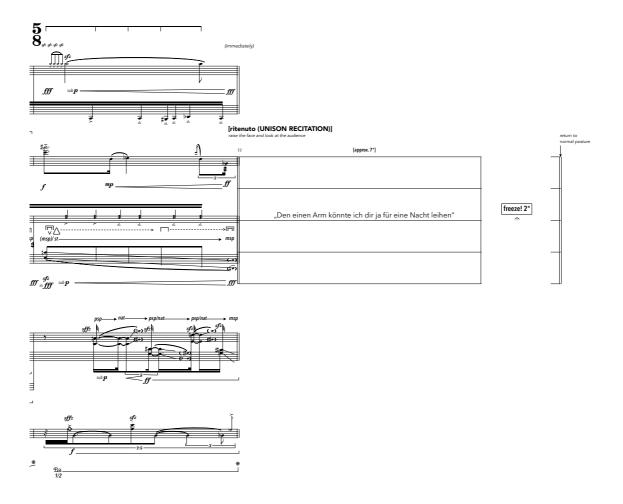




**figure 4.6** Stills from Two New Duo performing their own version of Simon Steen-Andersen's *Study for String Instruments #1* (2007) (Menotti)

# 4.3. Ventriloquism Effect

Text recitation is another 'unison' state framed in *One Arm*. All works in this series include the text given at the beginning of this chapter in the form of unison recitation. At bar 10/11 in *One Arm 3* for five players, for instance, all five instrumentalists immediately stop their movements, quickly change their posture to staring at the audience transforming the presence of the listeners from people 'who see' into people 'who are seen' (figure 4.7). At the same time, they start to recite in a complete unison at a slower tempo than usual speech. This set of actions repeats three times and the text composed of five sentences is divided into three at unnatural positions.



**figure 4.7** *OA3* bar 10-11

This becomes a moment of both alienation – the strangeness of performers leaving their 'normal' tasks to recite as a group – and of intimacy or complicity between people, where the audience

becomes more aware of how they are listening and looking and how they are being looked at. From the perspective of narrative or a fantastical quality that the text may add, the estrangement between the imaginary scene of a strange communication between a girl and a man and what is happening in front of the audience may open up a charged imaginary space for the audience. (The performer is asked to recite in the language that the majority of people there can immediately understand so that they can project their own subjective interpretations of the text during the performance.) For the performers, to recite the fictional story is, in a sense, to become a medium or conduit and to channel and evoke something from a different world. In such a situation, the performers' presences become something like marionettes or ventriloquist's dolls where they discard their instrumentalist role and sense of self, allowing themselves to be taken over by someone or something unseen.

#### (Observation: Ventriloquism Effect)

Takasugi's *Sideshow* (2009-15) for octet, electronic amplification, and playback involves two types of performative actions, one aimed at creating instrumental sounds, and the other, various movements producing effects of ventriloquism. There are 'page turns, cued glances, time beat with the foot, the exchange of doubling instruments, the muting of instruments, the acknowledgment of the audience', all of which 'become foregrounded, rehearsed, stylized...acted', regardless of what is brought into our ears at that moment (Takasugi, 2016, pp. 3-4). His exploration of inconsistency also lies between recorded or 'dead' sounds and 'live', acoustic performance, decoupling of music's physical production and its labour from the sounding whole to varying degrees as he says '[t]heater is a sleight of hand. It is the distraction by which the dead rise covertly, poignantly, unbeknown...or only vaguely sensed...among the live, the living.' (p. 4).

For Liza Lim, ventriloquism is one of the ways to stage an extra presence — 'the hidden voice, the story that lies beyond another story'. This conception is tightly associated with distortion effects that enable her to bring 'strangeness, alien-ness, divine or demonic energies, shock, repulsion, awe and other signs of the sublime into view'. Her works with voice, including the most recent opera *Tree of Codes* (2016) deals with 'a special kind of voicing, a voice that comes from pushing one identity aside in order for another to come forward' where noise elements or deformation suggest 'a trace, the evidence of invisible presences squeezing through into our space-time field.' (Lim, 2017)

#### 4.4. Phase 3 Conclusion

One Arm invites the audience to project their interpretation onto a situation. The juxtaposing structure is a further development of my idea of creating ambiguous spaces for the listener and performer to project their imagination onto a musical performance. This is enabled by the spaces' competing qualities and the circulating patterns of behaviour crosscut with segments that disrupt the dynamic flow mid-cycle. In addition, I add another layer to the experiential qualities of the performance through the application of a narrative in the form of choreographed recitation by the musicians.

# **Conclusion**

My research into a musical engagement with the Japanese aesthetics of *ma* has provided me a prototype for ways of thinking about musical relations and pattern making. One significant aspect of the concept of *ma* is the quality of interpenetration, an experiential space for simultaneous reception of different ambivalent phenomena.

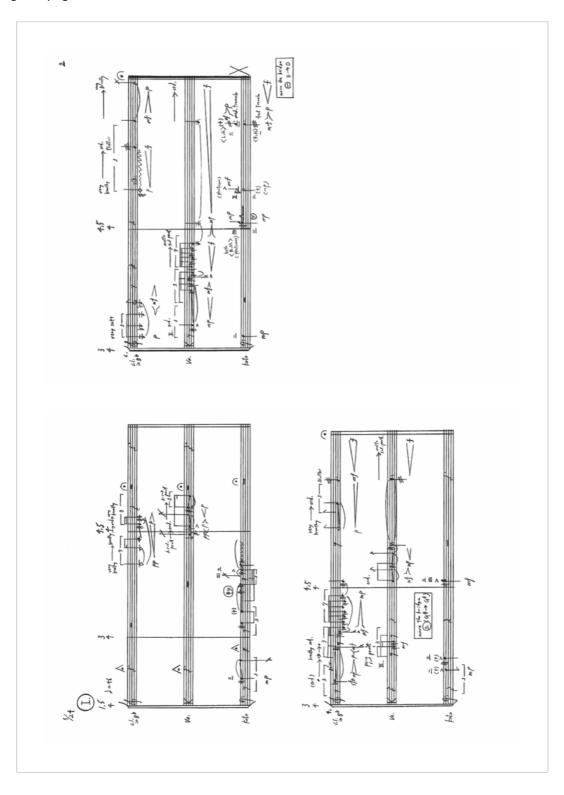
In the *Lizard series*, the performer's own narrative construction is framed by silences, the relations of determinate-indeterminate space and various unstable qualities such as transitional dynamics and fluctuating hierarchies between instrumentalists. In *Skin, Gelatine, Soot*, a complex network of multiple strands, an asymmetrical architecture of paradoxical performing states, and recitation of Japanese text with the performer's own voice are the principle techniques I used for disturbing the work's certainty. In the *One Arm* series which I describe as a 'theatre of strangeness', the alienation or distancing effect is brought about by interruptive behaviours of performing patterns and the ventriloquism effect where the performers repeatedly discard their normal state of being as instrumentalists leading to a decoupling between what is seen, heard, and imagined by the audience. These movements between different modes of performance and attention from the performers and their potential to disrupt the reception by the audience is my approach to creating an interplay between performers'/audiences' subjective and objective worlds to create a distinctive moment.

Pursuing the heightened aesthetics of *ma* in music led me to compose using paradoxical structures that invite a transcendent experience for listeners. It paradoxically helped me to move away from defining myself solely via the socio-cultural codes of Japaneseness, and to reach a new consciousness of who I am as a composer beyond an easily definable nationality, culture or history, towards a sense of multiple slippages between the masks that seemingly differentiate us in both positive and negative ways.

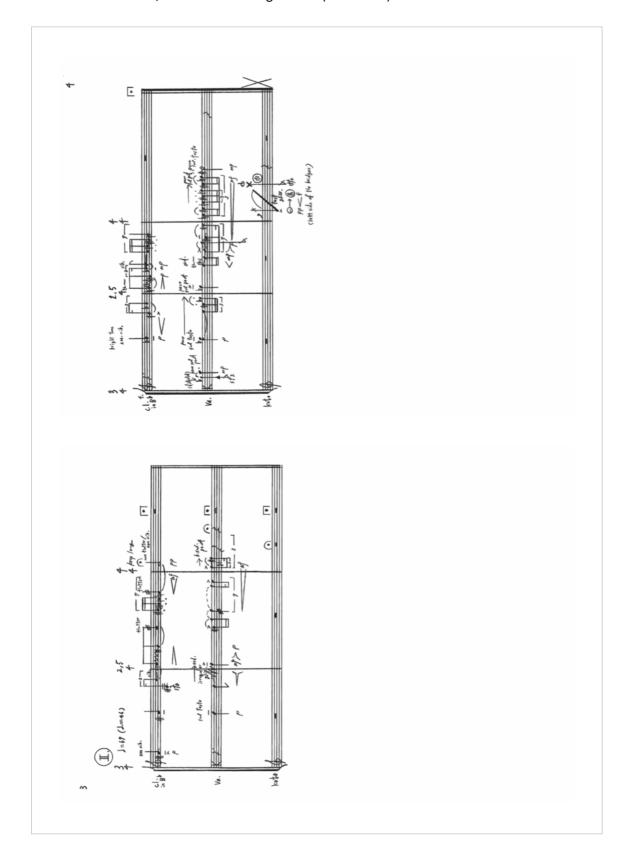
# **Appendix**

# Lizard for B-flat clarinet, viola and 13-stringed koto

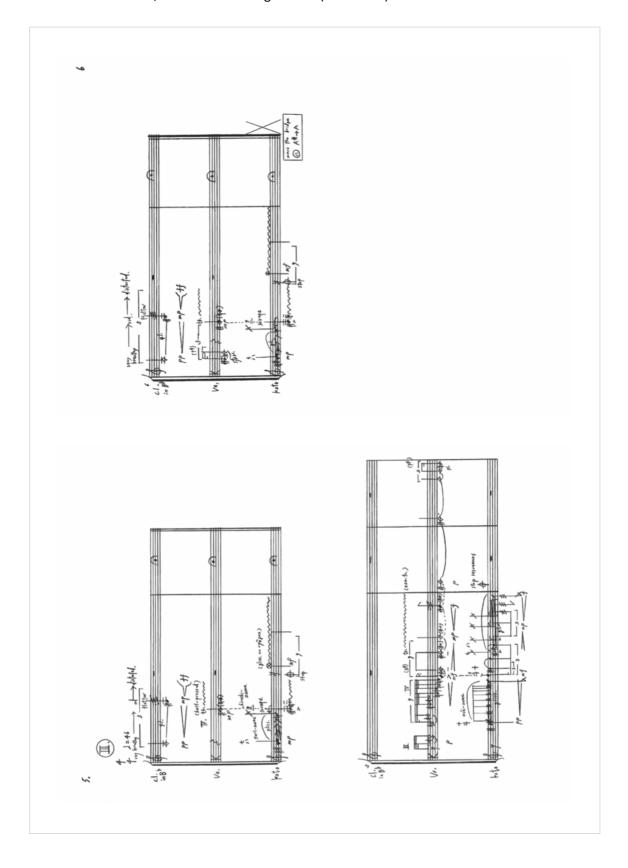
All players use the same score. The bound hard copy having each of the twelve fragments on the facing two pages.



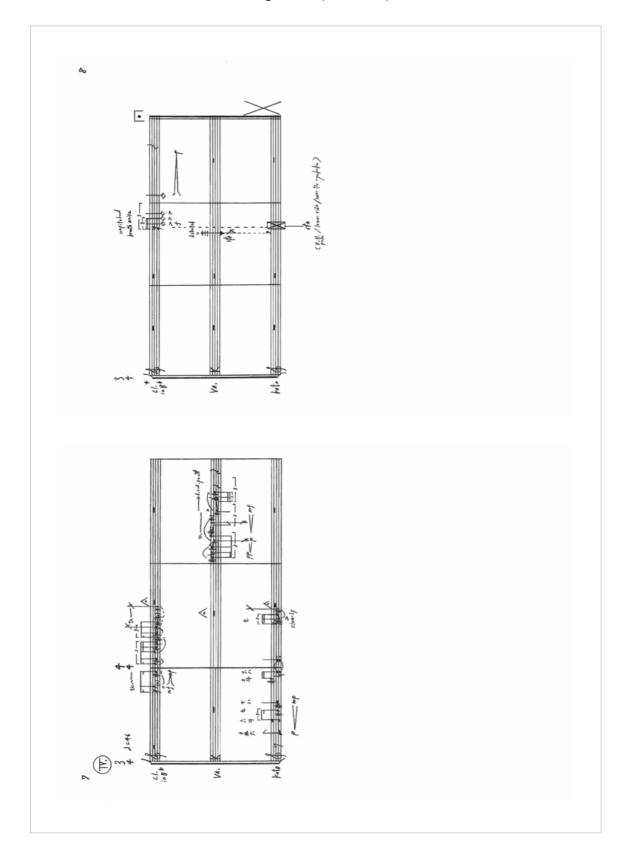
Lizard for B-flat clarinet, viola and 13-stringed koto (continued)

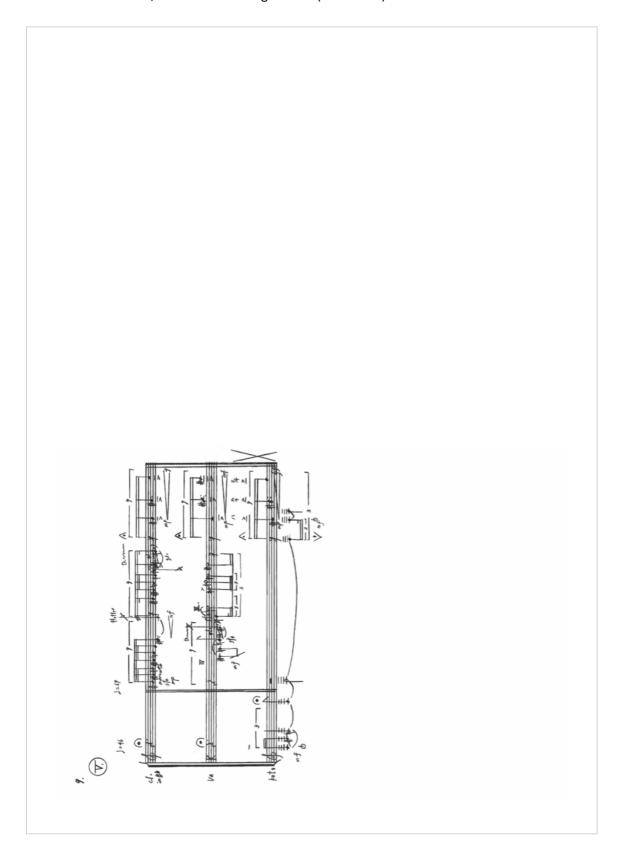


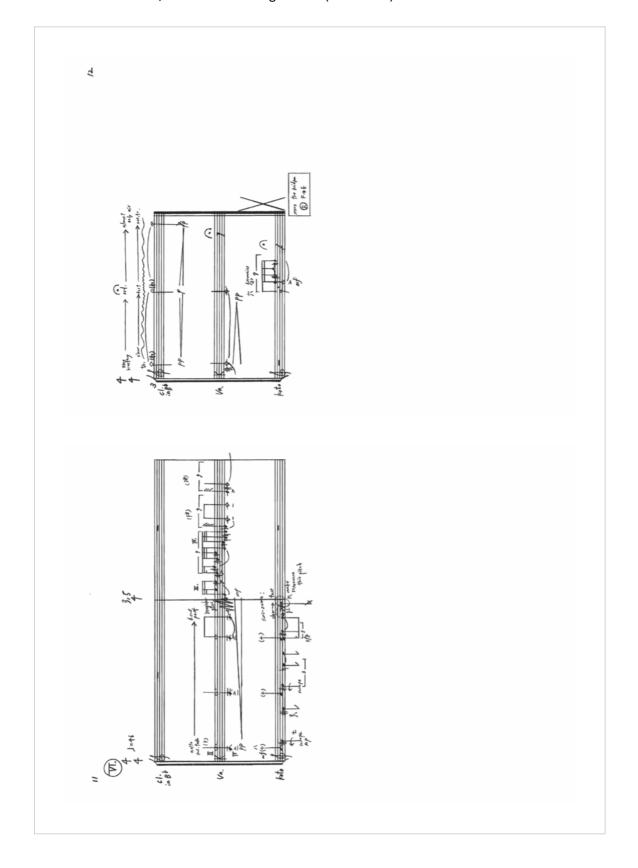
Lizard for B-flat clarinet, viola and 13-stringed koto (continued)



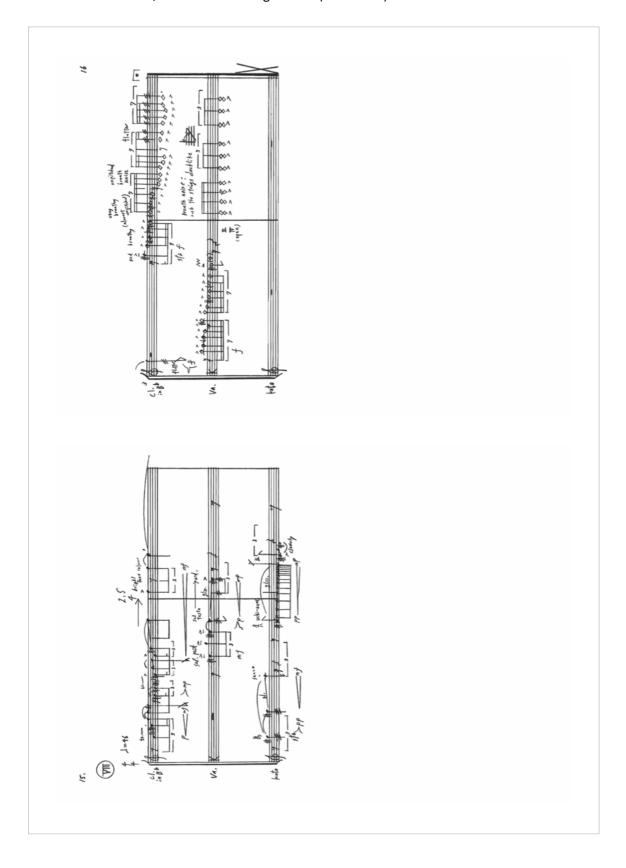
Lizard for B-flat clarinet, viola and 13-stringed koto (continued)

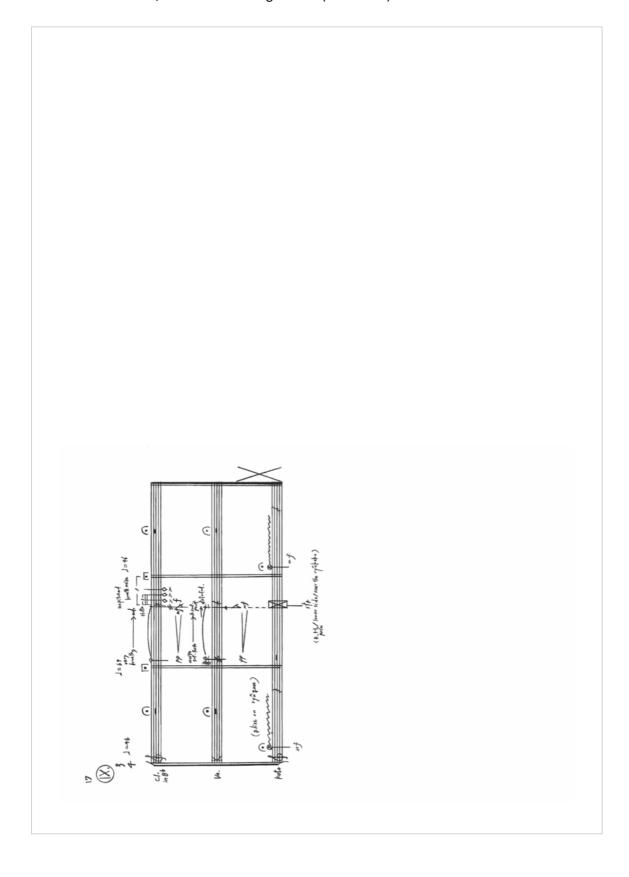




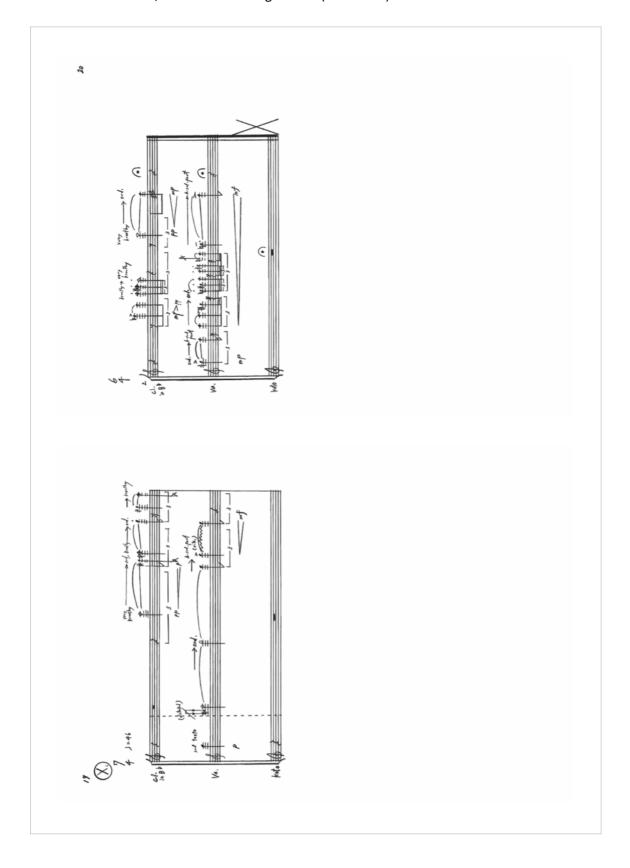


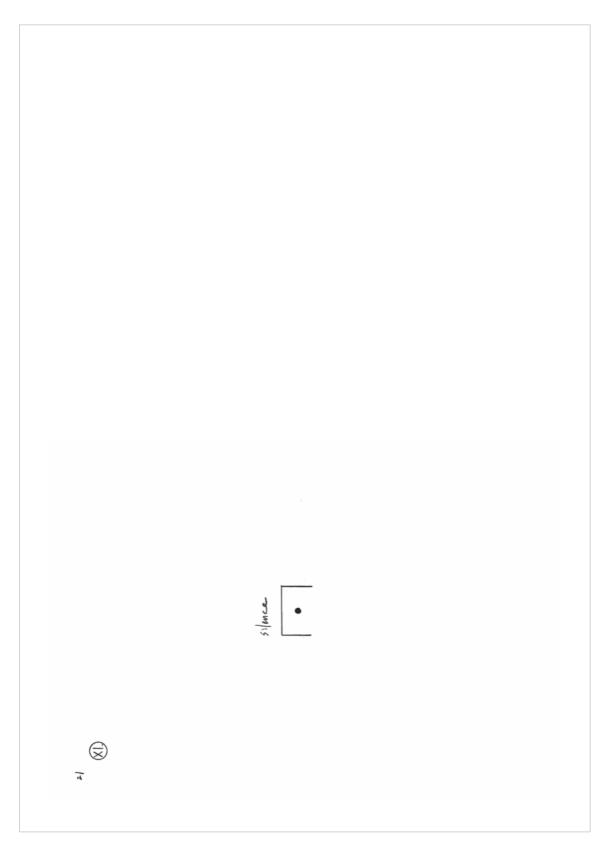
Lizard for B-flat clarinet, viola and 13-stringed koto (continued)

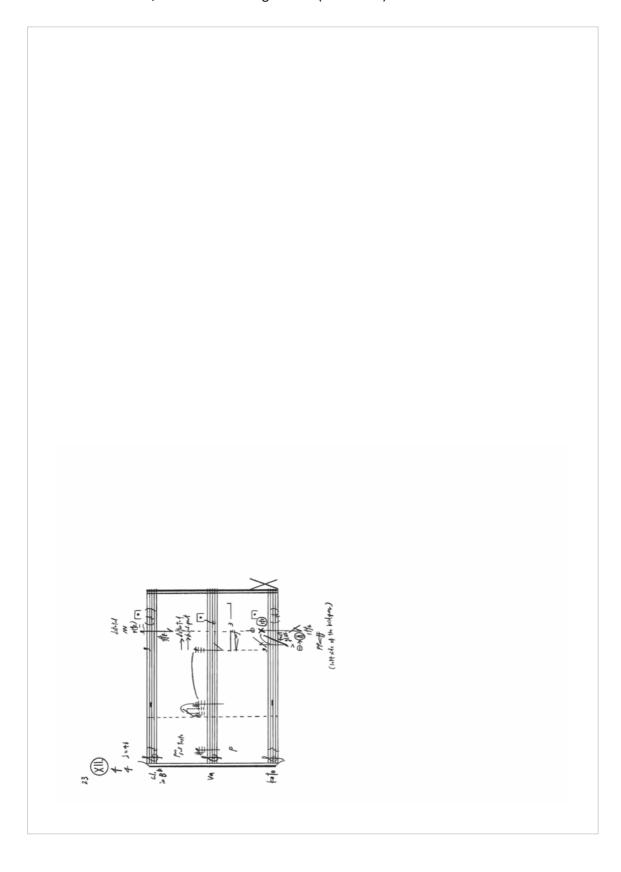




Lizard for B-flat clarinet, viola and 13-stringed koto (continued)







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