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## **Aurality & the modern urban landscape**

Invoking the flâneur - tracing a relationship between creativity and the city in my  
practice-research.

Stephen Harvey

A portfolio of compositions and a supporting commentary submitted to the  
University of Huddersfield in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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**Abstract:**

This commentary discusses an ongoing artistic practice that embodies the rich metaphor of the *flâneur* as the critical wanderer, observer and collector as imagined by Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*. Principally, improvisation and studio composition are the core components of a two-part composition workflow that is philosophically grounded when considered against the values of *flânerie*. By adopting the *flâneur* metaphor as a central motif throughout, I will argue that a critical and potent creative practice that foregrounds two independent lines of enquiry can be achieved.

Since the *flâneur* is deeply associated with the metropolis, an evocation of the urban environment remains a constant reference point in both the creative and analytical elements of the work. The conflation of music and image is a prominent constituent of this practice, both as an audio-visual component and as a visual aid to the production of music. This idea is clearly reflected and referenced in the portfolio of works.

The oscillating approach associated with this practice is thoroughly evaluated while the initial production and the subsequent manipulation and composition of 'raw', improvised music is clearly delineated. Linking the *flâneur* metaphor to this oscillating two-part workflow when realising new musical works is central to the practice, how this is accomplished is thoroughly analysed whilst referencing the portfolio of works. The commentary also reflects on the apparent paradox that fixing improvised material continues to illicit. However, as I demonstrate, this process can be both practical and fruitful when the concept of the *flâneur* metaphor is combined with the pragmatic nature of the recording studio. Whilst the studio space might be considered a purely functional environment, it can, with experience and imagination be both empowering and efficacious in the creative process.

Finally, by drawing on the approaches outlined and considering the portfolio submitted, this commentary concludes that by oscillating between seemingly disparate forms and paradoxical procedures one can provoke an exciting dialogue where a coherent, inspiring artistic practice can emerge and move forward.

## Introduction

This commentary is a comprehensive reflection on my practice and is a supporting document to a portfolio of work produced as part of my PhD practice-research. It is a chronicle of strategies that I consider to be reliable and effective for collecting, improvising and composing new work. Primarily, it describes a method that draws on the idea of the flâneur as a valuable aid in the artistic process and how the flâneur metaphor can be invoked throughout the creative endeavour. The implications of the flâneur in practice are manifold, and I undertake to provide a detailed analysis of exactly when and how these ideas are manifested in the two-part workflow that I see as central to the research.

On the surface, the practice might appear disparate and lacking in coherence, after all, it is wholly based on the poetic idea of ‘wandering aimlessly’ through the urban environment. However, I hope to convince the reader that far from being a wasted journey, this methodology is a powerful means of sourcing material that is valuable in promoting new ideas.

The *Arcades Project* is the most critical reference point for all that is discussed in the commentary. That it gave me the confidence to pursue what appears to be such an ambivalent practice, *The Arcades Project* is a perfect example of a work of undeniable scope (and genius) linked by wholly disparate fragments. *The Arcades Project* is an unfinished project by the German literary theorist and philosopher, Walter Benjamin, researched, collected and collated, (though not edited or published) in the thirteen years before his untimely death in September 1940. Originally conceived of in Paris in the 1920s, the book, first published in English in 1999<sup>1</sup>, contains a mass of material—a montage of writing, musing, quotation and general miscellanea. Although diverse in format, it is centred on the iconic glass and iron structures that are the Paris Arcades, seen by Benjamin as indicative of an emerging capitalist ideology and emblematic of a new modernist era. The Paris arcades, also known as “The Covered Passage of Paris” (*Passages couverts de Paris*) constitute a shopping street fabricated in steel, built primarily in the early 19th century; indeed, by the middle of the century there were around 150 such passages in existence. These pedestrianised walkways would have had glass ceilings and during hours of darkness would have been illuminated with gas lamps.

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<sup>1</sup> German edition published in 1982. Edited by Rolf Tiedemann under the name *Das Passagen-Werk*.



They would have been lined with small shops and at either end would connect two parallel open streets.

The book represents a body of work that is eclectic in its topics much of its contents derived from meandering through the city as a journalist/detective or collector whilst utilising established forms of research such as citing other writings, photographs and published manuscripts. This is the very epitome of the *flâneur*—the one who wanders aimlessly, specifically one who does so in the city “with the aid of methods more akin - above all, in their dependence on chance - to the methods of the nineteenth-century collector of antiquities and curiosities, or indeed to the methods of the nineteenth-century rag picker, than to those of the modern historian. Not conceptual analysis but something like dream interpretation was the model.”<sup>2</sup>

One is somewhat reminded of the work of John Cage, curiosity through chance procedure or errand through exploration. “For Cage, indeterminacy and chance methods were strategies for asking questions without the necessities of also providing answers.”<sup>3</sup> In the methods employed by Cage we see an attempt at ridding the artist of ego through play and chance procedure. Much like the *flâneur*/composer metaphor Cage is attempting to find an unauthored voice through the filter of chance. This was only partially successful as his authorial voice is clearly present and much of his work, no matter who plays it, can be attributable to him. The authorial voice is often reflected in the personality, preoccupations and psychology of the author, it becomes like a watermark on the work regardless of their lack of overall control or even active determination to avoid repetition of ideas, themes and subjective points of view. As Andrew Sarris states the *auteur* only becomes obvious “Over a group of films, a director must exhibit certain recurrent characteristics of style, which serve as his signature”<sup>4</sup> However, Cage’s attempts to dissociate his ego from his practice is helpful in any discussion of the possibility of a ‘neutral’ stance taken by the *flâneur* and by association the improviser. Cage states

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<sup>2</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999). *The Arcades Project*. Ed. Tiedemann, R. Trans. Eiland, H. and McLaughlin, K. Harvard Press. USA. pp. ix

<sup>3</sup> Toop, D. (2017). *Into the Maelstrom: Music, Improvisation and the Dream of Freedom*. Bloomsbury Academic London, UK. pp. 60

<sup>4</sup> Sarris, A. (1962). *Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962* Online PDF Retrieved December 2019. <https://dramaandfilm.qwriting.qc.cuny.edu/files/2011/06/Sarris-Notes-on-the-Auteur-Theory.pdf>

the answer must take the form of paradox; a purposeful purposelessness or a purposeless play. This play, however, is an affirmation of life—not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we are living, which is so excellent once one gets one’s mind and one’s desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord.<sup>5</sup>

The flâneur is only partially successful at ridding the researcher of their ego, but as we shall discuss the flâneur/improviser is many-faceted and works alongside the flâneur/composer throughout the two-part process of composition discussed over the next few pages.

In the research that followed from discovering *The Arcades Project*, there appeared to be other common ideas around these journeys without maps navigated by a sense of wonder. The Benjamin project represents a vision of mid-century modern Paris. Filtered through collected remnants and snippets, it is evident that these disparate artefacts—collected photographs, junk, memories, ideas, articles, and the general detritus of the city—can in some way enlighten us regarding the hidden details of a particular place. Guided by one’s senses on a journey to no-where in particular one cannot help but be aware of certain particularities, what Benjamin might consider to be the aura of a particular place. “What is aura, in fact? A gossamer fabric woven of space and time: a unique manifestation of a remoteness, however close at hand.”<sup>6</sup> Sights, sounds even smells can be insightful; “...for me, it's the smell of a ‘dirty water’ hot dog or a pastrami sandwich. Those are uniquely New York things...”<sup>7</sup> It is in these characteristic details that interesting and insightful connections are made. One should not always adhere to a given route to experience something significant, to discover the aura; one could appropriate the flâneur metaphor to guide one through that which is concealed and inexplicable.

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<sup>5</sup> Cage, J. (2009). *Silence: Writings and Lectures*. Marion Boyars Publishers. London. UK

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin, W. (2009). *Brief History of Photography*. Found in *One-way Street and other writings*. Penguin Books London, UK. pp. 184

<sup>7</sup> Antony Bourdain interview online. <https://www.wheretraveler.com/new-york-city/stay/road-anthony-bourdain> Retrieved 17th May 2019.

Whilst the flâneur is a necessary and hugely useful constituent, any discussion of this practice has to be mindful of the overarching idea of a two-part workflow, the oscillation that occurs between a wandering state (flânerie) and the focused state. What emerges is a dialectic that considers two quite disparate states; one involving a high degree of spontaneity, chance, serendipity and even error the other aims to curate, applying an authorial voice to the work. Perhaps this could be considered a betrayal of the flâneur; however, I prefer to think of it as a form of agonism, where opposition and conflict are considered potentially positive, indeed necessary to thrive. It is precisely this oscillation that is so empowering, allowing the work to develop in an open natural way, applying precision and immutability when required. However, since nothing is ever completely finished, immutability is possibly exaggerating the situation; the oscillation remains beyond the fixing, one state feeding into the other forever.

In applying an untethered two-part workflow to the various strands of the practice, it will become clear that this idea is in no way fixed, it is the fluid nature of the method that is essential. What appears to be one way of working can actually incorporate aspects of another, and this state is being continuously revised, oscillating is the prime situation. One could see this as a kind of agonistic conflict, a contest that is positively channelled; one chess move begets another. So rather than being hindered by indecision the process is both coherent and inspiring and driven by each strand.

In the second half of this commentary, I discuss each of the works in the portfolio and discuss how each task relates to both the flâneur metaphor and the two-part workflow that concludes with ever more precise compositional control. I will describe how the dual approach works in practice, when the methods are successful and when there is a betrayal of the process. Analysis of the aims and influences of the work will be carried out and related to how these ideas radiate and accord with the workflow. Consideration of the diverse interests that converge in this practice will be inevitable, and perhaps it is the broad range of collected details, that, like *The Arcades Project*, informs much of what occurs within the practice.

## Section One.

Where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on.  
**Samuel Beckett: The Unnameable.**

## Chapter One.

### The flâneur as navigator.

How effective is the relationship between creativity and the urban situation when experienced through the filter of the flâneur?

- What is the flâneur? Via French from the Old Norse “to wander with no purpose”

The idea of the flâneur appears as a recurring motif in academia and theoretical art studies in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, through the work of Will Self,<sup>8</sup> Iain Sinclair<sup>9</sup> and the Situationist, Guy Debord<sup>10</sup> to name just a few, but it is by no means a wholly recent proposition. Though there had been some reference to the flâneur as stroller or idler often associated with aimless loafing, during and after the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was later, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where we see the idea of the flâneur being revealed as a more complex and manifold character in literature. In 1872, in the eighth volume of the *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* compiled by Pierre Larousse, we find the flâneur variously described as equal parts curious, intelligent and lazy. However, Victor Fournel believed that there was nothing lazy about flânerie. Instead, it was a way of understanding the wide variety of the city landscape

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<sup>8</sup> Self, W. (2007). *Psychogeography*. Bloomsbury Publishing. London UK.

<sup>9</sup> Iain Sinclair is a writer and filmmaker whose work embodies ideas around psychogeography and flânerie. His work often involves long walks around the more obscure and uncharted areas of London.

<sup>10</sup> Guy Debord was a founding member of the Situationist International - [https://philosophynow.org/issues/14/Dead\\_Bored\\_Debords\\_Dead](https://philosophynow.org/issues/14/Dead_Bored_Debords_Dead) - he would arrange long unplanned walks known as *dérive* [literally: “drifting”]. An explanation of the Theory of the *Dérive* appears here: <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html>

as a “...daguerreotype mobile et passioné...”<sup>11</sup> (a moving passionate photograph) and the flâneur himself an “...artiste par instinct...”<sup>12</sup>

Keith Tester describes Baudelaire’s flâneur as first and foremost a poet “...a man *of* the crowd as opposed to the man *in* the crowd...”<sup>13</sup> Walter Benjamin identifies the flâneur as the essential figure of the modern urban spectator, an amateur detective, an investigator of the city “...who goes botanizing on the asphalt...”<sup>14</sup> collecting and recording in the urban milieu in search of their own Holy Grail. Edgar Allen Poe shrouds his flâneur, a lonely figure whose strolling is hampered by the crowds in which he seeks anonymity:

To Poe, the *flâneur* was, above all, someone who does not feel comfortable in his own company. That is why he seeks out the crowd; the reason why he hides in it is probably close at hand. Poe purposely blurs the difference between the asocial person and the *flâneur*. The harder a man is to find, the more suspicious he becomes.<sup>15</sup>

Between Baudelaire, Benjamin, Edgar Allen Poe, Robert Musil, Jean-Paul Sartre and many since these, flânerie is thrown into turmoil – does it, as many have posited, only exist in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Paris or is it transferable to other times, to other places. Does “...the idle and considered strolling and observing which is the essence of flânerie become doubtful in (Robert Musil’s *The Man Without Qualities*) universal Vienna”<sup>16</sup> or is it that, as Sartre describes in *Nausea*, “...the figure of the flâneur and the activity of flânerie has left the streets of historical Paris and has instead, been connected to something more by way of a genre of urban existence.”<sup>17</sup> Why is this important? How is the idea of the flâneur metaphor relevant to the artist/musician/composer in the process of making art and music? The position discussed over the next few pages will be that the flâneur can indeed act as a multi-faceted

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<sup>11</sup> Hobbs, R. (1998). *Impressions of French Modernity: Art and Literature in France 1850-1900*. Manchester University Press. Manchester UK pp. 79

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. pp. 79

<sup>13</sup> Tester, K. (ed.) (1994). *The Flaneur*. Routledge. Oxford UK. pp. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin, W. 1983 *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, Harry Zohn, trans. Verso, London, pp. 36.

<sup>15</sup> Hörnqvist, M. (2004). Walter Benjamin on Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd” <http://www2.idehist.uu.se/distans/ilmh/pm/poe-benjamin01.htm> Retrieved 31.10.2019

<sup>16</sup> Tester, K. (ed.) (1994). *The Flaneur*. Routledge. Oxford UK. pp. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. pp. 10.

metaphor that may be applied to many and various situations, not least as an aid to composition in the practice of the author.

For me, the ultimate flâneur's project is embodied in the massive collection of oddities that is *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin's final body of work before he died fleeing the Nazis during the Second World War. The work is a sprawling collection of unedited texts, both found writings and personal notes that, along with extended musings and ideas, were written up by Benjamin himself that appear to work on "the principle of textual fragments from past and present in the expectation that they would strike sparks from and illuminate each other"<sup>18</sup> as if the body of work would highlight something other than the collected fragments in isolation, the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. Perhaps it is this idea of collected morsels brought together and arranged, sometimes in a chaotic manner, like a "blueprint for an unimaginably massive and labyrinthine architecture—a dream city, in effect"<sup>19</sup> that makes the work so powerful. As one engages with the published work itself so the process of the flâneur is revealed, we experience the flânerie, we see the mechanism of the flâneur in the spotlight. *The Arcades Project* may also represent the plausible possibility of the flâneur acting as a metaphor for both the presentation of a body of work and the research practice itself; I am convinced that this profound idea is particularly relevant and will explore the proposition more thoroughly later in the commentary. The details in the *Arcades Project* are so far-reaching as to be much more than just a philosophical treatise on the architecture of Paris. It is densely packed with ideas and linking associations that touch on many disciplines; the details of which are beyond the scope of this commentary. Suffice to say that if we explore the work of the flâneur, in this context, we realise that it can be broadened to include many different artistic or scientific practices and that these practices may benefit from a looser, more open and less structured approach to the collection of material/data:

All this engages quite clearly with all the debate around the flâneur as a metaphor, a metaphor for the ethnographer's ultimate desire to come to grips with the city, or city lives. The flâneur stands in a relation: to people; to text; to fact and to tradition.

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<sup>18</sup> Coetzee, J M. (2001). *The man who went shopping for truth*. Guardian Newspaper. UK. Online retrieved 13<sup>th</sup> March 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/jan/20/history.society>

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999). *The Arcades Project*. Ed. Tiedemann, R. Trans. Eiland, H. and McLaughlin, K. Harvard Press. USA. pp. xi

We can begin to express more instructive parallels between the flâneur and the urban ethnographer.<sup>20</sup>

As Jenks and Neves suggest, the idea need not be confined to ethnography, philosophy or as proposed here an artistic practice, this commentary argues that the flâneur metaphor could be applied to many disciplines and activities. The flâneur is representative of the artist/intellectual's alter ego, reporting back after a reconnaissance mission, not with military precision for this is not what is required, but as one who reflects the ambivalence of the role as meanderer or collector and feeds back an impression of the experience through intuition. That is to say, not to make any specific judgements about the encounter only to translate it dispassionately. The "...fundamental ambiguity of the figure of the flâneur, sometimes verging on that of the mere stroller, at other times elevated to that of the detective, to the decipherer of urban and visual texts, indeed to the figure of Benjamin himself, was amplified by Benjamin's own analysis."<sup>21</sup> The flâneur is all things, metaphorically, employed by Benjamin to stand in as the detective researcher and the collector, the one who looks and the one who reveals, to illuminate his own methodology in *The Arcades Project*. Flânerie is associated with Benjamin not only by virtue of "...observation and reading but also with *production* – the production of distinctive kinds of texts."<sup>22</sup> It is with this in mind that I will also propose the question; can the flâneur metaphor act as a conduit through which a practice can occur and be fruitful?

Although it is the *Arcades Project* that provided the initial inspiration for my personal practice, I am always astonished by how plastic the idea of the flâneur can be and how far the metaphor can be extended. Whether it is Baudelaire's anonymous poet who "...enjoys the incomparable privilege of being able to be himself or someone else, as he chooses..."<sup>23</sup> or, a practicing composer/musician who, as I will endeavour to substantiate, finds unrestrained openness, considered meandering and contingent events within the metaphoric framework of the urban environment a useful technique for making art. The next chapters will demonstrate how this operates as a constituent of a two-part workflow in practice.

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<sup>20</sup> Jenks, C., Neves, T., (2000). *A walk on the wild side: Urban ethnography meets the Flâneur*. Cultural Values 4, 1–17. pp. 3

<sup>21</sup> Frisby, D. (1994). The flâneur in social theory. In: Tester, K (ed.) *The Flâneur*. London, UK: Routledge, pp. 82

<sup>22</sup> Ibid pp. 83

<sup>23</sup> Baudelaire, C. (1970). *Paris Spleen*. New Directions Books. New York, USA. pp. 20

The dialectic consists then, in the *flânerie* of the narrator and the *flânerie* in the text.

**Keith Tester: The Flâneur**

## Chapter Two.

### The power of the flâneur.

The metaphor in practice.

We have looked carefully at the flâneur both as a historical figure in literature specifically and more generally, how the flâneur metaphor has been useful in many disparate disciplines. The following chapter looks specifically at the flâneur metaphor in relation to this practice. When is it useful, when it is betrayed and why this might be the case?

What is particularly interesting to me about flânerie is that it is as much a state of mind as it is a physical embodiment of a practice; one both strolls and observes. The idea is to set up a context in which to explore and then allow the freedom within this context to realize something of practical and analytic value—this is perhaps best encapsulated in the phrase ‘wandering critically’. The setting might be the metaphor of the city, an urban space or a factory where thoughts of an unfettered journey can sit in one’s mind and interact with improvised musical performance. This may take the form of setting up a premise for dialogue, creating an unhampered mind space where this can occur, inventing a fictional world filled with diegetic elements with which to interact; in fact, anything that allows for the development of a musical idea. For example, one might contrive a contextual setting that is designed for performance along with the type of instruments available, or the pedals and audio effects that are incorporated; indicative of the hat, coat and comfortable walking boots of the flâneur. The flânerie metaphor is empowering, there isn’t anywhere that one cannot explore, nothing is ‘out of bounds’, every nook and every cranny is available for investigation; a route may not always be in view, but there is never a moment when a place or destination is proscribed. Detuning one’s instrument, re-routing audio signals, stopping mid-performance, restarting, not having to particularly worry about the flow of the performance itself, walk faster or slower, sit and reflect – everything is acceptable and encouraged, for the flâneur is not only an investigative reporter but she/he also represents



the collector, the detective and the ragpicker and they must “listen carefully to sounds, stories, scraps of quotations as well as search for ‘dead data’ of the metropolis”;<sup>24</sup> within the boundary of the city anything is possible.

The creative, open, meandering mind will collect influences from many sources. Constant distractions, thoughts and images, written and spoken word, all around us, all of the time, infiltrate our minds for good and for bad; if we are open, we cannot help but be drawn to everything. Suggesting influence over a body of work is like looking at the centre of a spider’s web. Strands radiating to many points, all having a fundamental impact on the confluence of ideas; each as strong as steel cable. The flâneur takes in every brick, every pathway and every sheet of glass, influences are drawn together from many disparate sources. As one expands one’s consciousness, so the influences become more vivid, the ideas more powerful, as one wanders so new ideas or new ways of thinking about those ideas present themselves, around every corner is a new vista. The ragpicker/flâneur understands this situation, their senses keen and discerning. Ideas are all around, but they can be slippery and obscured from view, like the Lynchian fish:

If you want to catch little fish, you can stay in the shallow water. But if you want to catch the big fish, you’ve got to go deeper. Deep down, the fish are more powerful and more pure. They’re huge and abstract. And they’re very beautiful.<sup>25</sup>

The moment one contemplates a situation the openness of that situation dissipates, the flâneur must keep an open mind, be receptive to that which is about them but be able to move on without nostalgia or sentimentality. By necessity there will come a time when the flâneur will be betrayed within the improvisation/composition two-part workflow and a more authoritative voice will need to prevail. We shall explore the idea of betrayal in much greater detail throughout this first section of the commentary.

Considered meandering is apparently oxymoronic; how can you wander randomly, if you contemplate on the journey? This is not as problematic as it appears, it is not a contradiction in terms; rather, an oscillation of conditions. The central figure of the flâneur/detective that

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<sup>24</sup> Frisby, D. (1994). The flâneur in social theory. In: Tester, K. (ed.) *The Flâneur*. London, UK: Routledge, pp. 93

<sup>25</sup> Lynch, D. (2006). *Catching the Big Fish*. London, UK. Penguin Group. pp. 1

exists in *The Arcades Project* together with the “archaeologist/critical allegorist”<sup>26</sup> and the ragpicker would not have been quite so successful in realizing such a broad view of the world had they only loafed around. It is important, for the flâneur to be dispassionate and efficacious, to allow this fluid-induced state of mind to exist but also be mindful of when one should betray it. The work of the artist is to annotate, catalogue and create from the raw data/material that the flâneur collects, one begets the other through cross-pollination.

Of course, in practice, things get blurred and complicated, there are many decisions to be made during composition, and we will unpack some of these in the next section.

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<sup>26</sup> Frisby, D. (1994). *The flâneur in social theory*. In: Tester, K. (ed.) *The Flâneur*. London, UK: Routledge, pp. 82

## The power of the flâneur II

### The metaphor & the studio composer in practice

This chapter develops the idea of the flâneur and the composer as they negotiate the search for the sublime; that unachievable goal. It will also look at the genre of music in which the portfolio resides. It can be difficult for practitioners to be intelligent when defining what they do. Indeed, we can be disdainful about the genres in which we work and not recognise those elements that are most clear to others. In this instance elements of melodic noise and pop music are bound loosely within an idea of a ‘post-acousmatic’ practice that embraces all that is open and wide-ranging in electronic music; this description is messy but essentially accurate. Composer/musicians such as Arca, Roly Porter, Taylor Deupree, Stian Westerhus, Puce Mary, Boards of Canada, Oren Ambarchi, Tim Hecker, Mika Vainio, Pan Daijing and Ben Frost along with those artists “who come to electronic art music having been brought up on super produced pop music, hyper-real film sound effects and soundtracks, hacked electronics and noise music, rather than a classical heritage of Schoenberg, Stockhausen and Subotnik”.<sup>27</sup> This is where I believe this practice is located. As Adkins, Scott and Trembley point out, the degree to which composer/performers actively combine

...aspects of the acousmatic paradigm, methodology, fixed media and aspects of acousmatic musical language varies widely. They do not form a single school or paradigm, but have simultaneous roots and destinations in multiple lineages, scenes and aesthetics.<sup>28</sup>

My practice embraces the listening and responding of free improvisation, the semi-organised chaos of noise and the melody of pop music. In this context, one would admit to coming from a non-orthodox background, not the lonely rigour associated with acousmatic training nor traditional music education. I view it as a highly flexible practice, that takes influences and approaches from many sources, combining and recombining not just from a sound practitioners’ perspective but also by embracing elements of the plastic arts, literature, philosophy, architecture and junk. However, it is from the urban environment where so

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<sup>27</sup> Adkins, M., Scott, R., & Tremblay, P.A. (2016). Post-Acousmatic Practice: Re-evaluating Schaeffer’s heritage. *Organised Sound*, 21(2), 106-116. doi:10.1017/S1355771816000030

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

much of what is described in the portfolio emanates. The myriad of colours found in the nooks and crannies of the urban situation fundamentally informs this artistic practice. It is essentially why the metaphor of the flâneur, the urban protagonist, is paramount and so useful in describing both the process and the work. The flâneur metaphor exists as a common thread throughout the practice, and I will provide evidence of how this is applied to composition when it is useful and when it is betrayed, in specific pieces in the latter part of this commentary, for now, let's take a comprehensive view of the practice.

In the beginning, everything is broken, and I think about mending things. Every finished piece has its essence in an improvised session. Every starting point is a walk through a palette of unfamiliar sounds, I do not have music in my head, I always find it lying in the road. An interview with the guitarist/composer Stian Westerhus illuminated this; he explains to the interviewer, how he clearly hears sounds and music in his head, and he then spends his time realising those sounds, as composed music.<sup>29</sup> This was an intriguing thought because there is nothing preconceived in my practice, I have no sounds in my head, ever! The starting point is always having to locate a sound within the sounding system of choice, be it guitar and pedals or no-input mixer or whatever is to hand. In all cases, there is a desire to create a musical setting that is both open enough for the flâneur to set to work and compelling enough to yield material with which to exploit at a later time. The proposition is to make music, out of which music might be made which is fundamentally different, not better or worse, to having sounds in one's head or 'collecting' sounds with which to compose from a particular sounding object. Improvising is a comfortable situation in which to work and can imbue the music with a specific *flavour*. The material acquires a compositional 'voice' or character. It is true that those "aspects of live musical practice that the acousmatic paradigm has profoundly abandoned: extemporisation, variation, the variability of performance parameters, and the sharing of the moment of invention with the audience, are exactly those which free improvisation has vigorously reasserted."<sup>30</sup> This particular aspect must be retained. One should be fully aware of the paradox implied in fixing elements of the improvised performance at a later time. However, one cannot argue that whilst improvising there is a tendency only to produce a sound that is appropriate to the

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<sup>29</sup> Trapani, D. (2017). *Interview to Stian Westerhus*. Musicoff. Retrieved: 14<sup>th</sup> November 2019

<https://www.musicoff.com/interviste/interview-to-stian-westerhus>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

moment of execution—intention can be defined as purpose mixed with the acquired knowledge of the possible outcomes of a particular moment in time. It is *not* the idea of exhausting all the possible sounds of a specific set-up, it is only to make music. Obviously, the results are not always perfect, one is not searching in any particular way for perfection or imperfection, the flâneur is merely wandering; the destination is less important than the passage, we are embracing the journey.

Once the improvisation session is completed, the audio files are stored away for assessment at a later time. The audio can remain untouched for many weeks or months after the original recording sessions. When the improvised session is loaded up into the DAW, the familiarity with the audio material will have long disappeared. However, having conducted even the most cursory rehearsal of what is on the timeline, one is often presented with a reasonably clear idea of how to best proceed with the composition. There are elements of play that are open and unrestricted, and there are beautiful, unexpected errors and happy accidents. These imperfections might even contain the seeds of an interesting idea that had not been initially intended or that had not been clear during the performance. The flâneur metaphor helps to build a state of mind that allows for material that is unbound while performing but cogent in its realisation. This can be intrinsically compelling and ultimately valuable as raw material for studio composition. Giving equal status to these oscillating states and not dismissing imperfection as unusable retains all the options throughout the process. The flâneur is wandering through the material, just picking up on what is relevant, what could be useful, acting as a bridge between performance and composition and as Andy Hamilton suggests:

...the aesthetics of perfection and imperfection apply not just at the level of performance, but within the process of composition also. Or rather, there is a sense in which these levels overlap; there may, for instance, be little difference between a loosely constructed studio composition and the recording of an improvisation. It may, for some purposes, be useful to divide the continuum in two, with works on one side and improvisations on the other, but this glosses over continuities and similarities.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hamilton, A. (2000). The Art of Improvisation and the Aesthetics of Imperfection. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 40(1), 170.

Improvisation in terms of making music in the moment of execution has been part of my practice for many years; it is often, but not always, guided by listening to musical gestures made by others and responding. This is a massive simplification, and I mention it only because in this respect, there are both similarities and differences between this practice and the kind of reactive improvisation made in the moment. Improvisation, where the music created, remains as a fully realised moment never to be experienced again or if recorded to be heard as the same moment over and over again is wholly different from this practice. The sole purpose of improvisation in this situation is to render music that will be changed; the finished composition happens not in the moment of execution but later, in the studio with a computer.

The acousmatic composer Annette Vande Gorne talks about the ‘musical entity’ brought about by “a type of improvisation with a sounding body”<sup>32</sup> known among acousmatic composers as *sequence-jeu*. Vande Gorne goes on to explain:

...the composer deploys, in time, interior and physical impulses by way of gesture, and the resulting aural trace carries the personal signature of the body and the composer’s interior sense of duration. This “time” is important to me as the base for the following work in the studio...<sup>33</sup>

There are many similarities between the process embodied by Vande Gorne and the practice discussed here. However, I do not think about sound in the Schaefferian sense as another language or as musical objects. It is never achieved through exhausting the possible sounds of a particular sonorous object, it is always music made in time; making music with which to compose music.

The apparent paradox that is asserted by manipulating and fixing an improvised performance can be countered by the fact that improvisation can render music that is interesting in and of itself. It would almost certainly not have been produced otherwise; indeed, as Andy Hamilton reveals even Schoenberg believed, “there is only gain in the working-up of an

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<sup>32</sup> Anderson, E. (2012). An Interview with Annette Vande Gorne, Part One. *Computer Music Journal*, 36, 10-22.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

improvisation into a crafted composition.”<sup>34</sup> There will be further discussion on the second phase of the process, the working up into a crafted composition, in a later chapter, for now, we will continue to look at an overview of the performative process.

It is also highly unlikely that studio composition of the kind in this portfolio would be rendered by thinking of sounds in one’s head and composing, or by setting up a grid of possible notational outcomes. This music is only possible because we can invoke the flâneur metaphor to offer some resistance and utilise it in the process of making music - through improvisation; and then, to make music - through composition. The work is improvised, in a studio, and then manipulated, processed and composed, also in a studio. The next chapter talks in more detail about the first of the two-part process, that is making music with which to make music.

How does the flâneur metaphor inform performative improvisation during the accumulation of material with which to compose?

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<sup>34</sup> Hamilton, A. (2000). *The Art of Improvisation and the Aesthetics of Imperfection*. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 40(1), 170.

The road and the tunnel or both take us between my two favourite pieces of music. Inevitably, because life can be like that, and journeys often don't end up as you planned them, this could very easily change.

**Paul Morley:**

**Words & Music – A History of Pop in the Shape of a City.**

## Chapter Three.

### Improvisation.

It might be useful, though not entirely necessary, to mention that I do not have a 'traditional' theoretical musical education, I am unable to read musical notation and have no particular experience of modes or scales. That is not to say that having knowledge is not useful, far from it, it can be cumbersome to be ambiguous, and I believe that this practice would be transformed if it was available. However, since my musical knowledge is based around a smattering of theory combined with intuition, "I sense that to not know is to have begun to improvise."<sup>35</sup>

A few common quandaries occur when discussing improvisation, most notably that of idiom, and to that end, based around what was mentioned above regarding music theory, there will be no reference to the notion of idiomatic improvisation at all. The standard nomenclature for music made idiomatically 'neutral' or 'discrete' would be 'Free Improvisation' which only holds up to the most cursory analysis. However, it seems to be the best term we have to describe "the process in which creation (as opposed to performative re-creation) and presentation of sonic events are simultaneous ... that at any moment the next event is not fixed or reliably predictable in advance by the participants."<sup>36</sup> Free can never really be free when you have a history of influence from which to be informed. Breaking free from the influence of history and trope will be one of the critical

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<sup>35</sup> Ninh, Lê Quan. (2014). *Improvising Freely: The ABCs of an Experience*. PS Gelph, Ontario, Canada. pp.

<sup>36</sup> Dean, R. T. (2011). Envisaging Improvisation in Future Computer Music. In (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Computer Music*. Oxford University Press, pp. 2. Retrieved 25 Apr. 2019, from <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199792030.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199792030-e-006>.



roles of the flâneur metaphor; I will discuss what might lie ‘under the hood’ regarding improvisation when considered as part of this specific practice research later.

There exists away from this project, a performance practice that is informed by improvisation for its own sake. In other words, I improvise music with others and on my own in a live setting. I understand the beauty that can emerge from playing freely in the moment indeed, there is no better way to describe improvisation than to engage in it, to make it, to listen to it. I have been an improviser for nearly 10 years as a solo performer, in the band *Tout Croche* and occasionally as a member of an ensemble. At its best and most beautiful improvisation can be an open, egalitarian approach to making music, “the skill and intellect required is whatever is available. It can be an activity of enormous complexity and sophistication, or the simplest and most direct expression: a lifetime’s study and work or a casual dilettante activity.”<sup>37</sup> However, improvisation as a component part of the practice described here is fundamentally different from that described above. The flâneur metaphor is, in this instance, the instigator and the guide, it is the flâneur who gives the improvisation purpose, and although the two versions are intertwined, perhaps they are even siblings, they are very different both in terms of motive and outcome. We will now look more closely at this idea for the rest of this chapter and talk about how it performs as an integral part of the two-part workflow later in the commentary.

As previously stated, I start with everything broken or nothing in my mind is fixed. The flâneur improviser, who acts only from a detached position, cannot make a judgement, but no one wants to leap without a parachute. It is this compelling dichotomy that lends the practice the potency to create. Whilst in this state “improvisation does not require a system of reference”;<sup>38</sup> it can reference itself, in the moment that it is made.

The best place to start is with a ‘good’ sound. This is represented metaphorically as the point at which we are dropped into the city. An important caveat here, I never start with a bad sound in the hope that it might get better, this never works – there is a pre-improvisation state where leaps are made. This isn’t wholly meandering, but it is a kind of flânerie, finding a sound that seems right to start drifting. Unlike improvisation in performance, I choose not

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<sup>37</sup> Bailey, D. (1992). *Improvisation: Its nature and Practice in Music*. De Capo Press. USA.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 21

to struggle against a wretched sound; one can never be absolutely sure, and the work may go nowhere, but a good starting point almost always leads somewhere. Imagine searching online at interesting starting points on a map or a photograph of a building in an unfamiliar city, the flâneur needs to be walking to somewhere but he needs a place from which to start. A ‘good’ sound will lead to other sounds. Conversely, a bad sound leaves you stranded. If a particular sound is inspiring, then it is good. If it is textured and delicate or if it is noisy and melodic - if it shakes my body - if it is a rich chord that contains an unusual set of pitches - if it takes my breath away. These are all good sounds. A good sound can be like an open window on a beautiful day, it encourages you to leave the room, the sound of open possibilities offering something more, something different, something not like the place in which you currently reside. When you find a good sound, and you are prepared to move on, we can make it so. It is at this point that one hits the record button, this absolutely needs to be captured, one can never repeat an inspirational improvisation to tape, and even if moving on proves difficult you don’t want to lose this ‘good’ sound.

What is particularly important, in the first instance, is to set up the conditions where a methodology is open and fruitful and not tied to the idea of poetics. As Simon Fell suggests, this “tends toward the realisation of mutually anticipated outcomes”<sup>39</sup>; composed ‘music’, or at least some kind of musical structure at this initial stage is not required since composition in this scenario, as stated above, is an entirely separate task. The emphasis lays more in the idea of the process or ‘praxis’, where the “primacy of the act of improvisation”<sup>40</sup> comes into being, this is where flânerie happens. All that is important right now is recording music and sometimes just the good sounds, these might be interesting and lead somewhere else, finding and capturing material from which a composition can be rendered. It can be messy and unstructured, but the flâneur meandering in the crowd is in control. He offers a resistance that feels embedded in the process of listening to sound and reacting. Indeed, in another situation, like listening and responding to another improviser. It makes for a beautiful combination; meandering improvisation with only the sound, as it appears, with which to respond. Even an error can be seen as an opportunity in this regard, the possibility of solecism is, of course, always present. However, the reaction to a mistake during a ‘musical

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<sup>39</sup> Fell, S.H. (2018). *A more attractive way of ‘getting things done’*. Doctoral Thesis. Retrieved from the author. pp. 68

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. pp.70

performance' might be very different; at best having only to respond, finding a route away from the error or at worst paralysis. Faced with the situation of 'finding a way out' could have the effect of closing the system down rather than opening it up and allowing the flow to continue. With the flâneur, there is no such situation. It can be intimidating, but it is preferable for the error to provoke new ideas than it is to arrest the flow. In concert an error can be catastrophic, one has to rescue something from the wreckage, for some recovering from adversity is part of the spectacle, the sadistic pleasure of vertigo. There is no such requirement here, just keep walking because a new vista will reveal itself or at the worst one can just start again.

The idea of 'flow' that was touched on in the previous paragraph, where we can be 'lost in our work', is an encounter with a performative transcendence. The flow state can be potent and is clearly a condition worth aiming for. The flow state is often experienced as another place – not spiritual at all – where one is so wrapped up in proceedings, unaware of the current situation; like children at play. It "...describes a state of optimal experience where the self is forgotten temporarily whilst deeply engaged in an activity... ...improvisation is a particularly flow-inducing activity..."<sup>41</sup> and many practitioners recognise that "...perceptions and ability are enhanced through flow."<sup>42</sup> Acting as a lucid walking daydream it is a beautiful place, though I am not at all sure how one evokes such a situation. Although, the flâneur definitely helps, the drifting engaged mind can carry you into the flow state where much can be achieved. The flâneur has the knowledge and the experience; the asphalt "awaken[s] a surprising resonance."<sup>43</sup> In applying this experience to the practice we are able to remain focused on that which is in hand. The music is primary, nothing else matters, it is as if

an intoxication has come over the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets. With each step, the walk takes on greater momentum; ever weaker grow the temptations of shops, of bistros, of smiling women, ever more irresistible the magnetism of the next street corner, of a distant mass of foliage, of a street name. Then comes the hunger. Our man wants nothing to do with the myriad possibilities offered to sate his appetite. Like an ascetic animal, he flits through the unknown

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<sup>41</sup> Bailey, S. (2013). *A practice-led investigation into improvising music in contemporary Western culture* (Doctoral thesis). Retrieved from <http://create.canterbury.ac.uk/13291/1/13291.pdf>, 1st May 2019 pp.21

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. pp.21

<sup>43</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999). *The Arcades Project*. Ed. Tiedemann, R. Trans. Eiland, H. and McLaughlin, K. Harvard Press. USA. pp. 416

districts—until, utterly exhausted, he stumbles into his room, which receives him coldly and wears a strange air.<sup>44</sup>

Part of this practice is about setting up strategies to nurture openness without constraint, the flâneur metaphor is paramount for this to succeed. The resilience of the metaphor is also very useful, both in the fact that it stays with one as one works, but also in that it can be applied to many and varied situations. We have already spoken about the flâneur as wanderer, ragpicker and detective and she is all these. However, it can be useful to imagine an unrestricted pathway to open one's mind to other aspects of flânerie. In the essay, *Ideas are Born in Fields of Play*, the authors posit the idea that... "... play as engagement facilitates the cognitive, affective, motivational, and skill dimensions of the creative processes, while play as diversion fosters a psychological and social-relational climate that is conducive to creativity."<sup>45</sup> Play has soft boundaries; one can more easily drop one thing and start another – this new thing may or may not have something to do with the first thing, it matters not, and anyway one can always return to the first thing at any time. There is no need to be mindful of a coherent discourse within the play state, we are still in meandering flâneur mode, there is no pressure at this point. Also, play can be powerful in achieving that all-important flow state which in turn is essential in keeping the play state active; to be genuinely fruitful, these two states need to be working in tandem. We need to be absorbed in the situation, the act of playful wandering mentally and physically can engender this almost trance-like state. Minor interruptions, like turning a corner or coming to an unexpected junction or going through an arch and wandering into an open space amid tower blocks, do not break the flow, it retains the engagement through intoxication, curiosity and unfamiliarity. This process is embodied in the flâneur metaphor, in her flights of fancy and her perception, her magpie-like attraction to all things shiny and the ragpickers tenacity for the unnoticed:

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<sup>44</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999). *The Arcades Project*. Ed. Tiedemann, R. Trans. Eiland, H. and McLaughlin, K. Harvard Press. USA. pp. 417

<sup>45</sup> Mainemelis, C. & Ronson, S. (2006). *Ideas are born in fields of play*. Research in Organizational Behavior: An Annual Series of Analytical Essays and Critical Reviews Volume 27, 81–131 Elsevier Ltd. pp. 121

Every corner, alleyway and stairway have the ability to plunge him into *reverie*. What happened here? Who passed by here? What does this place mean? The *flâneur*, attuned to the chords that vibrate throughout his city, knows without knowing.<sup>46</sup>

The idea that the *flâneur* knows without knowing resonates so powerfully while contemplating sound; just the joy of sound existing, just for a moment, of how it feels or what it might mean. Intuitively knowing what will work in the moment of making, there is no time for deliberation; in this moment of making music, the *flâneur* is guided by what is before her ears. These blocks of sound lead to other sounds, with each sound moment informing how we might move forward. “There is a freshness, a certain quality that can only be obtained by improvisation, something you cannot possibly get by writing. It is something to do with the ‘edge’. Always being on the brink of the unknown...”<sup>47</sup> This is not the absolute unknown of what happens after death; Steve Lacy is, I believe, alluding to a known unknown, to what Daniel Kahneman when talking about automatic decision making might describe as a “coherent interpretation of what is going on in our world at any instant.”<sup>48</sup> While partaking of this musical journey of *flânerie* we experience the “richness of the automatic and often unconscious processes that underlie intuitive thinking”<sup>49</sup> not through thousands of hours of study, but by letting the non-judgemental *flâneur* metaphor be the filter through which anything can be acceptable; including failure. We might not consult with the *flâneur* to make life and death decisions, but she can guide us on our journey through the city and certainly does not mind if we get lost.

The *flâneur*’s interdependence to the complexity of the urban landscape perhaps needs to be re-established; this relationship is ever present, one cannot exist without the other, there can be no *flâneur* without a city in which to operate. The city is the backdrop and is present at all times, embodied in all the work that occurs in the practice. It requires an approach that encompasses everything that makes up the urban experience; all those indefinable spaces between buildings known as *terrain vague*, riverbanks, clean, pristine areas juxtaposed with smog and dust and crud, factories, trains and crowds of people moving on or staying put and who act as an underlying inspiration for the work done here. It is the *flâneur* who recognises

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<sup>46</sup> Elkin, L. (2016). *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City* Chatto & Windus, London pp.3

<sup>47</sup> Case, B. (1982). ‘Steve Lacy’, interview in *The Wire*, issue 1. pp. 6-7

<sup>48</sup> Kahneman, D. (2012) *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Penguin Books London UK. pp13

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* pp13

everything and presents it as a prompt for action. The idea of the flâneur exists with all this in mind; the flâneur, so efficacious in this practice. In the presence of the playful, critical wanderer, the destination is unimportant. There is no ‘sound in my head’ moment, the inspiration comes from wandering as the flâneur, the poet in the crowd with the city in mind. The music made through improvisation at this stage is imbued with significance and substance which for me is the antithesis of collecting sounds, one is not engaged entirely with the sounding object; one is involved with the sound as music. During improvisation I am acutely conscious of the sound but moreover I am aware that music is happening with the city in mind.

To conclude, there is an essential distinction between the ideas that are incorporated in *sequence jeu* and making ‘music’ that will be available to compose music later. Exhausting the sonic possibilities of a sounding body and saving those sounds to magnetic tape or a hard drive is, I sense, somewhat detached from the musical aspect, one is not making any decisions about the sounds and the musical nature of those sounds. Making music (improvising) on the other hand is a journey informed by the sound being made; you are actually walking with the music. This will later inform the next stage, music (composition) that is made in the studio. It is highly likely that the “use of extended passages of ‘performed’ instrumental phrases in a fixed media work [...] changes our perception of the instrument as a site for sounds to one that implies a performing presence, no matter how disembodied this presence is”<sup>50</sup> and whilst it may be challenging to experience a physical engagement with electronically manipulated sounds, we instinctively know when there is a human filter or “trace of physicality”<sup>51</sup>. The aim then is to retain this human filter, the meandering spirit through which the improvisation has been rendered and make something entirely new. There is nothing intrinsically meaningful in a sound made by a guitar or a no-input mixer, and one would not expect any narrative associations to be inherently present. But the flâneur performer can imbue the performance with a unique character which may be useful in the next stage of the workflow.

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<sup>50</sup>Adkins, M. (2012). *Issues of live-ness in fragile.flicker.fragment*. Journal of Music, Technology and Education, 5 (1). pp. 5-16.

<sup>51</sup> Thibault, D. (2014). *My Physical Approach to Musique Concrete Composition*. Portfolio of Studio Works. Doctoral thesis, University of Huddersfield. pp. 40

We now have some music, what are we going to do with it? The next section looks at the second part of the two-part workflow; at how composition happens, how the improvised music is fixed.

The material of music is sound and silence. Integrating these is composing.

**John Cage: Silence**

## Chapter Four.

### Post-Improvisation.

Composing with the fugacious; having made music, how can we make music?

In this chapter I will explore the idea that in a two-part workflow of improvisation followed by a concerted compositional phase, with the flâneur metaphor firmly in mind, new music is entirely conceivable. That this new music will also be imbued with an essence of the quality and liveness of the improvised material seems inevitable, however, we shall delve more deeply into this idea both in this chapter and in the following sections where we talk about specific works in more detail.

The essence of improvisation practice, making music in the moment, at least that presented by Derek Bailey<sup>52</sup> et al. is that it should not be subjected to repeated listening. I am not looking to discuss the relative merits of recording improvised music, suffice it to say I personally hugely enjoy listening to moments of music that I would otherwise have never experienced. However, after a hundred years or so of recorded music, this situation has changed unrecognisably becoming totally normalised. We rarely hear the performances exactly as they were made—from Miles Davis and Teo Macero ‘fixing’ multiple versions of jazz improvisations for the *In a Silent Way* sessions or the way The Beatles and George Martin constructed large parts of *Sgt. Pepper* or *The White Album*. Also, Glen Gould’s “full creative use of editorial techniques”<sup>53</sup> as he developed a “love affair with the microphone”, “concentrating exclusively on Bach’s work, he controlled every aspect of the music by editing parts of different takes together to create a ‘performance’ that, at least to him, was

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<sup>52</sup> Bailey, D. (1992). *Improvisation: Its nature and Practice in Music*. De Capo Press. USA.

<sup>53</sup> Hamilton, A. (2003). *The Art of Recording and the Aesthetics of Perfection*. The British Journal Aesthetics, Vol. 43, No. 4.



more authentic than its equivalent could be on the concert platform.”<sup>54</sup> Even straight recorded versions of live improvised performances by say Keith Jarrett have been committed to a ‘fixed’ recording. So facing up to the apparent paradox of “...mixing of the immiscible...”<sup>55</sup>, the idea that oil and water cannot become homogenised, has, to a large extent, been rejected.<sup>56</sup> Pop music and the academies are intertwined; electronic music is in the mainstream. Jamming, or improvising within a band set-up has long been considered fruitful among the rock and pop fraternity, where improvisation is worked up into something new; this is nothing new. Indeed, we mentioned Schoenberg earlier saying much the same thing.<sup>57</sup> Sound is a thing that can be worked, like paint and when one is working directly with this thing, “...there is no transmission loss between you and the sound—you handle it. It puts the composer in the identical position of the painter—she’s working directly with the material, working directly onto a substance, and she always retains the options to chop and change, to paint a bit out...”<sup>58</sup> What happens when a situation like this occurs? When an oscillation between states, between improvised music and fixed composition, renders a new and unexpected whole; oil and water *can* be mixed you just need to shake hard or introduce an emulsifier.<sup>59</sup>

The previous chapter explained how the flâneur metaphor is viewed and used in this practice and analysed her role in the process of rendering music with which to make new music a little like collecting different coloured pigments. What is described in this section is the next process, searching through the paint box to find the right colours and using them to create a new painting; the deconstruction of a number of fixed recordings of improvised material and the composition of new musical work, cut-up, processed, reformed and remixed into a wholly original piece. We are re-composing the fugacious improvised material and fixing that

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<sup>54</sup> Eyre, R. (2017) *Glen Gould and the Art of Recording*. Gramophone Online.

<https://www.gramophone.co.uk/other/article/glenn-gould-and-the-art-of-recording> Retrieved 3rd August 2020

<sup>55</sup> Tremblay, P.A. (2012). *Mixing the Immiscible: Improvisation with Fixed-Media Composition*. In Meaning and Meaningfulness in Electroacoustic Music, Stockholm. Electroacoustic Music Studies Network Conference.

<sup>56</sup> Hamilton, A. (2003). *The Art of Recording and the Aesthetics of Perfection*. The British Journal of Aesthetics, Vol. 43, No. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Hamilton, A. (2000). *The Art of Improvisation and the Aesthetics of Imperfection*. The British Journal of Aesthetics, 40(1), 170.

<sup>58</sup> Eno, B. (2008). *The Studio as Compositional Tool*. In C. Cox & D. Warner (Eds.), *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*. Chapter 22, pp. 129. New York: Continuum.

<sup>59</sup> Zielinski, S. (2010). *Oil and Water Do Mix*. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/oil-and-water-do-mix-38726068/> Retrieved: 8<sup>th</sup> November 2019

which might be considered ephemeral to be experienced later, again and again, after the fact. Again, composition in this context has much in common with the parlance of architecture and the built environment, the words ‘build’, ‘construct’ or ‘assemble’ might stand in pretty well; and indeed, there are many established labels and expressions that architects, and composers share. In the book, *Archispeak* Tom Porter explains that composition “...is a vehicle for bringing order to chaos; it involves the unifying of elements into a whole so that each ends up in its proper place.”<sup>60</sup>

We return to the flâneur metaphor in this second phase of the two-part workflow since it represents a distinct synthesis of engagement and objectivity, especially through that which would normally seem complex or elusive. The function of the metaphor is to enable us to describe one thing or a combination of things, particularly something that might be complex, by using another word or phrase which simplifies, refines or is symbolic of that thing. The flâneur metaphor is a distillation of the ragpicker, the detective, the detached observer, the critical wanderer/collector whose only realm is the urban/industrial landscape. The flâneur perspective is also particular; in google ‘map-speak’ it is never satellite view it is always street view. The flâneur is able to approach detail through a wide lens with a keen eye and a discerning judgement, collecting material fragments that might otherwise be elusive or ambiguous. To invoke the metaphor during the poetic process is to empower us with a world view not normally available.

To split the process of improvising and composing in two like this might seem entirely counterintuitive, even though that is precisely what is being described and exploited here. The procedures involved in this second phase are partitioned by time and outcome; this is a deliberate strategy since the enforced critical distance between performance and review is necessary for a clear perspective of the material. There is a clear lineage in the fact that one process happens after the other and most importantly there is a heritage between the improvisation and the finished piece.

The second part of the workflow begins in earnest with trawling through many recorded hours of improvised music which can take a long time, it can be exciting to rediscover the work, it can sometimes be difficult finding a way through so much material. Audio flânerie,

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<sup>60</sup> Porter, T. (2004). *Archispeak: An Illustrated guide to architectural terms*. Spon Press. London. pp31.

wandering through the sonic material, seeking all the while and happening upon interesting details is all part of the process. In this composition phase one is still trying to work fast however, it is important to remain true to the essence of the improvisation. Obscuring the heritage between the original work and the finished piece would, in my view, be somewhat counterproductive. The flâneur/composer should be mindful of the terrain through which they are operating. Rough compositional notes, reminders and sketches may be made about individual sections that are at work at different points in the original improvisations. Images can be very useful, either imaginary or real, as an aide-memoire of a particular voice, flavour or aura of a place. Discussion around individual works later in this commentary highlight the very clear use that is made of specific photographs or scenes. For example, the vivid photographs of factories made by David Lynch that were so evocative when making *Like Steel and Cement*. Likewise, the scene that is framed by the window from the eight-channel studio at the University of Huddersfield where the piece *Dark Stone Smoke* was constructed contained the essence of the flânerie involved in the original improvisation.

The playback head might be flicked forward or back, repeatedly listening to a single phrase—there is no method, and nothing is fixed. The flâneur metaphor is wholly useful, acting as the guide, since it is so easy to flick through sections of music on a DAW timeline, like looking at photographs, scanning through notes or picking through rags. This is “...the flâneur as producer of texts resulting from flânerie that might suggest possible connections between forms of investigating metropolitan modernity and reporting and narrating this modernity in textual forms.”<sup>62</sup> Put simply the metaphor that is “the language of music” is being asked to perform the task of realising an intention—the intention is to facilitate the flâneur metaphor in its role as expert of the urban experience, “if it is true that the city is the properly sacred ground of flânerie”.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, it is the intention in this project, for the music to reflect that urban experience and it is the flâneur, the critical wanderer, on the asphalt over which they pass, as the collagist, reporter and ultimately, interpreter of flânerie that enables that process to be realised. The reading of ‘text’ in this context is musical but as David Frisby suggests a text can be extrapolated to include many areas of investigation or production.

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<sup>62</sup> Frisby, D. (1994). *The flâneur in social theory*. In: Tester, K. (ed.) *The Flâneur*. London, UK: Routledge, pp. 101

<sup>63</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999). *The Arcades Project*. Ed. Tiedemann, R. Trans. Eiland, H. and McLaughlin, K. Harvard Press. USA. pp. 420

The *flâneur*, and the activity of *flânerie*, is also associated in Benjamin's work not merely with observation and reading but also with *production* – the production of distinctive kinds of texts. The *flâneur* may therefore not merely be an observer or even a decipherer, the *flâneur* can also be a producer, a producer of literary texts (including lyrical and prose poetry as in the case of Baudelaire), a producer of illustrative texts (including painting) a producer of narratives and reports, a producer of journalistic texts, a producer of sociological texts.<sup>64</sup>

The flâneur/composer works quickly with a wide view and a keen perspective. A motif, an artefact or a simple gesture can be dissected, manipulated and reinterpreted in a new context. Initially, one works very quickly, trying different combinations, changing things, discarding ideas and making something different. At this stage nothing is permanent. Impressive structures may ensue without delay, or it can take hours or days to build a convincing arrangement. A promising development may sound sublime but doesn't go anywhere and it equally quickly may be abandoned forever or one can move it away safely, for use later. Embracing the quality and sheer proficiency of making things happen within the digital set-up is a joy, especially if you have ever worked with tape recorders! Sometimes the flow state mentioned earlier can arrive and drives any sense of time away, the process moves on unnoticed. At other times there is massive resistance—it can, very occasionally, be as devastating as a blank piece of paper. There is no method that works consistently, one is somewhat at the bidding of the audio sound world. At this stage the situation can be as frustrating as a cul-de-sac or as open as “the intoxicated interpenetration of street and residence”,<sup>65</sup> the work is very ad hoc, playful and meandering.

With the studio tools that are currently available it is possible to mutate recorded sound unrecognisably; even when a particular sound source or a specific instrument is known it is possible to change every aspect of the material. However, to exclude any trace of physicality would be to deliver a piece of music perhaps devoid of any musicality and would “...appear to most listeners a very cold, difficult, even sterile music.”<sup>66</sup> Recorded music has been

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<sup>64</sup> Frisby, D. (1994). *The flâneur in social theory*. In: Tester, K. (ed.) *The Flâneur*. London, UK: Routledge, pp. 83

<sup>65</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999). *The Arcades Project*. Ed. Tiedemann, R. Trans. Eiland, H. and McLaughlin, K. Harvard Press. USA. pp. 423

<sup>66</sup> Smalley, D. (1997). Spectromorphology: explaining sound-shapes. *Organised sound*, 2 (2), 107 - 126.

available for a very long time and we are less entrenched in the concept of association so prevalent when live music was the primary experience. By combining, layering and juxtaposing sonic material and utilising the studio as a creative tool, a metaphoric sound world can be created. Like Daphne Oram's sound work with the filmmaker Geoffrey Jones in both *Snow*<sup>67</sup> and *This is Shell*<sup>68</sup> the music makes a connection with the visual imagery without restraining what we see or necessarily being connected to a specificity of its own. A sound that might have a direct connection to an imaginary place or aura rather than to an instrument. The aim then is to retain some level of gestural live-ness or trace of physicality whilst making use of "the sonic other", that which has no apparent cause or connection to what is known in the real world.

The improvised material is reconstructed over time and as a piece begins to take shape, and edges toward a conclusion, so the flâneur wanderer is betrayed and displaced by the systematic flâneur/composer or producer of texts. More precisely, we gradually return to the idea of oscillating between the flâneur/collector and the self-reflective curator flâneur/composer that is mindful of the artefacts of flânerie. Precision becomes prevalent, deliberate musical decisions about sonic material become more focused. This idea is very well reflected in the work of Daniel Kahneman in his book, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* where he "elaborates the distinction between the automatic operations of system 1 and the controlled operations of system 2"<sup>70</sup> where I regard system 1 is the flâneur/improviser and system 2 is the more curatorial flâneur/composer. Chaos is not wholly discharged, it is just remade as a musical structure rather than serendipitous meandering, although the process is very gradual it is also deliberate, this state change does not happen by accident—at least very rarely. Slowly, the process becomes more and more focused, the flâneur and the composer softly oscillate. As one gets closer to 'finishing', so the gains made by editing become less compelling, the returns diminish and become counterproductive; having learned from experience that time, although precious, is also one's friend, one should allow time for consideration. The flâneur/composer can return to a piece afresh, with renewed perspective after time has passed and will render far greater results than stewing over a section for hours in a pitch-black studio. There is a recognisable final phase, that perhaps never really ends, where one

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<sup>67</sup> Jones, G. (1963) *Snow*. BFI National Archive. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cl4pJwcE7JI> Retrieved 4th August 2020

<sup>68</sup> Jones, G. (1970) *This is Shell*. <https://vimeo.com/386821807> Retrieved 4th August 2020

<sup>70</sup> Kahneman, D. (2012) *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Penguin. London UK. pp.13

zooms in and out tweaking microscopic details and modifying elements forever. Unfortunately, neither the flâneur nor the composer can tell you when to actually stop working.

In conclusion, in this second phase the description of the production of a piece of music has a loose but recognisable shape; there is a state of meandering play, Kahneman's system 1, that exists for as long as it seems pertinent, playtime moves into a more considered state, system 2, as the process becomes focused on detail. Although one can examine the flâneur/composer relationship states in isolation, so determined are their roles, it is absolutely imperative to define them as exquisitely balanced and fluid. Intermittently existing at one and the same time, both in the improvisation phase and in the composition phase of the work. One is never rid of the flâneur just as one cannot rid oneself of the composer/performer in a practice that involves musical improvisation. I would argue that the flâneur/composer can be adapted and invoked in music production, just as the flâneur/journalist or the flâneur/ethnographer are useful designations of broader research (inter)methodologies.

The next chapter looks specifically at the visual aspect of the portfolio and discusses what visual imagery brings to the compositional equation in the form of film, referencing particular influences and placing the work in a broad context of the film essay, documentary film making and independent experimental film and video.

That piece of music may have nothing to do with the scene.  
When it marries, you can *feel* it.

**David Lynch: Catching the Big Fish**

## Chapter Five.

### Moving Image + Music.

Can the whole be greater than the sum of the parts?

This short chapter looks at the influence of visual imagery on the work and how this led to the idea of making video an intrinsic part of three pieces in the portfolio. Images are very important in the actual creation of the work in this portfolio as mentioned in previous chapters; whether they are real or imagined. Specific instances will be discussed throughout section two when individual works are analysed more fully. However, very early on in the building of the research into the ideas around the flâneur metaphor it became manifest that to include imagery, still or moving, in the project in some way was almost unavoidable. The images in mind were always photographic, only occasionally painted but never abstract. The idea of abstraction happens in the music, the music is the metaphor and I think we use it to become conscious of something, perhaps something of which we were not familiar before we heard the music. With the addition of a visual aspect one could either reinforce the abstraction or take it and make it something else, one could either guide the listener/viewer or leave it more open, or perhaps even slightly confuse the situation.

Perhaps the biggest influence on the way imagery is used in the project is the work of David Lynch. He is notoriously discreet about his work, possibly abdicating some responsibility as an artist, but his work remains mysterious and intriguing because of the stance he has taken:

The world in the film is a created one, and people sometimes love going into that world. For them that world is real. And if people find out certain things about how something was done, how this means this or that means that, the next time they see the film, these things enter into the experience. And then the film becomes different.

I think it's so precious and important to maintain that world and not say things that could break the experience.<sup>71</sup>

The visual aspect of the work here tends to take priority as happens in most cinema. The music that exists in these video works is always composed and finished prior to any visual element having been created—indeed the music could and probably will exist as a separate entity in future iterations. The visual material is mainly collected in a way that mirrors the improvisation of the original music; perhaps with the music in mind. Finally, the music and the visuals are composed or combined. In the case of *Aurality One* and *Two* the music played a part in how the visuals were placed in time; in *Dark Town* the music is incidental to the visuals and vice versa.

Throughout the project I leant on many artists, filmmakers and photographers borrowing elements from these and many others for inspiration. For example, the gallery filmmakers Bill Viola and Michael Snow or the film directors Jim Jarmusch, Jean-Luc Godard, Chantal Akerman and Bela Tarr, the photographers Eugène Atget, Robert Adams and Lewis Baltz; they all had an effect in flavouring the visual work and the way it was presented. And whilst Lynch is the overriding influence on the way the work feels, there is little similarity to David Lynch in terms of style or substance—for this one has to look elsewhere.

The influential French filmmaker, Chris Marker,<sup>72</sup> whose ideas around the notion of the essay film “a form pitched some way between the documentary and the personal reflection”<sup>73</sup> is also pertinent for the work collected here. In the case of an overview of style I would cite documentary film as being the most obvious. The documentary filmmakers Geoffrey Jones and to some degree Len Lye have some bearing on the work in this portfolio most notably the films *Snow*<sup>74</sup> and *This is Shell*<sup>75</sup> made by Geoffrey Jones. More recently the experimental documentaries, although almost indefinable as such, made by Geoffrey Cox

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<sup>71</sup> Lynch, D. (2006) *Catching the Big Fish* Penguin Books London UK. pp. 19

<sup>72</sup> Marker, C. (1981) Junkopia.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ymKAhoXyPA&list=PLznE8l\\_wM7Y1cicDMuY5toCshayIT3Zuy&index=2&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ymKAhoXyPA&list=PLznE8l_wM7Y1cicDMuY5toCshayIT3Zuy&index=2&t=0s)

<sup>73</sup> Bergan, R. (2012) *Chris Marker Obituary*. Guardian Online

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/jul/30/chris-marker> Retrieved 4th August 2020

<sup>74</sup> Jones, G. (1963) *Snow*. BFI National Archive. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cl4pJwce7JI> Retrieved 4th August 2020

<sup>75</sup> Jones, G. (1970) *This is Shell*. <https://vimeo.com/386821807> Retrieved 4th August 2020



and Keith Marley have had a marked effect on my thinking regarding the combination of visuals and music particularly in the films *Mill Study*<sup>76</sup> and *Border Stones*<sup>77</sup>. Particularly interesting here is the way the sound and the visuals are both connected and also strangely isolated, so that one is switching between both the visual and the aural strands, aware of one and the other at different times. Drawing on this approach of uncertainty between the modes of reception the aim in this work is for the sound/image relationship to be both particular and ambivalent perhaps at the same time. I believe the music does much of this work indeed “this tendency of sound to break the frame makes it ambiguous and ephemeral”<sup>78</sup> and is able to shift perceptions in quite powerful ways.

The flâneur metaphor is as equally useful in the filming/improvisation phase of the visual work as they are for the editing/composition phase, working in almost identical ways as discussed in reference to the music. In all three works the images were collected while walking, nothing was set-up or planned in advance. And later, once the music had been composed, the visual imagery was edited with the music in mind. Wandering critically with a camera in unfamiliar streets represents an essence of flânerie distilled; collecting material deliberately, in an ad hoc manner for use later. The Hungarian photographer André Kertész sums this up when he says, “The camera is my tool. Through it I give reason to everything around me.”<sup>79</sup> The flâneur/photographer is enthralled by the world as the walk unfolds, as she attends to the uniqueness of the situation, “the difference between the photographer as an individual eye and the photographer as an objective recorder seems fundamental, ... both are logical extensions of what photography means: note-taking on, potentially, everything in the world, from every possible angle.”<sup>80</sup>

To sum up, this brief section looked particularly at the visual aspect of the work; the films in this portfolio can be viewed as a starting point for further enquiry representing as they do three quite different strands of a single, linked idea. Exploring music and imagery as linked in a format that takes time to experience is in my view rewarding and offers a unique

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<sup>76</sup> Cox, G. & Marley, K. (2017) *Mill Study* <https://vimeo.com/205044352> Retrieved 5th August 2020

<sup>77</sup> Cox, G. & Marley, K. (2019) *Border Stones* <https://vimeo.com/357220845> Retrieved 5th August 2020

<sup>78</sup> Cox, G. (2018) *Soundings: Documentary film and the listening experience*. University of Huddersfield Press. Huddersfield. UK. pp. 2

<sup>79</sup> Sontag, S. (2008) *On Photography*. pp. 207. Penguin Classics. London UK

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 176

perspective on both the visual and aural aspect of the work in combination. That they can also exist as individual entities and be seen as not having anything particular in common but have such a profound effect on the reception when combined is fascinating; that the elements can both co-exist with and influence each other in disparate and interesting ways. A more in-depth discussion on each of the three film works happens in section two of this commentary along with the other works in the portfolio.

By walking, you escape from the very idea of identity, the temptation to become someone, to have a name and a history.  
**Frédéric Gros: A Philosophy of Walking**

## Epilogue.

We have discussed the flâneur in some depth, from those early sightings in the Paris crowds through many various iterations and concluded that the flâneur metaphor can both exist and be efficacious throughout an artistic practice that involves composing music. We have described how the flâneur metaphor works at all stages in the creative process, from initial setup—the initial part of the two-part workflow— and pre-production; the selection of instrumentation, through the initial improvisation stage where the primary concern is to make music with which to make music later in the process. The flâneur retains a guiding role in the initial stages of composition—the second part of the workflow—as we quickly traverse the audio terrain for interesting snippets gathered during the wandering improvisation stage. We saw that the composer/flâneur relationship oscillates and becomes fragile as the composer becomes more apparent taking an ever-greater responsibility over the finished work. All the while we saw that the flâneur is highly influenced by her surroundings, improvisation, composition, photography and cinema are all brought to bear on the working practice throughout. The efficacy of the flâneur metaphor remains strong at all times especially as an anchor to a multi-modal working practice both as an improvising musician and a studio composer, photographer and filmmaker.

So strong is the flâneur influence on the work that it could be argued that the reception of the work might also involve an element of flânerie. Certainly, this remained strong for me as I reviewed the work. I asked a composer friend of mine, Cassandra Miller, to review the piece *Like Steel & Cement* to illicit her reaction to the music, entirely unprompted. She kindly responded with a couple of pages of notes. Here are some extracts from those pages:

I am both excited and calm, the upper swoops are like birds, lower tones like fuzzy warmth, the combination of elements makes its own world, I feel inside it's a smallish room, then the tones come again, they feel like a city, both an enclosed space and a landscape, it feels now really like a city, with depth and activity but one I

am entirely comfortable in, a landscape of living things but mechanical, yikes the roof lifts off, as if it is me, exploded out all over the city, low rumbling only, a different world, then I'm inside again, like it's not water – a thick fog

For me this reaction to the piece has some heritage to the flâneur methodology involved in making the work. Maybe the title would have had some influence on the response but as Bence Nanay states:

in the case of the experience of music, we get systematic and aesthetically interesting influences from the visual sense modality (which) play an important role in our aesthetic appreciation of the expressiveness of musical performances.<sup>81</sup>

Cassandra's response to the experience of the music could be seen as analogous to Baudelaire's flâneur poet or Benjamin's fragmentary responses to Paris in the *Arcades Project*. It also reinforces the idea mentioned earlier of the multimodal aspect of the flâneur in practice, not only in the first and second stages of musical composition and production but in the various ways our senses are combined to influence the reception of the work.

That completes the first section of this commentary, in the following section we analyse the works in the portfolio individually. We will explore how the potent flâneur metaphor applies to each piece, from triggering the starting point to influencing specific ideas within the composition. As we have discussed, the oscillation between the flâneur and the composer is hugely important in this practice, and we will scrutinise this relationship with regard to the specific pieces of music submitted as part of the PhD.

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<sup>81</sup> Nanay, B. The Multimodal Experience of Art, *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Volume 52, Issue 4, October 2012, Pages 353–363, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ays042>

## Section Two.

Portfolio commentary.

Error's gift is its critical friction against our desire for control.

**Francesca Hughes: The Architecture of Error.**

### **Aurality One: Ambiguous Fragments.**

No-input mixer. Music with moving image.

Duration: 9'.29"

The initial flânerie for this piece was made using a No-Input mixer, an instrument fraught with exquisite imprecision. As is suggested by the nomenclature the No-Input mixer is a standard mixing console into which no external source is plugged. At the most basic level, the output of a mixer channel is plugged into the input of the same circuit creating an internal feedback loop. Controlling and manipulating the feedback is a case of modifying the dynamic level of the signal using electrical resistance via the volume faders and/or by adjusting the EQ section of the channel. Very minor adjustments to any control within the chain can have quite significant consequences regarding the sonic outcome. Additional adjustments can be made by inserting into the feedback loop any signal processor or effect pedal; for example, distortion, frequency modulation and delay. Since feedback in a closed-loop is essentially a slightly clipped pure tone, a square-ish wave if you will, feeding the signal through a distortion pedal, for instance, would introduce new, more complex, musically related harmonics to the original. A chorus effect, on the other hand, makes a copy of the original signal into an internal buffer. The copy signal would be delayed by an amount, mixed with the original signal and sent back out into the loop. The result is a doubling of the signal out of phase with each other, giving the effect of two tones played at different times. Since the delayed signal might also be altered in terms of the pitch, this would accentuate the impact of two different sounds; as we can see with only two effect pedals, the signal can be extensively manipulated.

The sonic world that can be accessed with this particular instrument varies wildly from variable 'pure' tones to vast blocks of dense noise, but these states are temperamental. They

can be lost forever by the slightest of touches on a potentiometer. Soft-touch and a level of precise control can be useful, although it guarantees little in terms of predictability. Probably the best-known proponent of the instrument is Toshimaru Nakamura who can wrest delicate textures from the internal workings of the mixer, dark looping pulses are interspersed with dense tonal rattles which seem to push the sounds around in space. You can almost hear the capacitors pop and fizz; this is very obviously the sound of electronic components making music. Nakamura is generally accepted as a virtuoso of the No-Input mixer; his intimate control of the machine is quite astounding. But what is particularly interesting about the ‘instrument’ is that extraordinary sonic material can be achieved relatively easily with some experience. Once a sound has been ‘discovered’ it can be carefully manipulated with outboard effects. The flâneur is invoked, and one can very quickly get lost whilst meandering in this world of sound, many hours can pass while tweaking the various parameters. It is, however, imperative to have a sound recording device running at all times as beautiful sounds can be found and lost for ever in the split of a second.

“The misadventures of precision”<sup>82</sup> embraces an idea that with the advent of computer technology ultimate precision is within our grasp. Along with this ability to specify the absolute micro detail, the possibility of error in the macro is amplified. Whilst technology design has allowed infinite control “...the architect’s increasingly conflicted relations to material tolerance and the inflated value of precision...”<sup>83</sup> has led to a point where error is induced through exactness. Material and machining tolerances in the real world will always be far greater than those that can be specified in computer-generated architectural drawings. Conforming precisely to the specifications prescribed is, in reality, not possible. This paradox is reflected in many endeavours, engineering, architecture, printing and music technology among them. For example, in photographic editing or design practices, we can specify a colour gamut that exists far beyond the scope of real-world printing machines and outside the tolerance of any particular paper stock. If a steel girder is affected by heat and cold beyond the tolerance of the holes drilled in it then twisting and buckling will occur, when amplified into a bridge, clearly this would have catastrophic consequences. “It is important to understand accuracy, precision and tolerance and how they impact your design and the

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<sup>82</sup> Hughes, F. (2014). *The Architecture of Error: Matter, Measure and the Misadventures of Precision*. MIT Press. London. pp. 3

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. pp. 3

manufacturing process...”<sup>84</sup> as over-specification can lead to problems during manufacture that could render the product unusable, unsafe or unfit for purpose. Moving sample-sized fragments of audio around on a DAW timeline will unlikely have any catastrophic effects. However, as sample and bit rates go beyond the scope of reproduction, except perhaps in the most clinical of situations, they become “...increasingly surplus to purpose”.<sup>85</sup> The point is that just because we can specify beyond the scope of a particular requirement does not mean we should. We could spend hours fractionally altering the frequency of a sound that lasts the length of a sample that only bats will notice. We can specify dimensions of a brick wall to six decimal places only to construct them in the wind, rain and mud of a typical building site. This need for hyper accuracy is often misplaced, precision fetishism can be dangerous. “Error’s gift is its critical friction against our desire for control: to remind us not to insist on a control that is not there (and never was) but ask instead why we should desire it in the first place.”<sup>86</sup> The dichotomy is to embrace the precision and deflect it for something more human, like adding noise to a CD, and at the same time to repair error and welcome the ability of absolute control, but to use it wisely. Error is very much part of our world, it happens all the time, it can affect our lives immeasurably—but only occasionally is it embraced.

*Aurality One* embodies and embraces this notion of the error in sound manipulation and is mirrored visually in the accompanying video. However, the paradox is manifest; the hand of the composer is observable in both the audio and the visual aspect of the work, chaotic for sure but demonstrably designed. Much of the unpredictability of the original improvisation has been radically tamed, in a few segments all but removed. However, the new composition resembles a palimpsest of the original recordings. Indeed, all the studio compositions in the portfolio include elements of this desire and expectancy, as was discussed earlier there is always a heritage from the original recordings no matter how much they are manipulated.

Very much borrowing from the techniques involved in music video the visuals are carefully cut with sonic gestures in the music, timing has been reigned in, patterns are perceptible between the visual and the audible. Making manifest the gesture of one with the other gives

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<sup>84</sup> Vitex Aluminium Extrusion web site <https://vitextrusions.com/understanding-accuracy-precision-tolerance/> Retrieved 10<sup>th</sup> July 2019

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. pp. 3

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. pp. 248

the impression that they are, in some way, connected. This is obviously not the case, but as a viewer, it is difficult to resist any implied association and then as we experience the film, we build a concept that makes sense to us in our minds around those implications. When things are vague and open, we cannot help but try and make sense of it.

What is particularly interesting is how the audio references the visuals and vice versa, implying synchronicity; this implied state is beneficial for framing what might otherwise be unconnected. Musically, the opening section contains several spiky, metallic pitched tones which transition to a moment of stasis. The visual elements mirror the sounds such that they appear to be linked. There is no apparent meaning implied, conversely there is no reason to doubt that the streaming of the visual and the audible in tandem happens in such a way as to elicit some deeper meaning. In other words, the streams seem to collude to offer a single idea of something that is not quite right, of a chaotic situation that perhaps implies something is damaged or malfunctioning. It reflects the flâneur particularly as an interpreter of various texts relayed as a compelling poetic visual experience, moving fluidly between states to engender a single coherent thought. Similarly, at 0.47' into the video as the image in the frame begins to glitch and shatter into fragmented pixels of colour so too does the music, disintegrating into clouds of distortion. By conflating the music and image, it offers a possible narrative, an overpowering connectedness that would not necessarily exist had the two elements not been placed in combination; the sum of the parts is magnified. Embodied in *Aurality One* is perhaps a suggestion that audio material *can* have an implicit visual context, or it can be made explicit with the addition of a moving image. Paraphrasing David Lynch, you can feel the marriage, what Michel Chion refers to as 'added value' when the "expressive and informative value with which a sound enriches a given image so as to create the definite impression, in the immediate or remembered experience one has of it."<sup>87</sup> When a film and its soundtrack are so closely linked in this way, where the invocation of the flâneur metaphor creates a fusion of audio gestures and moving image manipulation that speak so carefully to each other, there is little alternative but to imagine a link. Spectatorship in *Aurality One* is rendered, on the whole, as a passive experience; it is all but impossible to imagine an alternative architecture, it is what it is, we may ask, "What does this mean?" and make an attempt to invoke some meaning to it, but it is unlikely that we would ask, "Where is the

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<sup>87</sup> Chion, M. (1994). *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* Columbia University Press. Chichester, West Sussex, UK. pp.5



meaning?” since the ‘where’ is before our eyes and in our ears. We have to hand all the information required to interpret the artwork, there is no need to look elsewhere, it is all we can do or choose to ignore it.

The film acts as an evocation of an imagined city precipitated by the flâneur poet whose experience of various aspects of the material world are laid bare. A fractured state filtered through the grime and detritus of the real is ‘re-dreamed’ as real. It is the discarded regenerated and brought back to life. The beauty of the moving image is that it can operate through many layers, from entirely untrue to wholly real, and move unencumbered between them all.

The friction between narrative cinema and the non-narrative form is exciting, and I will endeavour, in subsequent works that combine music and moving image, to make use of what the viewer/listener expectations might be, given particular circumstances. What that might mean, how those expectations might be perverted allowing for a more open, nuanced, multi-faceted and active perception of the work, I shall discuss in more detail with particular reference to *Aurality Three* later in this section. Subverting expectations in art can be fraught with pitfalls, one spectator “...watching fog drift from the mountains might find it an exercise in contemplative boredom: another might experience it as transcendental meditation...”<sup>88</sup> of course both of these situations are valid. To strive for an alternative cinematic space, one that isn’t bound by the “...iron nucleus of narrative...”<sup>89</sup> is worth pursuing, and we shall be devoting some thought on these ideas later.

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<sup>88</sup> Schrader, P. (2018). *Transcendental Style in Film/Rethinking Transcendental Style*. Oakland California. University of California Press pp. 31

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 25

Organic buildings are the strength and lightness of the spiders' spinning, buildings qualified by light, bred by native character to environment, married to the ground.

**Frank Lloyd Wright**

### **Aurality Two: Post Office Station.**

Remixed audio with moving image.

Original piano composition: Adam Staff

Duration: 1'.48"

If we accept Paul Schrader's idea of cinema being an atom, "a tight nuclear ball of neutrons and protons bound by 'strong force' of narrative",<sup>90</sup> at some time in the middle of the last century a particle broke free, spinning off with "great energy" and became something else. Schrader suggests that it moved away in "one of three anti-narrative directions".<sup>91</sup> One is the art gallery where artists working with film could reduce narrative to the material composition of celluloid and those physical components that allow it to project directly into our conscience; light or its absence. Once form is reduced to this most basic of states, then we have a very particular view of what the idea of film might be and the myriad of possibilities that may be engendered.

*Aurality Two* is by no means totally reduced, nor does the video have anything in common with conventional narrative film. Instead, it takes the general template of the photographic art magazine, where images and text are composited onto a flat page and relocates it in time. The work of the flâneur metaphor and the magazine *Flâneur*<sup>92</sup> were both a particularly stimulating influence on the way this piece was put together. The magazine has evident aims and objectives about what it is trying to achieve, conflating the character of a gallery exhibition with an artist-in-residence. It is heavily researched, well documented and aesthetically well designed—containing original photography combined with inciteful writing; imagined as a modern, streetwise version of *The Arcades Project* Walter Benjamin's 'Paris

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<sup>90</sup> Schrader, P. (2018). *Transcendental Style in Film*. University of California Press. Oakland, California, USA. pp. 25

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. pp. 25 Schrader's three directions are: The Surveillance Camera, The Art Gallery and The Mandala.

<sup>92</sup> Messner, R. Ed. *Flâneur Magazine*, 2013. (01).

collection'. *Flâneur Magazine*, deconstructs the complexity of a single street in one particular city through the eyes of artists, photographers and local inhabitants, it:

is a nomadic, independent magazine ... produced with and for *Flâneur* by artists of all disciplines while the team spends two months on location. It is made using a collaborative, impulsive and unconventional approach. The magazine attempts to use a single microcosm to tell universal stories.<sup>93</sup>

The design for *Aurality Two* corresponds to a magazine page laid out in an Adobe software package such as InDesign. Built for use in book and magazine publishing InDesign allows for images and text to be overlaid on a two-dimensional page grid. Still, unlike the static page of a magazine, the timeline of Premiere Pro acts in a much more linear way, visual transitions are made over a rigid time frame, a time dictated by the flâneur/composer rather than the viewer as would happen when reading a magazine. Part film, part magazine; *Aurality Two* is rendered in time like a video but has borrowed the visual structure of a magazine. Although text in the context of a film is not unusual, it is wholly accepted as part of the format of a magazine. Occasionally, filmmakers do make creative use of text. Jean-Luc Godard embeds text within the frame to augment signification or confusion, this is particularly apparent in the film *Weekend*.<sup>94</sup> When patterns of the live-action film are juxtaposed with text, it can ascribe a superficial charm, often at odds with the message the written word is conveying. Neither the text nor the image has primacy, it is the combination that is the over-riding context and offers a distinctive reading. This new situation is wholly in keeping with the flâneur metaphor, collecting disparate information to be presented as a collaged whole. The addition of text in *Aurality Two* revealed unintended repercussions. Meditative engagement in the flow of the video that is instilled in the viewer by the overlaid static images within the frame is broken with the introduction of the text. The intention was to provide a kind of poetic aside that would gently bind the images together. Instead, the emphasis is modified, for a moment, the eye is redirected to engage with the text. A little battle ensues with time. Although these consequences were not planned, the effect is quite striking; by introducing text into the flow of the cinematic experience, we can manipulate the viewer's gaze, in turn,

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<sup>93</sup> Messner, R. Ed. *Flâneur Magazine* GbR. Berlin, Germany. Website: <https://flaneur-magazine.com/about/> Retrieved 9<sup>th</sup> May 2019

<sup>94</sup> Godard, J-L. (Director) (1967). *Weekend* [DVD] France/Italy. Artificial Eye.

shaping perception in fascinating ways. Managing the length of time text is present on the screen can hugely influence the viewer's understanding. If it is too fleeting, one experiences frustration – there is a need to examine and appreciate the images as they appeared, the viewer is drawn to engage with the text; it is demanding to prioritise one over the other. Hopefully, the struggle to participate is not such that one becomes entirely detached. Obviously, repeated viewings would negate the problem or at least change the understanding of the experience, but it would be fanciful to imagine that happening very often.

Much of the music in this portfolio is pretty intense; dense, noisy and heavily gestural. In comparison, *Aurality Two*, which has been re-worked from an original composition by Adam Staff, is subdued, melodic, a little glitchy yet not overly gestural at all. Any overtly visual essence or flavour is subdued. The intention was to invoke an audio 'ambience'; music that could be ignored or engaged with as preferred, borrowing Brian Eno's ideas around Ambient music or perhaps Erik Satie's ideas around *musique d'ameublement* as impersonal, generic audio accompaniment. On the other hand, I did not want the music to be flavourless, *Music for Airports*,<sup>95</sup> Eno's first so called 'Ambient' album after *Discreet Music*,<sup>96</sup> was my reference point. Where *Music for Airports* is melodic, sedate and suffused with melancholia, the soft glitches and stuttering phrases in *Aurality Two* reflects a hint of unease or restlessness one would expect when walking in an unfamiliar urban landscape.

The music is tempered by viewing the images, presented as they are as sedate and meditative contemplations, depicting particular *aspects* of a city. Detailed sections of stonework, a handrail, an abstract fragment of an iron bridge or a softly lit stairwell are familiar but decoupled; the extensive views we do encounter act to frame the details in context. Similar to the iconic images of Paris made by Eugene Ag t there are no people in this study of the urban micro-scape. The only allusion to humanity is through the display mannequins in the final frames of the video, which is followed by a reflection in a shop window of another shop window. Where Ag t's pictures of Paris seem to be haunted, "...by people who step through walls and dissolve before our eyes..."<sup>97</sup> these are just empty, deserted and lifeless,

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<sup>95</sup> Eno, B. (1978). *Ambient 1: Music for Airports* [Audio Recording] Polydor Records UK

<sup>96</sup> Eno, B. (1975). *Discreet Music* [Audio Recording] EG Records UK

<sup>97</sup> Dyer, G. (2005). *The Ongoing Moment*. Abacus. London, UK. – Nobody actually steps through walls, as Dyer explains: "...long exposure times caused any swiftly moving objects or people to disappear completely."

suggesting only the ephemeral; material surface and texture, existing only in time. Impersonal material fragments revealed in the imagery acts as a counterpoint to the poetic, personal reflections in the text, intended to humanise the otherwise distant experience of the film.

Where *Flâneur* magazine investigates a microcosm of a city through the study of a single street and the people who inhabit the area, this video attempts to establish an essence of an expansive place. Through the combination of fragmented images and text connected by aspects of their location, we perhaps recognise comparable patterns and similarities that exist throughout the work. The photographic notes made whilst ‘wandering critically’ around Montréal in 2016, look homogenous as if they represent a single place at a single time. The flâneur/photographer is entirely invoked in a city that was utterly unknown. The intention is to present a reflection or an essence of the place filtered by the flâneur through the images, no matter how removed from the place they might seem, “...photographs really are the experience captured... ..to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed.”<sup>98</sup> They contain a specific grammar all their own, working on our visual capacities. The pieces of text quoted from the Montréal edition of *Flâneur* magazine, not only work differently on our sensibilities, but they propose a different kind of idea. A more personal, intimate response to the situation that is only partially revealed in the images; in placing one with the other new connections are made, a superimposed montage is happening, and we are encouraged to read between the lines. Music, text and image as the data of the city are combined as a single document and filtered through the work of the flâneur/composer we see a unique description, a rendering made real by the viewer.

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<sup>98</sup> Sontag, S. (1997). *On Photography* Penguin Books London, England pp. 4

Either a building is part of a place or it is not. Once that kinship is there, time will only make it stronger.

**Wilella Sibert Cather**

### **Aurality Three: Dark Town.**

No-input mixer. Music with moving image.

Duration: 6'.22"



Opening shot of *Dark Town: Aurality Three*.

Some pieces of music possess a distinct visual element weaved into their fabric; there is something unique about music that generates images in one's mind. I envisage the British urban landscape, often dark, often misty and raining, in the music of the electronic music producer, William Bevan, AKA Burial. It fizzes with a melancholic urgency, an implied impression of danger; it is unsettling and often wholly mournful. As we listen to an evocative piece of music, it can act as "a transportation system to and from our subconscious, our instincts and our shared culture. Vibration sense, sound sense, is ancient, visceral, and inextricably linked to old and deep emotional centers in the brain ... Such is (its) influencing power".<sup>99</sup> The flâneur engages with this eerie presence, shrouded, curious and reticent as

<sup>99</sup> Douek J. (2013). Music and emotion - a composer's perspective. *Frontiers in Systems Neuroscience*, 7, 82. doi:10.3389/fnsys.2013.00082

they wander through the world lit by streetlamps. The improvised audio for *Dark Town* was like this for me, the raw material was imbued with an impression of shadow shrouded darkness, hints of details, things unspecified, loneliness and melancholy. One is minded of the contemplative paintings by Edward Hopper reflecting a kind of lonely sadness, a sadness that seems uplifting, a sadness that is entirely part of the human condition. The music of Burial does this to incredible effect, for example, ‘Archangel’ from the *Untrue* album<sup>100</sup> or ‘Come Down to Us’ from the 12” EP *Rival Dealer*<sup>101</sup> evokes an almost unbearable but inspiring sadness.

In reviewing the original improvised audio for *Dark Town*, the associations were still present in the musical detail and there existed a powerful metaphoric connection that was both visually and sonically redolent of an impression of a particular place and a specific hour of the day. It is the internal conversations that one has when walking alone in the dark that can make a place seem so ambiguous, so detached. Streetlights, the shadows and reflections, the traffic and road works, railings, walls, car parks and stations, connected through proximity create a feeling of isolation in the dark town centre. Wandering the streets of Huddersfield is more fascinating at night, the crowds have dispersed one is transfigured by anonymity and loneliness; it may be true of the urban condition generally that darkness begets a shadow of mystery that daylight obscures. It has an aura that is unique to the place—what is busy with purpose during the day becomes languorous come nightfall. There are concentrated areas of activity, the night owls at play, and as one would expect, some areas become entirely deserted or even restricted. A resident of the town centre for many years, I walked every day and have photographed the centre many times. One particular image resonated with me, it represented a visual attitude, the flâneur reference image for the piece during the time I was composing, so enduring it also features as the opening shot in the video. It is a still image, made at night, of a road devoid of activity. The perspective is broad and takes in the entire street, a few cars, a blurred silhouette, streetlamps that glow fiercely and on the right-hand side of the image stands a row of large Yorkshire stone buildings. Nothing of particular importance is happening and for me, this is irresistible; nothing is happening. If one gazes at an image lacking any framed focus point first the eye and then the mind begins to meander; the internal conversation emerges, questions arise, circumstances are contrived as one

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<sup>100</sup> Burial (2007). *Untrue* [Audio Recording] Hyperdub Records, London.

<sup>101</sup> Burial (2013) *Rival Dealer* [Audio Recording] Hyperdub, London.

attempts to liberate the scene and impose meaning. The tableau takes shape, meagre details materialize – the negligible reflections in the windows, the rubbish in the road, the street sign on the building and the slightly blurred figure, walking, positioned on the left of the frame. A whole body of information emerges, we can construct a tableau vivant, that stimulates a perceived narrative. Initially, there was nothing but a few random elements, but with time to ponder, we are forced to impose a story, both within and beyond the frame. The information is trivial and insignificant like the unremarkable objects explored in microscopic detail by Nicolson Baker.<sup>102</sup> Holding a shot like this, even for just a few moments may be disconcerting, troubling even. Time slows, boredom thrives, no longer can we submit or be passive. The idea, that Samuel Taylor Coleridge formulated “that willing suspension of disbelief, which constitutes poetic faith” can no longer apply; we are the active spectators. Time has allowed us the opportunity to unfold, to reveal a narrative that is true only for the viewer. These ideas are encapsulated in what is being labelled slow film, slow art and slow music. Let us briefly look at these ideas and how they have influenced my work here.

Earlier, in the discussion around *Aurality One*, we touched on the ideas surrounding active and passive participation when engaging with a work of art. Cinema, traditionally associated with a passive agreement, has, away from the mainstream at least, taken some divergent routes. One particular idea is around the notion of slowness, where there is an emphasis not on moving a narrative forwards but in allowing the viewer some agency in the way they participate in that narrative. “Stillness is one of the hallmarks of slow cinema, along with the use of static shots, long duration shots, pans, tracking shots – as well as a narrative focus on the more mundane aspects of life.”<sup>103</sup> Incorporating this idea of slowness and keeping it in mind when working on *Dark Town*, to create a particular situation and encourage the viewer to take a participative role in the experience.

Examples of slow ‘art’ film like Michael Snow’s *Wavelength*,<sup>104</sup> or more mainstream films like Robert Bresson’s *Pickpocket*,<sup>105</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky’s *The Stalker*<sup>106</sup> or Bela Tarr’s *The Turin*

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<sup>102</sup> Baker, N. (1998). *The Mezzanine*. Granta Books. London, UK. - A 130-page novel that covers an hour-long lunch break.

<sup>103</sup> Russell, A. (2019) *Slow cinema: what it is and why it’s on a fast track to the mainstream in a frenetic world*. <https://theconversation.com/slow-cinema-what-it-is-and-why-its-on-a-fast-track-to-the-mainstream-in-a-frenetic-world-114769>

<sup>104</sup> Snow, M. (Director). (1967). *Wavelength*. [Film] Canada

<sup>105</sup> Bresson, R. (Director). (1959). *Pickpocket*. [DVD] France. Artificial Eye.

<sup>106</sup> Tarkovsky, A. (Director). (1979). *Stalker*. [DVD] Soviet Union. Artificial Eye



*Horse*<sup>107</sup> displaces Eisenstein's idea of narrative movement driven by the montage cut with more static framed time. These films contain fewer, often static shots, no panning and no zooming, that dare to hold the viewer's attention for much longer than would have conventionally been acceptable. So much so that time becomes pervasive, we experience time as slowness, it is "...the viewer (that) makes time felt in a shot. The viewer is operative; the viewer acts upon the image."<sup>108</sup> Little or no action is made serene, the shared experience is made remote, as viewers we must either contemplate this worldview, on our own or reject it; passive surrender is no longer an option. Slowness as an idea has filtered into other disciplines, for example in painting the work of Edward Hopper and Mark Rothko instil a sense of the serene and the meditative, the work of the composer Morton Feldman does the same. The extremely long exposures made by the Japanese photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto represent a "slow art" where we engage with time as intent. The still photographic image is subverted as fractions of a second, 24 frames a second to be precise, and becomes monumental. Sugimoto sets his camera up to record for many hours - movie theatres are photographed on an immobile camera, recording every frame of a film rendering the cinema screen completely overexposed, a bleach white block in the centre of the theatre in place of the screen a whole movie compressed into a single shot. Similarly, the serene seascapes made on a large format still camera with exposures of up to three hours, result in images that are entirely blurred but still recognisable as seascapes. These ephemeral images are staggeringly beautiful but also revealing of the passing of time through the photographic process itself, a process that is wholly linked with time and light.

Once alerted to time passing and enveloped by this unfamiliar cadence we begin to encounter another altogether different quality; that of boredom.

Like slow art, boredom is a thoroughly temporal experience; to be bored means to be conscious of nothing but time's passing. Which suggests a further step. If attention sustained too long empties into boredom or distraction, perhaps boredom or distraction might awaken attention.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Tarr, B. (Director). (2011). *The Turin Horse*. [DVD] Hungary. Artificial Eye.

<sup>108</sup> Schrader, P. (2018). *Transcendental Style in Film*. University of California Press. Oakland, California, USA. pp. 17

<sup>109</sup> Reed, A. (2019). *Slow Art – The experience of Looking, Sacred Images to James Turrell*. University of California Press. USA pp. 31

Slow film extends time, we experience that duration physically, it represents narrative as a reduction, the story as time, "...Time becomes the story—or at least its central component. Slow cinema examines how time affects images. It's experiential, not expositional."<sup>110</sup> We become alert to the experience of time through the film's narrative, in other words, the emergence of time as fundamental to the narrative structure of the film acts as a kind of non-narrative narrative because the passing of time itself is the story.

The audience is invited to invoke the flâneur, to more or less make their own way through this experience, to take the parts they need and discard what they deem irrelevant. *Dark Town*, more than any of the other works, considers these ideas of slowness, the film's static shots, of which there are very few, frame an image of little particular focus. The cuts, when they come, are not made to service a narrative or gesture, indeed they ignore musical gestures entirely; the images linger and allow the viewer to contemplate both the framed space and the expanse beyond the margins of the frame. The shots are expansive and offer many small, possibly insignificant, points of interest. However, there is no attempt to influence—the looking experience should be active, time (narrative) appears over time (duration of the film), and there is time to explore each shot. Coupled with the non-narrative, non-diegetic sound/music, which functions as a counterpoint to the visual experience we are able to ponder on the experience on offer. There is no apparent thematic link between the individual shots. The sound and the shared time help bind the visual elements; for it is through this disparate image/sound coupling that any essence of a thematic narrative emerges, should such an interpretation be redolent of anything.

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<sup>110</sup> Schrader, P. (2018). *Transcendental Style in Film*. University of California Press. Oakland, California, USA. pp. 10

“How language sits on top of experience...”

**Laurie Anderson**

### **Like Steel & Cement**

No-input mixer/Audio composition.

Duration: 13'.00”

Although by no means imperative, a working title can be hugely helpful in articulating an idea, giving skeletal form to an unmade composition. It can also act as the flâneur’s drop off point. Lou Reed spoke of how he, Delmore Swartz and Andy Warhol learnt the admiration of the title of something<sup>111</sup>, describing that it helped to ground the work. A title can provide context, this is true both for the possible audience and the flâneur/composer, where it can “...underline, focus or clarify manifest content...”<sup>112</sup> creating a frame within which certain sounds, gestures and characters can co-exist. At this time, the title is not necessarily set in stone, as new shapes are bound to appear, which may or may not encompass the original idea. A fluid title can be altered to reflect this new state – however, in this case, it stuck throughout. The label represents both the character of the audio material and the drama of the images in David Lynch’s book of photographs *The Factory Book*, which I found so influential in making this work. *Like Silk & Cement*, embodies several apparent dichotomies – solid/ fluid, textured/smooth, flexible/rigid–materials altered by state, both concrete and steel as pourable and malleable but also dense and immovable.

The monochromatic images of stark factory locations featured in *The Factory Book*, had an overwhelming effect on the way *Like Steel & Cement* was constructed. Acting again as a trigger for the flâneur in the studio, setting the scene from where flânerie could happen, its influence cannot be overstated. The book is full of dense contrasts, monolithic concrete towers, complex steel structures, used and disused buildings “...exuding his unique

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<sup>111</sup> Laurie Anderson & Lou Reed Interviewed by Charlie Rose (2003). - Part Two. Retrieved 10th March 2019

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQWiyKtMemo>

<sup>112</sup> Franklin, M., Becklen, R., & Doyle, C. (1993). The Influence of Titles on How Paintings Are Seen. *Leonardo*, 26(2), 103-108. doi:10.2307/1575894 pp103

cinematic style through dark and brooding images.”<sup>113</sup> It was essential to reflect musically what was represented visually in the photographs as if the audio material should embody an idea of “...the labyrinthine passages, detritus and decay of these man-made structures – haunting cathedrals of a bygone industrial era slowly being taken over by nature.”<sup>114</sup> Each page acts like an indeterminate photographic plan each suggesting transformed aspects of an analogous scene, dreamlike, hazy and enigmatic, these are perplexing images that represent both a very bold ‘now’ and a disconcerting distant time past. This is Lynch celebrating a murky human spirit, industrial courage, tinted with deep, haunting melancholia.

The book acted like a photographic score, or moreover a prompt for action through which the flâneur was able to wander. The improvisation was informed by the work. This is one of the unusual occasions where the improvised material was made with the finished piece in mind. There was an overwhelming impression of physicality, the audio elements sounded like actual objects; crackling machines, metallic sparks and dripping oil in water. Though there are no field records in the piece the flâneur metaphor acts as an imaginary field recordist/sound designer working in an abandoned factory, a dark, damp ruin, with broken glass and crumbling concrete, the ghostly remains of a once-thriving industry. Whilst the flâneur metaphor is fully operational in making notes in the factory space, the subsequent work of the flâneur/composer is in recognising the value of what one has ‘found’—not yet formed, like bare-bones requiring flesh. As I mentioned earlier, *Like Steel & Cement* was a title before it was a piece, and now there was some flesh and a skeleton on which to build a piece of music.

Soft, spacious pitched material and jagged textures co-exist, suspended in space, jostling for attention. The machine-like clicking, regular, insistent, creates an aural ‘zone’ that functions as an establishing shot for the piece and this is a repeating motif in *Like Silk & Cement* and appears almost immediately in the opening section. The music is sonically grounded in a Lynchian factory location, and it has that very particular atmosphere.

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<sup>113</sup> Press release from the photographer’s gallery. Retrieved 28 February 2019.

<https://thephotographersgallery.org.uk/whats-on/past-exhibitions/david-lynch-the-factory-photographs>

<sup>114</sup> *ibid*

We can link this back to architectural theory, particularly in the ideas of Gerhard Böhme, who remarks that “Atmospheres are spaces with a certain mood.”<sup>115</sup> The pulse, appearing throughout, acts as an imaginary audio signifier, a metaphor that suggests a capacious situation within which other sonic materials reside. This visual aurality, where the sound creates an image of the environment, is a compelling atmosphere. There also appears to be an implied wall or boundary or maybe a containing structure. Through the use of audio spatialization and audio gestures placed as if beyond the more prominent sonic material, we are aware of a sonic place beyond or at least a perception of spaces beyond. This imagined space creates yet another area within which new sonic material intermingles; rooms within rooms bounded spaces contained within bounded spaces.

The piece represents the physical experience of motion in space and the associated resonant sensations. As she slowly wanders the flâneur/composer assembles and edits the text; the sounds fade from one to the next, suggesting movement, slow wandering around a significant place as if in a video game. Space appears and disappears, the sounds are revealed in dense layers, some super-wide, others narrow and contained; occasionally sounds are so distant and unconnected to the space, they appear as if beyond the frame, beyond the tableau. Audio material cross-fades as if we approach the source and then move on; as it fades to nothing some new object takes its place. The closing section seemingly breaks through a resistant barrier, a steel door which opens into a new cavernous space. This piece represents the flâneur metaphor vividly. In working closely with the photographic text, the original improvisation has the flâneur and the essence of photographs in the music. The finished piece sounds like a journey of exploration in the familiar environment of an unknown factory space, it is flânerie personified.

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<sup>115</sup> Böhme, G. (2013). *Metaphors in Architecture - A Metaphor?* In Gerber, A. & Patterson, B. (Eds.) *Metaphors in Architecture and Urbanism: An Introduction* (pp. 21–57). Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag.

Speaking of architecture as rhetoric or as music, served to support architecture's claim to be elevated to the status of *artes liberales*.

**Andri Gerber - Metaphors in Architecture and Urbanism**

**Four Buildings.**

A composition for Architek Percussion ensemble – 2016.

Duration: 21'.00"

Perhaps the most challenging undertaking in writing music for others to perform, expressly if one's customary experience is composing directly with sound, is finding a method of imparting one's ideas to the performers for them to render coherently. This is especially true if one's knowledge of traditional notation is scant at best. My previous experience with graphic notation and text scores proved they have limited scope in dealing with specific ideas or details and are often open to misinterpretation.<sup>116</sup> I have had much success with graphic and text notation, most notably with music written for Edges Ensemble at the University of Huddersfield. This particular ensemble is a group of committed individuals who are totally at ease with this more experimental approach to composition and will move mountains to render, with the utmost sincerity, the work they have before them. Unfortunately, this is rare; time constraints and the will to decipher the work is not always available. Once we present work that is complex to illustrate or intricate to understand then as Kunsu Shim suggests, "To convey music in words, i.e. through verbal notation, is not suitable if its parameters are complex, dependent on simultaneity or result oriented... verbal notation is not an instruction but a proposal."<sup>117</sup> So, although improvisation and indeterminacy have a considerable part to play in this practice, it most often results, through composition in the studio, in a fixed, determined piece of music. In an ideal world, a preferred strategy for writing for others to play would be to render a fixed work through improvisation, spending time with the musicians, experimenting through dialogue and working through ideas

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<sup>116</sup> Open, indeterminate and misinterpreted instruction can be full of wonderful surprises – it can also be fraught with tears... this could be a PhD topic in itself.

<sup>117</sup> Shim, K. (2012). *Word Events: Perspectives on Verbal Notation*. Lely, J. and Saunders, J. (Ed.) Continuum International Publishing Group. London, UK. pp. 340

eventually forming a composition that could be replicated. I have indeed experienced this working method, producing an agreed notational system that was both stringent and open where necessary.<sup>118</sup>

Four Buildings was, in some ways, a commission. I had been invited by the Canadian violinist, Mira Benjamin and the Nu:Nord community to participate in a creative residency. The experience working with Architek was, in fact, a kind of half-way house—although a score had to be prepared before the workshop, there would be time to work on it together before the performance. There would be two performances, one in Huddersfield and one at the Union Chapel in London.

The project coincided with a planned trip to Montréal, so I was able to meet with Architek and discuss different ideas, sounding them out as to what might be possible. Focusing on instrumentation, we were able to narrow down some ideas. Even though they were really open to most suggestions, it made sense for *me* to constrain the possibilities. We discussed the use of electronics as part of the performance, and I left this meeting with a clear idea of what could be achieved.

Unlike *flânerie*, where one could ignore the outcome and get on with the process, from the very outset, the dread of the completed piece loomed ever-present. Committing to anything during composition was all but impossible—it is a truism that if you can work with reduced options, a more satisfactory conclusion is more natural to find. The piece took many months to realise and it was an excruciating process. It is an admirable trait to be able to hear constructed sounds in one's imagination but it really is not like this for me. I have to be able to actually listen, break and process sounds and then reassemble them; audio for me is like paint, it needs to be worked. I seriously considered presenting an audio score, but I really felt that this was an abdication of my role as a composer, especially in this scenario. I realise I have quite a strange and rigid idea of what a composer should be but if I could achieve the piece electronically, why would I have it re-imagined by live musicians?

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<sup>118</sup> I have only ever experienced this strategy once, in 2013. The Québécois musician Jean-François Laporte very generously worked collaboratively over a few days to make a piece that resulted in a graphic instruction/aide-memoire for the piece. Given his instrumentation a notated score would have been virtually useless.

Finally, I committed to programming some basic patterns and pitches in Ableton Live and notated the outcomes, which is a particularly clunky and wholly ill-advised way of working. But by combining these rigid notated patterns with parts and sections where the instruction was loose and more open to interpretation by the players, I was able to work in a way that resembled previous situations. During the extensive rehearsal period, which I knew from the outset would be available, we were able to hone the piece considerably. An example of this was the ‘pushing/pulling’ of the drum phrase in the last section. I had included a written instruction in the score, but it was not specific enough to be useful either as an instruction or as a musical gesture. In rehearsal we were able to experiment first with slight adjustments that were hardly noticeable, altering the tempo by a few bpm and marginally unlocking the phasing in the vibraphone parts, which was the intention all along. This would have worked really well over a much more extended period. However, the short duration meant there was insufficient time for the music to noticeably fragment, but with more dramatic changes in the tempo in the drum part, we were able to really test the vibraphone players. Indeed, it took some will on the part of the players to keep the vibraphone parts locked down. The two vibraphone parts not only move around in phase with each other but the unstable rhythmic modification wrenches at them to break free from the confines of the role as written. There is something both satisfying and slightly subversive in making something actually sound broken.

To reflect the flâneur wanderer, I imagined not a meandering journey but fully realised vistas, individual moments of reflection in a given space. To this end, I concluded that there should be four different parts of the piece. Also, given that interest in the built environment was relevant to my PhD, I made a connection with the idea that these four parts could be four different rooms or buildings; four entirely separate spaces with some kind of linking theme or metaphor. I visualised the four areas connected via a concourse acting as a pathway between the buildings. Borrowing from the title of an exhibition from 1959 held at the Museum of Modern Art - *Four New Buildings: Architecture and Imagery*<sup>119</sup> the piece contained four sections that alluded to the ideas presented in the exhibition. It is not directly related to the specific ideas around the exhibition, only that four very unique buildings were being discussed. The point was to borrow and build on the unique characteristics of the individual

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<sup>119</sup> Four New Buildings: Architecture and Imagery PDF Online:  
[https://www.moma.org/documents/moma\\_catalogue\\_2440\\_300063736.pdf](https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2440_300063736.pdf) Retrieved 14th May 2019.



architect's vision, focusing on unusual sculptural, non-standard architectural shapes that dispense with the 'rectilinear grid' of more traditional buildings. Sometimes these new forms are merely hinted at and at other times they are represented by substantial sweeping figures that dissect vertical and horizontal lines. The notes from the exhibition catalogue are illuminating "some forms are inherently richer in overtones—are more provocative of associations—than the purely geometric forms of abstract architectural composition. The images such forms evoke become part of a building's ultimate value".<sup>120</sup> What particularly interested me was the internal "negative" space that such buildings might create. I envisaged a piece of music that represented not an external view of four individual buildings precisely, moreover what is formed by the shape they enclose; much like Rachel Whiteread's negative sculptures. *Ghost* employs the interior of a room within a Victorian house as a mould to create a sculptural effigy. The sculpture represents the internal shape of the building, the area that bricks and mortar had previously enclosed, as if "mummifying the air in a room."<sup>121</sup> The result of the sculpture is eerie, melancholic and slightly confusing, a negative space that no longer exists or rather never actually existed, made positive and solid.

We can imagine filling a particular space with sound, we might even be able to imagine what any particular space might sound like; the sound of clattering machinery filling a cavernous factory or an organ and choir filling a cathedral. The aim for this piece was to create an audio representation of four different internal spatial environments in time, with each being strange and complex in a slightly different way. The music would be like the sound of the interior of a room; an audio version of *Ghost*. The finished work reflects four different large open spaces that contain an inky reverberant emptiness. Shafts of hazy morning light streak through the strange open expanse, dark shadows revealing curious details in the distant margins.

The intention was to make a piece of music that followed the flâneur through the different environments, though the outcome was somewhat at variance with this concept. Each section has a unique sound world, and as a piece of music, I believe it to be quite lovely.

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<sup>120</sup> Four New Buildings: Architecture and Imagery PDF Online: [https://www.moma.org/documents/moma\\_catalogue\\_2440\\_300063736.pdf](https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2440_300063736.pdf) Retrieved 14th May 2019 pp. 1

<sup>121</sup> Rachel Whiteread: The John Tusa Interviews. BBC Online. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00ncxzw> Retrieved 14th May 2019.

However, I think that in responding to the original ideas, it fails to convey what had been intended. There are some compositional elements I would now modify; the piece does not represent my usual concerns very well at all. I think staging the musicians such that people could move around them might have been more interesting in this regard. The composition generally and the third section, in particular, was, for my taste, a little too pretty and in retrospect some dissonant contaminates might have allayed the sweetness. Also, the musicians were overly reverent, quietly moving between the sections surrendering to the notion of the concert hall rather than these open spaces that contain sound. Overall, there are some beautiful moments, and the final part played around with juxtaposing shapes in exciting ways – if I were given the time again now, with hindsight and experience, the last section might well have been my starting point.

The river twists and turns to face the city. It looms suddenly, massive, stamped on the landscape. Its light wells up around the surrounds, the rock hills, like bruise-blood. Its dirty towers glow. I am debased.

**China Miéville: *Perdido Street Station***

### **Reflecting Stars Through a Stinking Rainbow of Impurities.**

Composition for Loadbang Ensemble, December 2017.

Arranged for Baritone Voice, Trumpet, Bass Clarinet & Trombone with a fixed recording.

Duration: 8'.08"

Based out of New York City, the ensemble Loadbang was invited to appear in the UK as part of the composer/performance programme organised by CeReNeM at the University of Huddersfield. Student composers were invited to submit requests to compose for these visiting performers, and this particular ensemble set-up seemed like a dream challenge. Immediately drawn, as I was, to the idea of writing for such a broad range of instruments, everything about the set-up appeared to represent the idea of darkness and foreboding, the flâneur/composer could see clearly the world created by such an array of noise.

Earlier, I stated that I never hear music in my head, and this is true; however, it was very clear from the outset that a spoken voice part should act as the flâneur wanderer and would need to appear in the final composition. I found the flâneur narrator in *Perdido Street Station*, the science fiction novel<sup>122</sup> by China Miéville. Set in the fictional city of New Crobuzon, like a steampunk version of Dickensian Victorian London that has been dumped in the distant future. The city is inhabited by many races and many outlandish alien creatures, who co-exist in a marginalised heterogeneous society. The novel opens with a four-page monologue describing a night-time boat journey from the outskirts of the city to the near centre. The flâneur character, the passenger on the boat, describes the sounds of the buildings "...over

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<sup>122</sup> Miéville, C. (2000). *Perdido Street Station*. Pan Books. London UK.

the engine's oily rumble..." and he paints a grim picture of the cityscape that lets the "...sprawling monster hide behind corners to leap out at the traveller...". It is a dark and wretched place; still, the writing is so beautifully lyrical, so engaging that I wanted at least a pared-down, re-imagined version of this opening section, as a dramatic backdrop. This poetic voice acts as a strategic layer in the piece to aid cognition, like a voice-over in a movie, giving the audience a descriptive cue for the setting of the piece. Although initially conceived to be either spoken or sung by the voice as part of the performance, I concluded that the narrator should be a disembodied character, a fixed recording relayed to the listener via a speaker system. This idea became central to the piece; the voice should be anonymous and disconnected from the music. Generously, the members of the ensemble made themselves available, via email, to answer questions and give advice. I broached the idea to Jeffrey Gavett, the baritone voice in the group, of recording the reworked monologue both spoken and whispered. Obliging he produced quality recordings of himself performing the spoken and whispered parts and made them available as audio files.

Once committed to the idea that the aural narrative is the primary element of the piece, it required that one should have complete control over its construction. In some respects, the flâneur was betrayed in favour of the composer. This became imperative because the flâneur voice needed to be central to the piece. However, although I felt I had betrayed the flâneur compositionally, in truth, she was re-appropriated in the role of actor, *she* is the voice of the narrator. Manipulating the recording to reflect the character of the flâneur protagonist meant that one was not only required to direct but also to regularly defer to the flâneur/composer; the oscillation necessary to establish the right place for the voice to inhabit, the right tone and flavour was essential.

As the fixed vocal part took shape, there appeared to be an intense conflict between the whispered and spoken elements. There was a distinct lack of clarity, it was really messy even when I panned each section hard left and hard right in the stereo field; the dense colouring of the parts didn't gel. As is often the case with such things, removing sections of audio made a considerable difference to the subtlety of the recording. Details mired in mud became diaphanous; the more information deleted, the more work done, the clearer and more perceptible it became; once again, the flâneur/composer coupled with the studio machine was immensely productive. The finished fixed part is sparse and glitchy, word

fragments left suspended in limbo, truncated; sentences are chopped up and long silences inserted. The voice of the narrator is clear. The nuanced flavour of the original text is still discernible, but by combining the spoken with the whispered and allowing the words to exist in extended moments of silence created a dreamlike, otherworldly place into which one could place the music.

As suggested earlier, this spoken part acts as a proxy for a visual layer, a hazy vision projected onto a gossamer screen. It is a long single shot viewed through the eyes of the protagonist, unrelenting and unflinching like a scene from Bela Tarr's *A Man From London*, acting as a dream, which holds the viewer's gaze throughout: "Time allows the viewer to imbue the image with associations, even contradictory ones."<sup>123</sup> And filtered through this veil of time, we hear music. The music is a wholly separate essence, a distant cloud of sound, another layer entirely. It doesn't belong to the spoken layer, but we hear the music through the spoken layer, in that way, the layers rely on each other. The musical layer is dark and medieval sounding, based as it is on a four-part vocal piece by Johannes Ockeghem. Much like the spoken part, it is an extraction from the original, fragments are selected and reworked for the ensemble, parts repeated, chords reinterpreted, and sections written anew. There is an apparent force in the musical element acting both as support and as counterpoint to the spoken part. There is an oscillation at work, in this case between what can be 'seen', the flâneur narrator and the distant music heard through this gauze. These two layers oscillate, crossfading between clarity and obfuscation, narration, and sound, also indeed between composer and flâneur. At times it is almost impossible to discern detail in the parts; it should be both a taxing and mysterious journey.

### **Some reflections post performance.**

I had imagined, given that St. Pauls Hall is a big reverberant space that the ensemble would be a beautiful haze of medieval noise, all extended chords bouncing around the hall and to a degree this is what happened. Unfortunately, what I had imagined as pin-sharp dryness of the narrator part turned out to also be a mush of noise, made worse by the fact that I chose

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<sup>123</sup> Schrader, P. (2018). *Transcendental Style in Film*. University of California Press. Oakland, California, USA. pp. 5

to replay the fixed part at a higher volume than was reasonable. In practice, the separation between the two layers was almost indiscernible. In the recording, the microphones are relatively close to the performers and some distance from the speakers. However, the sound of the performers would have benefitted from more of the room acoustics, whereas the fixed part should be devoid of any room sound. The overall sensation is one of chaos rather than mystery. This was, in fact, worse in performance than it appears on the recording and the recording is pretty awful.

This piece would benefit hugely from being recorded in a studio environment where one could control the final mix of the different elements; most notably a dry narrator voice, and an ensemble awash with reverb.

Go where you cannot understand yourself  
 Cross your mental and physical boundaries  
 Allow your brain to be nomadic  
 Walk as a camel, who is the only one who ruminates while walking  
**A stalker experience by Leire Mesa and Marta Gil**

### **Dark Stone Smoke**

Bass Guitar + processing and percussion.

Duration: 9'.05"

There is a stone chimney set in the Yorkshire countryside just behind the studio in which I work. The view from EMS 5, the eight-channel studio on the second floor of the Creative Arts Building<sup>124</sup> at the University of Huddersfield, is of the fields that surround the small Yorkshire town, and no matter what the weather this outlook is always splendid, in a specifically Yorkshire way. The view inspired the title. This, in turn, inspired the flâneur to reflect on a particular place and the aura of that place. I discussed this in the section on *Dark Town* earlier and whilst 'dark stone and smoke' are not the ubiquitous words one might once have associated with Yorkshire, in the aftermath of the industrial zenith from which the north is currently, very slowly recovering, there is a queasy nostalgia for all things past. On a recent trip to Cornwall, while photographing disused tin mines, along the rugged coastline, this strange contrast was again made palpable. These buildings stand in as a metaphor for the industrial history of Cornwall; they have an aura of specificity that is instantly recognisable to the unique landscape in which they are situated. They are undoubtedly beautiful, but they are also a reminder of an industrial past that is shrouded in a delicate voile of nostalgia. These disused sites are often entirely overgrown with weeds and bramble, teeming with wildlife, but like an overgrown graveyard, you encounter objects manifestly created by the hand of a human being. This terrain where the function has become vague exists everywhere, all over

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<sup>124</sup> The building has been re-named "The Richard Steinitz Building"

Britain we find buildings that are “...effaced whilst others subsided into disuse, lingering on in the urban landscape...”<sup>125</sup> and those that lingered are often loosely defined as wasteland, ‘terrain vague’, shuttered and locked away. These strange places that surround us, act as “...counter-spaces, *terrains vagues* are also containers of a fragmented shared history, illuminating the imperfect process of memory that constantly attempts to recall and reconstruct the past.”<sup>126</sup> Deserted terrain or that which is in the process of transition become “...the removed lieu de memoirs, the unconscious becoming of the urban systems, the spaces of confrontation and contamination between the organic and the inorganic, between nature and artifice.”<sup>127</sup>

The oscillation between the flâneur and composer in the second part of the workflow is imperative and perhaps more evident here than elsewhere. The compositional decisions made were tested against the knowledge gained by the flâneur; the musical metaphor should represent that experience. *Dark Stone Smoke* contains musical elements that allude to both a rugged industrial past and the haze of wistfulness. In setting noise against sublime melodic washes of sound, the piece reveals an arrangement of discordant material that reflects the contrast between the ruin and the re-emerging undergrowth, which in turn embodies the mixed feelings we have toward terrains vague. The piece opens with a jagged crash of sharp, high-pitched tones that flow into a machine-like rhythm, dark and slow, grinding stone and fizzing shards of piercing sparks. The grinding continues, as in the distance, everything begins to settle, disappearing from view. There is something watery, aqueous up in the air like damp walls dripping, but eventually, the trickling subsides. The whole work explores these shifts in tonality and timbre, light, and shade in combination. We shift ground, dark foggy patches of apprehension begin to lift, revealing a slowly beaten cymbal, a strange sticky pulse, the essence of a dynamic force. The soft crackling like rain on a tin roof creates a sense of reality while some birds fly by in the distance. A grinding returns, but it seems much more immediate, more electronic, vital, volatile, juxtaposed with a ghostly machine, like the hum of electricity pylons. Suddenly the rhythmic element breaks through, very upfront, very

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<sup>125</sup> Edensor, T. (2005). *Industrial Ruins: Spaces, Aesthetics and Materiality*. Berg Publishing. Oxford. UK. pp.6

<sup>126</sup> Barron, P. (2014). *Terrain Vague: Interstices at the edge of the pale*. Ed. Mariani, M. & Barron, P. Routledge. London UK pp. 1

<sup>127</sup> Stalker-Architect and Artist Collective manifesto: Through the actual Territories.

<http://www.osservatorionomade.net/tarkowsky/manifesto/manifesting.htm> Retrieved: 30<sup>th</sup> June 2019



persistent. The thick dusty swaths of energy still rush by and eventually come to the foreground as the insistent beat slowly fades into distorted isolation, vague and distant. A hazy melodic rumble envelops the landscape – everything feels warm. The reassurance of the callback, the bass motif, which has only been present previously in fragments, brings about a sense of familiar calm.

This piece represents clearly the composer/flâneur metaphor as a method through which compositional decisions can be coerced and made real. The first part of the workflow always invokes the flâneur as an improvisational attitude. In *Dark Stone Smoke*, the composer/flâneur partnership was perceptible and flourished in the second part of the workflow, one informing and borrowing from the other; as the piece was constructed the ideas and decisions are shared.

Finally, *Dark Stone Smoke* very much represents those initial ideas around the view of the chimney and what I thought it could represent. Much of that part of the world contains remnants of the industrial past and

while ruins always constitute an allegorical embodiment of a past, while they perform a physical remembering of that which has vanished, they also gesture towards the present and the future as temporal frames which can be read as both dystopian and utopian, and they help to conjure up critiques of present arrangements and potential futures.<sup>128</sup>

Embodied in this view of the ruin of the chimney in particular and that idea of the terrain vague in general, is a feeling of looking forward into the unknown, coupled with the knowledge of the past which puts me in mind of that beautiful quote from *Misty in Roots*:

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<sup>128</sup> Edensor, T. (2005). *Industrial Ruins: Spaces, Aesthetics and Materiality*. Berg Publishing. Oxford. UK. pp. 15

When we travel this land, we walk for one reason... to try to help another man think for himself. The music of our hearts is **roots** music, which recalls history, because without the knowledge of your history, you cannot determine your destiny.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Misty in Roots (1979). *Live at the Counter Eurovision 79*. [Audio Recording] People Unite Publications.

It may be that all borderlands hum with the frequencies of the unconscious; after all, borders are where the fabric is thin.  
**Kapka Kassabova: Border - A Journey to the Edge of Europe**

## Convergent Boundaries

No-Input Mixer + effects

Duration: 10'.46"

The origins of the idea for *Convergent Boundaries* lay in the ideas around borders between countries and states. Serendipitously, I had been reading a few books whose common central theme is this idea of the border and what it means for those for whom a border looms large in their lives. China Mieville's *City and the City* where two entirely different cities occupy the same area simultaneously, one 'unseeing' the presence of the other by force of statute. Cormac McCarthy's border trilogy that plays out along the border between the USA and Mexico, the excellent *Prisoners of Geography* by Tim Marshall and *Border* by Kapka Kassabova which both look at disputed borders in particularly interesting ways. And then there is the madness of Brexit...

Borders, those invisible, distinct and immovable, occasionally nebulous moments that exist between towns, cities and countries. Whilst being conscious of the fact that they are essentially just lines in the sand created by setting two areas against each other, they are also "the physical representation of liminality"<sup>130</sup> both literally and metaphorically. Often defined as the place where one thing becomes another the border also represents an indefinable moment in space when we recognise how arbitrary any demarcation might be. That a single line can define two places so succinctly, can also be quite bizarre, as illustrated here by Cormac McCarthy:

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<sup>130</sup> Sedgwick, M. (2016). *Books about Borders*. Guardian Online.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/19/top-10-books-about-borders> Retrieved 17<sup>th</sup> September 2019

crossed sometime near noon the international boundary line into Mexico, State of Sonora, undifferentiated in its terrain from the country they quit, and yet wholly alien and wholly strange.<sup>131</sup>

We are well aware of how arbitrary these lines are, indeed, this imagined point in space that is denoted by a mark on a map often does not actually exist as a line at all; at other times the line is representative of a fortified razor-wire fence. Moving between two different spaces, negligible regarding distance travelled but sometimes massive culturally or in terms of identity is often relatively uncomplicated; at other times it can be fatal. Thinking about how extraordinary this leap from one thing to another can be and trying to imagine how one could represent this sonically was a central position for this piece of music. How could a musical gesture stand-in for this divergence/convergence? I began to imagine how one could represent two entirely different states, both visually and sonically in time.

If one cuts into a piece of audio in a DAW, or indeed video/film in a video editor, one encounters a vertiginous face where at one moment there is audio/image the next absolute silence or the screen jumps to a blinding white. If one places another sound/image directly next to the cut, one will experience a jarring switch from one state to another. There are many techniques to make this harsh transition more palatable, the most common of which would be the ubiquitous crossfade – this practice is common both in audio and in cinema, fade one thing out as another thing fades up. It is as easy on the ear as it is on the eye and it nearly always works. Unfortunately, this technique has its drawback, it almost always works, and one can become over-reliant, and its overuse can be pervasive. Used wisely and in moderation, it can be a handy tool. In both music composition and cinema editing, the use of the crossfade or indeed the continuity edit is ingrained in us as spectators; we are as comfortable as we are conditioned to accept this as usual and make sense of the situation as it occurs. Perhaps guilty of resting on this particular laurel too regularly I was eager to reform. The jump cut, or its thuggish cousin the smash cut, is altogether a more difficult thing to digest even when the practitioner pulls it off successfully; it can be a surprising or even shocking gesture. The jump cut, although often quite a small gesture, appears as a monumental moment in our experience. The smash cut is a higher order of something else, a massive leap from one thing, to the next. A completely disorientating moment, disconnected

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<sup>131</sup> McCarthy, C. (1995). *The Crossing: The Border Trilogy Vol. Two*. Picador. Great Britain.

to what went before, is happening before our eyes, and our brains work hard to make sense of this new unconnected thing, attempting to make connections when none are apparent. Robert Normandeau's composition *Jeu*<sup>132</sup> makes much use of this technique throughout the 24 minutes; smashing from male voice choirs to jarring mechanical noise, from children playing at the seaside in the distance to the sound of a pneumatic drill, in isolation—right up front and in your face. We experience extreme dissociation, exhilaration and bafflement. Normandeau, in evoking intrigue and/or discomfort, is asking us to make sense of this unique disconnected sound world. As in the film *The Lost Highway*, David Lynch invites us to decipher Fred's descent into trauma through juxtaposing 'real' and 'imaginary' situations/places in a single cut. The spectator can see the actual locations the characters inhabit, but the continuity is severely interrupted—jump cuts and video glitches confuse our experience of these locations. Is this to illustrate Fred's schizophrenic distorted reality? Is it two different realities? Lynch, as with Normandeau earlier, invites us into these alternative states and asks us to decipher the codes as they are presented, in the moment. We ponder the confusion fully aware that we are also engaged in dissecting the beautiful minds of David Lynch and Robert Normandeau and to do so adds a certain verisimilitude to these wildly esoteric worlds. Let us now focus on how these many disparate thoughts and experiences applied to *Convergent Boundaries* and furthermore how the flâneur/composer uses these influences and formulates them to be useful in composition.

On an entirely more pragmatic level *Convergent Boundaries* are a geological phenomenon "...where lithospheric plates are moving towards one another. The plate collisions that occur in these areas can produce earthquakes, volcanic activity, and crustal deformation...". This idea combined with hearing the early work of the Quebecois composer Gilles Gobeil acted as a jumping point.<sup>133</sup> The intention was to deliberately avoid, where possible, fading between audio gestures and to compose a piece that would consider more severe transitions, preferring to work on the very limits of tension where it fractures and breaks apart. Practically, when a piece of audio on a timeline is cut hard and placed next to another section

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<sup>132</sup> Normandeau, R. (1998). *Lieux inouïs*. [Audio Recording] Empreintes DIGITales, Canada

<sup>133</sup> Particularly the album *La mécanique des ruptures* released in 1994 of which the composer says "I've discovered that my work as a composer has much in common with this branch of civil engineering — exploring and evaluating the behaviour of material on the verge of splitting apart. The composer searches out well-defined forms, strong and clearly cut, alternating movements and interaction marked by tension and release." [https://electrocd.com/en/album/2389/Gilles\\_Gobeil/La\\_m%C3%A9canique\\_des\\_ruptures](https://electrocd.com/en/album/2389/Gilles_Gobeil/La_m%C3%A9canique_des_ruptures) Retrieved 29<sup>th</sup> August 2019

of audio with no fade, there is a resultant loud click as the audio jumps from some voltage back to zero at the point of the cut. The solution is to add a minimal fade or to precisely cut the adjoining audio as close to zero volts as possible. So, theoretically, one could smash cut any sound, but could it be acceptable or even agreeable compositionally? Trevor Wishart affirms that

...the internal architecture of sounds becomes both analytically and conceptually accessible and hence available for more or less precisely defined composition and, as our ability to monitor the subtleties of human intellectual-physiological gesture and transfer them onto sound-materials increases, our notion of what 'music' is must become much more generalised.<sup>134</sup>

The vast majority of the audio material for the work was made experimenting with the no-input mixer, finding the starting point, hitting record and wandering as the flâneur improviser. In the second part of the workflow, it is not unusual to audition several separate improvisations to find something interesting to work with, this might be as insignificant as a single gesture that will appear to the flâneur/composer to be sufficient to start to wander. In this case, the requirements were more specific. As the flâneur skipped quickly through the audio with the border's idea in mind, the composer sought within the sounds and gestures of the improvisation, sufficient dynamic shifts and variations in timbre to convey the different concepts; to render the smash cuts required for the piece, effectively and in a musical way. Unlike other works in the portfolio *Convergent Boundaries* is not about a picture being painted, it contains fewer narrative indicators, the shifts in light, shade, texture and atmosphere are more akin to an experience. Rather than wandering, this is more about transporting, one is experiencing the dynamic shifts of states, crossing boundaries perhaps through a dream reality, one state existing almost on top of the other. The virtual worlds act like the questions asked in a Lynch film, occasionally unanswerable, often intriguing, always baffling. One question smashing into another, leaving no time to react, the intention is to facilitate a confused state of pondering. There are no questions or answers. Instead, the music functions as representing the work of the flâneur, as an agglomeration of questions without answers or perhaps answers without questions brought together for the composer/flâneur to translate, to re-imagine as a musical metaphor. All works of art to some degree or other are to be

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<sup>134</sup> Wishart, T. (2002). *On Sonic Art* Routledge. Oxford, UK. pp.331 Transferred to digital printing 2005

deciphered by the viewer/listener and although the work can be baffling, there are moments of connection, moments where a particular sound has a resonance. This does not last for long; one is faced with a new dilemma almost immediately. The overwhelming sensation of disorientation, of being unsettled throughout the journey, is intentional, it is designed to evoke the work of the flâneur poet, fragments of experience are represented in the composition itself, like the *Arcades Project*.

A late-night Rambler might pass and have no clue that we were 60m under their feet, running through miles of empty tunnels in what was once Britain's deepest telephone exchange.

**Bradley Garret: Subterranean London – Cracking the capital**

### Gently Underground.

No-Input Mixer + effects and processing.

Duration: 9'.30"

If the flâneur could travel underground with impunity, this might be the soundtrack – the subterranean metropolis, made of sewers, underground waterways, tunnels and train ways. Many cities have an underground transit system that exists as a ghostly negative of the city above, a chaotic reverse palimpsest tracing its routes like roots in the subterrestrial gloom. Urban explorers, the illicit flâneur of the 21st century and academic geographers alike search for the hidden from view, "...it was the city in the city they were after, the secrets buried deep underground where the line between construction site and ruin is very thin indeed. The Kingsway Telephone Exchange was the crème de la crème, more coveted even than abandoned Tube stations or possibly even the forgotten Post Office railway..."<sup>135</sup> The city above exists as a distorted mirror of the vast network that lies beneath. The muddle of unseen and abandoned tunnels runs alongside the network that is used every day by hundreds of thousands of people. As Peter Ackroyd in his biography of London reveals:

...the underground has its streets and avenues which the pedestrians quickly recognise and follow. It has its short cuts, its crossroads, its particular features and, just like the city itself, areas of bright lights and bustle are surrounded by areas of darkness and disuse. The rhythms of the city are endlessly mimicked beneath the city, as well as its patterns of activity and habitation.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Garrett, B. (2014). *Underground London: adventures in the secret city beneath our feet*. Guardian Online - <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/nov/11/sp-underground-london-secret-city-ghost-tube-stations> Retrieved 22 November 2019

<sup>136</sup> Ackroyd, P. (2001). *London – The Biography*. Vantage. London. pp568



The train maps deceive us into thinking that there is absolute order, but this is far from the truth. The two-dimensional, superbly designed maps conceal a three-dimensional network that criss-crosses from north to south, east to west and vertically occasionally revealing its machinery above the surface like some metallic Loch Ness monster. Indeed, there is more going on under London than there is above, much of which is not even mapped. Not only transport networks, but sunken ducts containing cables, gas and water being carried in tunnels and trenches; all over the city there is a "...catacomb of avenues and highways mimicking their counterparts above ground."<sup>137</sup> The London Underground, the oldest underground railway in the world, opened in 1863, is both complex and massive covering the city from fringe to fringe, today it is a "...great subterranean metropolis covering an area of 620 square miles, 254 miles of railway..."<sup>138</sup> Travel below the surface of the city at peak transference and the chaos of the roads are replaced by the chaos of the pedestrian traffic swarming through narrow passages to the train platforms hundreds of feet below the surface. Reverberant tunnels dense with cacophonous voices becomes a multi-frequency brown noise. Distant bursts of *Roxanne* or *Life on Mars*, along with the huge posters proclaiming a cure for hair loss or a new five-star production of Hamlet - all the senses are overwhelmed. All humanity is down here in this surreal cavernous labyrinth, it stretches as far as the platforms where the trains will enter from and exit into darkness that leads to the next facility. One cannot escape the noise, the noise of the wind, the noise of people, the noise of trains, the noise of machinery, the noise of information amplified through hideous public address systems filtered in such a way as to slice through all the other noise and enter directly into your brain. Noise combines in reverberant spaces to create more noise. Down here noise is solid, and it assaults the senses to the limit. Noise and heat homogenize, the noise is hot and airless and uncomfortable, and yet with all this, there is still a sense of serenity. Possibly a defence mechanism; our always open ears seem to shut down, and we become isolated from the cacophony and find some inner sanctum. Unlike the trains that operate above ground, these noisy electric carriages are confined to the city limits, enclosed by the boundaries above. No matter where you decide to evacuate, you will have gone no further than the city. You enter this underground place in the city, and you emerge elsewhere in the same city.

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<sup>137</sup> Ackroyd, P. (2001). *London – The Biography*. Vantage. London. pp562

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. pp567

The composition for this piece derives from an improvisation made in December 2015. I mention this mainly because I started working on composing *Gently Underground* in April 2018, under the working title of *Gently Seeking*. The improvisation had remained untouched for 15 months before I began the second part of the composition process. As with the previous piece, *Convergent Boundaries*, I was searching for audio that matched a ‘feeling’, this time, however, of the flâneur underground. The composition represents an enveloped soundscape, not vast and open but enclosed, claustrophobic even, as if shut inside a cell. It represents a flâneur vision of Subterranean London and is experienced as an overarching blanket of sound, sometimes stripped back as if one is listening to an individual element of a cacophonous whole. It is a dramatic monologue invoking the sensation of being in a vast subterranean conurbation. The intention was never cinematic as this implies a shared experience, the aim was more personal reflective experience, part of the crowd but isolated from it, head down, eyes focused, and mentally alert; underground flânerie, exploration as covert reconnaissance. We hear in the public spaces the sound of elevators filled to capacity, grinding machinery reverberating through the tunnels, hot wind blowing, dirt and dust and vomit; the sound of one’s own brain not quite coping. And in those non-public spaces traversed at the dead of night by the modern urban flâneur there exists the crackling static of electricity, strip lights humming, engines rumbling; a subterranean soundscape. Personally, I love the London underground with all the hellish notes that are present here. It is a fantastic feat of human will and ingenuity, it moves millions of people around every day, it evokes both the history and the future at the same time. The known London Underground co-exists with an equally vast unknown, secret London Underground, like a city in a city below a city; a three-dimensional subterranean matrix. It is a place of dread, panic and not some element of danger, of a chance encounter and melancholy; the memories and occasional dangers of travelling on the London Underground as both a schoolboy and a young man have remained with me, perhaps this piece acts as a reflection of that memory.

This is the final piece I made for the portfolio; it is also indicative of the two-part workflow process of composition that I have designed for myself. In *Gently Underground*, the first part of the two-part workflow happened in December 2015, and the second part of the workflow was completed in autumn 2019. The flâneur/improvisation that was used for composing the piece was completed in an afternoon and lay dormant on a hard drive for 15 months. The flâneur/composer spent 16 months completing the work, through many iterations, editing

and honing the piece until it represented an idea that had been seeded many months previously. It almost entirely represents my practice as it stands now, with the flâneur metaphor not only as the guiding influence at nearly every stage in the workflow but also as the co-producer of the work itself.

## Conclusion.

All that is solid melts into air

**Marshall Berman, after Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels**

Channelling the work of Walter Benjamin, particularly the collection of documents that is *The Arcades Project* as a basis for a project on electronic music may seem odd. To incorporate the research practice of a studio composer into the study of the idea of the flâneur both generally and particularly in connection with studio composition is, at best, eccentric. If truth be told, it was some time before the relationship was refined enough to be relevant; as this commentary has made clear, as the flâneur metaphor was distilled the more power, it revealed. At the outset, I became fixated on the city metaphor in isolation, and I was wholly fascinated by the way urban music seemed fashioned from the city environment itself with reference to artists such as Kode9 & the Spaceape whose album *Memories of the Future* reveals a bleak urban decay, and Dusk and Blackdown whose *Margin Music* represents a kind of travelogue through a myriad of ethnic urban communities. Along with Burial's unmistakable take on the dirty side of London when darkness falls, and the streets become illuminated by a halogen, fluorescent and neon glow I felt they all made explicit links to the London streets, they called home.

Gradually it became clear that Benjamin and the artists I mentioned above are referencing both the place and a way of looking at that place, of seeing and interpreting, of gathering the precious bits of pertinent information and fashioning it into something else. *The Arcades Project* is not Paris; the fragments collected represent a perspective on Paris. It is a metaphor that stands in for that modernist place; the albums I mention above do much the same thing. Benjamin took the idea of the flâneur as detective/rag picker and set them to work, delving into every nook and cranny, every corner and wide-open space, not having to make rigorous decisions, only to collect pertinent information. With having relinquished the power of judgement at the moment of discovery, the flâneur can be free and open to everything that they stumble on. Burial, like Benjamin, makes use of the flâneur to see everything, to take it

all in and then, perhaps as the flâneur/composer, make something from the disparate information the flâneur detective/ragpicker has gathered.

It has been suggested that the flâneur can *only* be a resident of a Paris of 20<sup>th</sup> Century modernity, however much subsequent thinking around the idea of the flâneur and flânerie "...might suggest possible connections between forms of investigating metropolitan modernity, reporting and narrating this modernity in textual forms."<sup>139</sup> Research faculties such as anthropology, ethnography, history, psychogeography, sociology, play theory, urban planning and architecture would appear to be perfect for the flâneur researcher; less blatant but entirely embedded in the idea of the flâneur collector would be disciplines such as painting, music production, street photography, journalism and cinema. The flâneur is "...stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes. Adept of the joys of watching, connoisseur of empathy, the flâneur finds the world 'picturesque.'"<sup>140</sup> These are, but some examples of what a 'text' or body of work invoked through flânerie might constitute. Specifically, the research project has investigated whether the metaphor applies beyond the accepted, narrow historical view; I very much believe it can and with extraordinary results. "The flâneur can be used as a figure to illuminate issues of city life irrespective of time and place"<sup>141</sup> and more generally those ideas around a more universal modernity; even though the flâneur is historically considered fixed to a Parisian time and place. The dichotomy that exists between the fixity of the Parisian flâneur and the all-embracing flâneur of modernity opens up other possibilities "other axes of specificity: the local and the general; the particular and the universal."<sup>142</sup> The flâneur metaphor as the critical wanderer was the starting point, this experience has shown that the flâneur workflow is simple to instigate and it can be unpredictably inspiring, hugely productive and gratifying.

Most notably, my invocation of the flâneur has released the pressure on contemplating *purpose* or *focus* too early in the creative process. I never have to think about whether something is right or wrong, whether some phrase or other might 'fit', since the purpose of

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<sup>139</sup> Frisby, D. (1994). The flâneur in social theory. In: Tester, K. (ed.), *The Flâneur*. London: Routledge. pp.101

<sup>140</sup> Sontag, S. (1977). *On Photography* Penguin Books. London pp.77

<sup>141</sup> Tester, K. (1994). The flâneur in social theory. In: Tester, K. (ed.), *The Flâneur*. London: Routledge. pp.16

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* pp.17

this exploratory phase of production is just that, exploratory. The metaphor works because it is so open to possibility. Examining the modern urban world, "...with its myriad cross-cutting interactions, its fleeting impressions and all that Baudelaire signified as 'the transitory, the fleeting and the fortuitous', posed problems – in different ways – for artists, writers and social investigators alike."<sup>143</sup> Indeed, how can 'the transitory, the fleeting and the fortuitous' be useful if the goal is already set? To be genuinely free to research, one should be open to outcome. By invoking the flâneur, there are no goals, no particular routes, no rules to follow, indeed within the flâneur workflow, anything is of value.

We must be mindful of the fact that should the flâneur become unfocused and indiscriminate then the metaphor would be meaningless, the efficacy would be lost. The flâneur influence in my practice of studio composition is more useful some of the time and cannot be applied wholly to all situations; one has to temper the influence of the flâneur and be conscious of the process in hand. It is at this juncture that the operation oscillates between the flâneur metaphor and the functional composer who makes decisions based not on chance or fortune but experience, knowledge and judgement. It is not useful to isolate when this moment happens—if indeed a moment can be identified—it is as if invoking the flâneur is a switching process, that only wholly recedes at the moment one decides to stop composing/editing, calling time on the endless possibilities of working and re-working a piece, forever.<sup>144</sup>

As discussed earlier, the flâneur metaphor can be usefully utilised as a way to free the mind whilst wandering critically but can be extrapolated to include many areas of investigation and production mirroring the work Walter Benjamin did for the *Arcades Project*. Benjamin's flâneur is considered by David Frisby to be the "decipherer of urban and visual texts ... the *flâneur*/detective is a central, often metaphorical, figure that Benjamin employs to illuminate his own activity and method...".<sup>145</sup> Here the flâneur metaphor works beyond that of the collector/detective, through the realms of the journalist/artist/producer and touches on the notion that the flâneur also explores, "the texts on the experience of modernity, the

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<sup>143</sup> Frisby, D. (1994). The flâneur in social theory. In: Tester, K. (ed.), *The Flâneur*. London: Routledge. pp.100

<sup>144</sup> "Art is never finished, only abandoned." — Leonardo da Vinci

<sup>145</sup> Frisby, D. (1994). The flâneur in social theory. In: Tester, K. (ed.), *The Flâneur*. London: Routledge. pp.82

representations of modernity all of which are as labyrinthine as the metropolis itself.”<sup>146</sup> The flâneur is an extraordinary figure, ubiquitous in many ways, open to interpretation within many activities and disciplines. Baudelaire had the flâneur confined entirely to Paris, Benjamin to Paris, Berlin and London and Musil to Vienna and many essayists and academics have illustrated that the metaphor could be utilised globally, in many ways and as part of many practices. If the flâneur is to remain useful then we should perhaps be specific about where and when the boundaries can be applied. Clearly this is not the place to do that but perhaps I recognise that common to Baudelaire, Benjamin and Musil it is modernity and the urban situation that the flâneur calls home.

Throughout this project, I have kept the idea of the urban, the idea of architecture and the concept of dead open spaces within the urban environment centre stage, they remained essential to my aesthetics and thinking within my practice. There is much in my peripheral reading over the last few years that explore these ideas, and there is no doubt that these notions had some effect on the way the music sounds. However, the flâneur can operate anywhere, and once you know this, the idea of the urban is perhaps less emphatic. There is no question that the music produced would be very different if the influence of the city was not so apparent. It is just that invoking the flâneur also allowed a more open view of the world I inhabit and the impact it has on the work.

The work has, over the last years, become increasingly confident and more accomplished than I had ever expected. The recording studio has become my creative space of choice. Through having written compositions for others to perform during the last years, there is no longer any urge for me to pursue this area of investigation. I view it as a wholly unsatisfactory, uncontrollable monster, and it will be left to others to tame that beast. I will be eternally grateful for having been allowed to learn this lesson sooner rather than later.

I will continue to perform live as redvirginsoil when I can. I will also continue to make music with my friend Dominic Thibault as Tout Croche. I will continue to compose music in the studio, and most importantly, I will continue to invoke the flâneur for it is through her that I find a free, open place in which to work. Reflecting on my system of working within the two-part workflow from performative material collector to studio composer I trust that what

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid. 98-99

may have been a mysterious affair has, through this examination, been shown to be most effective in practice. Indeed, it is through this analysis that one can recognise those elements which are useful at various moments and take ownership of them — knowing that all situations are under one's control. Being confident that the oscillation between the flâneur/improviser in the first part of the workflow and the flâneur/composer in the second, in turn, unhindered and focused when necessary, does not restrict the flow of ideas, indeed the switching is an almost indiscernible mechanism. The flâneur's power lies in being the distant observer and poet in the crowd — the collector of information and the producer of texts. They can also act a conduit into the work, imparting a particular insight or affording a critical appreciation of the artwork. The flâneur metaphor, in conjunction with the idea of the city, has opened up a way of working that will, I am confident, furnish me with ideas for some time to come.

The writing down of all these ideas has often been tortuous, but as I type the last few words, I can sincerely say this has been a truly cathartic and humbling process where I found the voice to express the importance of the flâneur both in my work and in my life.



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