Portfolio of Composition with Accompanying Commentary

by

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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This is the written commentary on a practice-based period of research. This research has focussed on the development of a substantial series of new musical compositions considering the development of unique and personal identity in composition. As well as broader technical consideration the commentary emphasises the incorporation of new technology and electronic media into composition, collaborations with other creative artists and performers and in developing vocal music with Matthew Welton, a literary collaborator.

The commentary prioritises three main compositions; *the terminus wreck* for cello and electronics; *My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name.* for piano and electric piano and; *Things that are blue, things that are white and things that are black.* for piano, electric piano, prepared piano with clarinet/bass clarinet, cor anglais, horn, viola, cello and at least 16 violins. These are all substantial pieces between 15 and 30 minutes in duration for a variety of forces and, particularly between the two piano works, demonstrate a clear trajectory of development. Chapters are also dedicated to smaller-scale chamber works, vocal music, collaboration and the house of bedlam, a new ensemble formed as an element of the research.
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LIST OF ACCOMPANYING SCORES

Concert Works

*My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name.*
for piano and electric piano (one player)

*The terminus wreck*
for solo cello with optional electronics

*The life and death of 9413, a Hollywood extra*
for chamber ensemble and electronics

*Five Kerouac haiku*
for violin, cello and percussion

*riviniana (acoustic version)*
for piccolo/alto flute, bass clarinet, cello, vibraphone and piano

*four letter words*
music theatre for solo baritone and clarinet with violin, horn, percussion and
double bass
Text – Matthew Welton

*Springtime*
for soprano, 2 clarinets, classical guitar, vibraphone/glockenspiel, harp, piano and
electric piano with soundtrack and optional video
Text – Matthew Welton
Video projections – Larry Goves and flat-e

*Things that are blue, things that are white and things that are black.*
for solo piano/electric piano/prepared piano, with cor anglais, clarinet/bass clarinet, horn, viola, cello and at least 16 violins
Works written for the house of bedlam

riviniana and the vermillion border

sinew
(Includes versions for ensemble and cello with electronics)

deaf John’s dark house
(Includes version for version for ensemble and clarinet, cello and electronics.)

Poppy
Text – Matthew Welton

Talking microtonal blues
Text – Matthew Welton

blind Jack’s silent house

The Bilberry Hill Shim-Sham
Text – Nicholas Moore
LIST OF ACCOMPANYING RECORDINGS

DISK ONE (60’03”)

My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name.
1. Popular mysteries (2’58”)
2. The two William Wilsons cancelled each other out. (4’45”)
3. He could run for a hundred years, and still he would arrive just as the doors were closing. (2’48”)
4. Mush food in the hush dark room (1’48”)
5. Once there was time only to write three sentences (1’22”)
7. I see hope everywhere, even in the dark.
Sarah Nicolls – piano/electric piano
Recorded by the BBC live at the Warehouse, London. 29/11/2007

the terminus wreck (16’35”)
8. the cedar limbs (4’14”)
9. the vermillion border (version with electronics) (7’45”)
10. the terminus wreck (4’36”)
Oliver Coates – cello
Larry Goves – electronics
Recorded live at Kettle’s Yard, Cambridge. 26/04/2009

Things that are blue, things that are white and things that are black. (30’21”)
11. Things that are blue… (10’10”)
12. Things that are white… (9’15”)
13. Things that are black… (10’56”)
Sarah Nicolls – piano/electric piano/prepared piano
The London Sinfonietta
André de Ridder – conductor
Recorded by the BBC live at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London. 3/96/2010
DISK TWO (45’50”)

1. *riviniana* (4’08”)
   Radius
   Recorded live in the Wigmore Hall. 08/01/2008

2. *The life and death of 9413, a Hollywood Extra* (12’42”)
   Electronic soundtrack to the film.

   *five Kerouac haiku* (7’17”)
3. *The bird thrashing in the bath* (1’26”)
4. *Katapatatataya* (1’21”)
5. *The bottoms of my shoes are wet* (2’14”)
6. *The drunkards of Mexico* (46”)
7. *The office girl unloosing her scarf* (1’30”)
   Sounds Underground
   Tom Hankey – violin
   Oliver Coates – cello
   Sarah Creswell – percussion
   Recorded live at the Bishopsgate Institute, London. 24/10/2008

8. *Four letter words* (14’04”)
   Dean Robinson – baritone
   Dov Goldberg – clarinet
   Psappha
   Nicholas Kok – conductor

9. *Springtime* (7’42”)
   Juliet Fraser – soprano
   The London Sinfonietta
   Recorded by the BBC live at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London. 02/12/2008
DISK THREE (61’07”)

1. sinew (version for ensemble) (5’06”)
2. talking microtonal blues (5’42”)
deaf John’s dark house (6’55”)
3. one (1’58”)
4. two (2’08”)
5. three (2’49”)
6. riviniana & the vermillion border (8’38”)
7. Poppy (2’48”)
8. The Bilberry Hill Shim Sham (9’08”)
9. blind Jack’s silent house (6’46”)

Piece-in-six-sections (16’07”)
10. one (2’31”)
11. two (2’15”)
12. three (2’02”)
13. four (3’00”)
14. five (2’48”)
15. six (3’31”)

All pieces performed by the house of bedlam.

Text on tracks 2, 7 and 10-15 by Matthew Welton.

Text on track 8 by Nicolas Moore.

Tracks 1 - 7 recorded by the BBC live at the Warehouse, London. 14/11/2008

Tracks 9 - 16 recorded live by the house of bedlam at The Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester. 10/12/2009
DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Lawrence Goves

declare that the thesis entitled

PORTFOLIO OF COMPOSITION WITH ACCOMPANYING COMMENTARY

and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission;

Signed: ..............................................................................................................

Date: ...............................................................................................................
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Thank you to Enitharmon Press for permission to print extract from the Jack Kerouac Haiku.

Thank you to Peter Edition Limited, London, for permission to include the opening bars of John Cage’s Sonata IV from Sonatas and Interludes.

Thank you to Carcanet Press for permission to print extract from Paul Celan’s Snow Part and Matthew Welton’s The book of Matthew and We needed coffee but we’d got ourselves convinced that the later we left it the better it would taste, and, as the country grew flatter and the roads became quiet and dusk began to colour
the sky, you could guess from the way we retuned the radio and unfolded the map
or commented on the view that the tang of determination had overtaken our
thoughts, and when, fidgety and untalkative but almost home, we drew up outside
the all-night restaurant, it felt like we might just stay in the car, listening to the
engine and the gentle sound of the wind.

Many thanks to Matthew Welton for all the work we have done and are doing
together. This is my most elaborate creative collaboration.

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stupidity and bad taste.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Prior to starting the research and composing for my Ph.D. I had been a student at the Royal Northern College of Music studying with Dr. Anthony Gilbert. From September 1998 to July 2002 I studied for my BMus and from September 2004 to July 2006 I studied for my M.Phil. in music and composition.

During my undergraduate degree I was particularly fascinated by the music of Iannis Xenakis and Morton Feldman, the former sparking my interest in composing when I was taken to a London Sinfonietta concert of his work when I was 17 years old. Although I studied Xenakis’s compositional techniques and attempted, when I understood them, to incorporate them into my writing the preoccupation with these composers was much more superficial. As I was working out my own ideas about the organisation of harmony, rhythm and timbre the stark differences in the apparent simplicity and complexity in the music of these two composers was an ideal starting point for straightforward, compelling music. A reviewer writing for the magazine Gramophone about walking underground, a piece written in 1999, easily recognises these influences, ‘on the basis of his contribution, Larry Groves (sic.) is on his way to a personal synthesis between the legacies of Feldman and Xenakis, with stasis and movement held in persuasive accord.’

My fascination with Xenakis’s music has not diminished and I consider his music a significant influence. However, I no longer try to incorporate his compositional approach in my pieces and I do not use mathematical drawings, stochastic procedures or numerical sequences to compose or permutate my compositions and, although I use technology to realise many of my compositions I do not, for the most part, use computers directly to compose. I am drawn to the sounds of Xenakis’s music rather than the procedures that he employs to create them. Paul Griffiths comments that ‘even in this composition for a solo instrument, it would seem, the listener’s attention is directed toward the general features of events, such as various types of tremolando, glissando or pizzicato, rather than to pitch and rhythmic aspects. In this regard the range of effects makes Nomos alpha an extraordinary virtuoso display.’ I think I am drawn to these features of physicality and timbre as well as pitch and rhythm but there is a superficial surface layer to
the music which leaves greater impact than detailed analysis. I can point to specific moments in my compositions which are directly influenced by sounds from Xenakis’ music. The second movement of the terminus wreck, the vermillion border, has elements of both of Xenakis’ solo cello works Kottos and Nomos alpha and it is noteworthy that when I was working on the terminus wreck with cellist Oliver Coates he was preparing Kottos for performance at the same time (see Chapter 2). In the violin writing for Things that are white… the second movement of Things that are blue, things that are white and things that are black bars 47 to 61 are influenced by the 1994 orchestral work by Xenakis Dämmer schein. I find the string writing in this piece particularly compelling and, in bars 16 to 18, the simple melody performed by full orchestral strings in clusters is particularly significant for Things that are white….

The continuing influence of Morton Feldman is more elusive than that of Xenakis. There are still moments of stasis in my music and a preoccupation with certain kinds of repetition (both Four letter words and Things that are blue, things that are white and things that are black. make extensive use of repetitive looping). However this is more closely related to literary influences and, in particular, the poet Matthew Welton who I have collaborated with extensively. My continuing preoccupation with Feldman is in the simplicity of the statements in his music and, throughout this commentary, I often refer to very simple structures and architectural ideas for my pieces. These simple monolithic ideas are things I trace back to Morton Feldman.

Throughout my M.Phil. at the Royal Northern College of Music I also started to develop an interest in the music of Richard Barrett. Despite employing some relatively complex notation in my music I have never written music with the same notational degree of complexity as Barrett. Rather my interest in his music is inspired, like Xenakis, by the superficially exciting unique sounds of his music and also his ability to acknowledge both extreme simplicity and complexity in his music simultaneously. In the music of Morton Feldman through very long simple structures and extremely minimal writing I find myself focussing in on the immense complexity inherent in every sound. In Barrett’s music I perceive one aspect of his notation as an acknowledgement and reflection of this inherent
complexity. This formed part of the argument in my M.Phil. thesis *Complexity and Simplicity: an overview of the music of Richard Barrett*.

My pieces that use simple techniques of gradually slowing down (which include, to varying degrees, *riviniana*, *Springtime*, *Things that are blue*, *things that are white and things that are black* and *The life and death of 9413: a Hollywood Extra*) all started with the discovery of *Madrigale*, a piece for piano duet and electronics by Aldo Clementi in which the music, governed rhythmically by the pre-prepared electronics, gradually slows down. Clementi, often employing both quotation and dense counterpoint, is a composer who looks back to earlier music and compositional techniques and combines this with a unique contemporary aesthetic. In 1988 Paul Griffiths wrote that Clementi ‘deserves to be better known here, if only for the Alexandrian simplicity of this solution to the current confusion in music.’ This was the first composer whose works made me believe I have permission to reference the past and, because of this rather than with reference to Clementi’s music, is partially responsible for my developing certain harmonic ideas (certainly my own approach to harmonic cadence) and my exploration of 19th Century influence in *Things that are blue*, *things that are white and things that are black*.

One idea I have been grappling with throughout my Ph.D. is incorporating popular musical influences into my music. I have been searching for a way to acknowledge through my composition that a substantial percentage of my listening is devoted to rock music, electronic dance music and blues. I also want to avoid pastiche and quotation of these genres (if I want to perform and write for a blues band I would not consider it a necessity to mention it in here). I have explored this principally through my ensemble the house of bedlam (chapter seven). At this stage this process has been one of exploring the ownership of the creation of music and what constitutes improvisation or group composition (although this process is still in its infancy for the ensemble). There is also a more straightforward emphasis on particular sounds; distortion is often used as a processing tool, the electric guitar is often featured and, in the original line-up of the ensemble, this was alongside clarinets, saxophones, banjo, percussion, live electronics and voice. These are all sounds I associate either with popular music or blues.
The overall aim of this period of research was to develop technical and aesthetic features of my composition focussing in specific areas of my writing. The simple technical areas I have addressed are approaching larger-scale work, writing for voice with ensemble, incorporating electronic sound and media into my composition. The aesthetic agenda is to develop and understand individuality in my composition.

In the simple technical areas I have fulfilled all of these requirements. I have written several pieces for voice, two of which are included in the portfolio (Springtime and Four letter words – chapter six), have written a substantial 30 minute work for a large group of instruments (Things that are blue, things that are white and things that are black) and have widely incorporated electronic sounds in different context throughout the majority of the portfolio.

Perhaps the most significant of these is the introduction of electronics into my music. Until just before the start of this research I had not written music with electronics at all and my knowledge in this area was in its infancy. Developing an entirely new feature of my composition outside of my previous taught degrees has been liberating. I have been able to incorporate writing techniques idiosyncratic to electronic music which help balance some of the more habitual approaches that informed my acoustic instrumental composition and score writing. This, more than anything, has contributed to a more individual attitude to composition.

Over the last four years I have developed a close series of collaborations. Some of these are not mentioned much in the main part of this commentary usually because the nature of the work produced, or the manner in which it was documented, is not suitable for submission. These collaborations have, however, been essential to the overall research. For example I collaborated with singer/songwriter Sandy Dillion, making microtonal string arrangements of a new series of blues songs. Her attitude towards music is far removed from my own and conversations with her led to my performing live electronics with her in Berlin. I had not performed live music since my schooldays until I started this body of work. It is difficult to articulate the significance of these experiences. It is one thing to learn something about the instinctive approach of a performer in a live situation
with your own music and ensemble. It is an entirely different experience to find yourself being asked to perform a ‘bruiser blues solo’ with almost no preparation in an unfamiliar aesthetic. I am convinced that these unusual collaborations have found there way into my writing through a greater sense of spontaneity and a more tangible sense of pleasure in the writing process evident to the listener.

An important element of this research was to undermine my own musical preconceptions. As an experiment I collaborated with artists whom I might have dismissed previously and realised, in most cases, that these ideas about music could usefully inform my own. In the case of my long-term collaboration with the DJ and electronic music artist Mira Calix this has been a gradual process of learning, in detail, about a radically different music background to my own and how this affects the aesthetic thinking despite the music becoming superficially more similar.

Another collaboration that is not explored in this commentary is with the neuroscientist and artist Dr Beau Lotto. This collaboration is in its infancy and our only finished product together at this stage is a reduced version of the house of bedlam piece _blind Jack’s silent house_ arranged for piano and cello then diffused over a wall of 88 speakers. One of his preoccupations is with ideas of unique perceptive experiences. His soundwall generates a unique perceptive experience as the diffusion of the sound over the 88 speakers is represented visually so we can precisely see the movement of the sound. Similarly in another of Lotto’s projects participants were invited to graffiti large canvasses with bright coloured spay paint and then specially designed software ‘translated the temporal and spatial patterns of colour into sound.’ The aspiration to a unique experience is in allowing the participant to hear the colour; ‘translating light into sound so that people hear their visual world is a wonderful way to experience the process of the brain actually learning to make sense of the world’. Participants in the project found there was no vocabulary to describe their experience of picking up and object by listening to it. Working with Dr Lotto has been useful in considering what place novelty and uniqueness has in a piece of music and how I might establish my own attitude to the artists’ cliché of ‘finding my voice’. Strangely Dr Lotto has tried to encourage me to write more accessible music so those key features in his experiments are sufficiently explicit (and popular). Although I have
no intention, at this point, of altering my own aesthetic agenda to incorporate a concert that does not have obvious musical relevance this has helped me formulate ideas about function in music. In the largest piece in the portfolio Things that are blue, things that are white and things that are black (chapter four) I have incorporated sounds and musical configurations that I directly associate with earlier music. These ideas have a solid function in contextualising ideas that are more individual.

Some of the most significant collaborative relationships have been with creative performers and, since starting to perform myself, I have found the lines of communication much easier. I have written two substantial pieces for the pianist Sarah Nicolls, numerous pieces for the cellist Oliver Coates and formed my own ensemble the house of bedlam. Through these relationships I have begun to understand the dialogue between composer and performer through score and, as a consequence, my written music has become more complex in rhythmically defining sequences of music for individual performers, but has become often more straightforward in how this music coordinates. Many pieces in this portfolio have rhythmically independent sections and allow time and space for performers to play in rhythmic unison. This same line of investigation has also produced the most virtuosic music I have written with a concerto dominating the portfolio. Four letter words also explicitly explores this drama with an instrumentalist taking on one of the central protagonist roles in this short music theatre work.

Collaborative work is considered in more detail in Chapter 8.

Ultimately this period of research has prioritised widening my musical experiences as much as possible and incorporating them into my writing with the right balance of consistency and novelty. I have developed a series of original pieces that are a document and culmination of these experiences.
CHAPTER TWO

the terminus wreck

the terminus wreck is a three movement work for solo cello with an optional live electronic element in the middle movement. The electronic version of the middle movement can either be performed in surround-sound (with six speakers in the round) or in stereo. The acoustic version of the piece lasts approximately fourteen minutes and the electro-acoustic version of the piece lasts seventeen minutes. The three movements are the cedar-limbs, the vermillion border and the terminus wreck.

The genesis of the terminus wreck was a commission for Faster Than Sound, a Suffolk-based festival affiliated with Aldeburgh Music. This festival is dedicated to presenting performances and installations of experimental contemporary electronic and acoustic music with an emphasis on artists with backgrounds in classical and/or in electronic dance music. Many of the commissions for Faster Than Sound encourage collaborations between these two groups, make skilled instrumentalists available to artists who tend to work only with electronic music and provide a context for composers to work with high-fidelity electronic music. ‘Faster Than Sound is a groundbreaking strand of programming that joins the dots between musical genres and digital art forms. Developing a fresh approach, which focuses on commissions, residencies and collaborations, this project places strong emphasis on emerging technologies and original ideas.’

Initially this piece consisted of only the second movement the vermillion border. This is the most virtuosic of the three movements. I was concerned with the space for the piece’s premiere, the Hush House at Bentwaters Park, formerly RAF Bentwaters. The Hush House is a large warehouse-like building originally used to test jet engines. The six speaker stacks were placed around the edge of this enormous room containing a central mixing point for the live-electronics performers and the informal audience area (the audience were welcome to sit on the floor, stand or move freely around the room). The stage was at one end of the room, in front of a large tunnel, and opposite the doors. For this dramatic scenario I was concerned with virtuosic writing which would allow the physicality of the cellist, as well as the sound, to fill the space. The electronic sound, for the most part, provides a sonic canvas as a background for the cellist.
A key feature of this piece was working closely with a specific performer, the cellist Oliver Coates. Through this piece and working in my ensemble the house of bedlam Coates has become one of my closest collaborators and this has had a substantial impact on my music. He was, at the time, particularly interested in performing a technically demanding new work, and we spent time at Aldeburgh Music together working on this piece at the early stages of the composition. There are particularly difficult passages in this piece, particularly from bars 34 to 82 in the acoustic version (62 – 105 in the version with electronics). In order to balance the theatricality of this section with the technical virtuosity these were redrafted numerous times during this collaboration. In bars 72 – 74 and bars 79 - 82 (acoustic version, Figure 1), the bars either side of the dramatic climax of the piece, the bowing (the added line of rhythm above the stave) is offset against the glissandos in the cellist’s left hand. This creates a more fluid line and means that there is not too much coincidental emphasis on pitches that occur at the higher or lower points of the line. This also generates a physical tension for the player as his left and right hand are forced to work counter-intuitively. This contributes to the musical tension and momentum.

Figure 1

In bars 75 to 78, the dramatic climax of the piece, this bowing is simplified with heavy emphasis on the start and end points of straightforward downward glissandos. This allows for greater freedom for the performer to end this phrase with visual flamboyancy and part of the discussion when writing this piece was allowing some key moments to feel more idiosyncratic for the instrumentalist. As
a consequence the physical tension of the piece is slightly diffused, despite the aggression at this point, and this is mirrored in consonant intervals. The most significant interval in these three bars is a perfect 5th. This allows the final physical frenzy from the performer to suggest harmonic and physical resolution.

The function of the electronics in the vermillion border is predominantly an accompanying role and can be separated into several distinct groups of sounds. Initially and throughout the first section (ending before bar 62) there is an explosive, dense and rapid collection of pitches that gradually slow down. The pitches were selected by choosing sequences of intervals around important pitches in the written cello part and were recorded on acoustic instruments by the house of bedlam. During the recording I emphasised to the instrumentalists that the exact pitches were less important than maintaining the overall sense of shape and gradual slowing of the tempo. In this way the pitches would become clearer and more coherent throughout the section because, when the music is very fast at the opening, there are limitations to what the ear can easily process. This is mirrored in the physicality as the listener can hear the experience of the performers as the music slows down and becomes less physically demanding. This is a similar idea, albeit realised in a very different way, to the simplified bowing at the climax of the movement (bar 75 – 78), which concludes the drama of the music. The simple structural technique of slowing down to establish gradual coherence underpins Springtime (chapter six), riviniana, the electronics for 9413: The life and death of a Holywood extra (chapter five) and a section of Things that are blue, things that are white and things that are black (chapter four).

The sounds for these initial electronics come from recording a marimba, vibraphone, glockenspiel, classical guitar, electric guitar, soprano saxophone, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet and b flat clarinet. Electronic processing was limited to changing the pitch to create greater variety but maintaining the same intervallic relationships from the original recordings. I avoided changing the speed of the recording when modifying the pitches too much in order to maintain the more natural sense of gradual diminuendo.

Superimposed over this first section are two other sets of recorded sounds. The first is at bar 27 which accompany the high cello pizzicatos. The sounds are made
up of a large number of recordings of lower cello pizzicatos that are then processed using a variety of digital delay effects. The result is intended as a microcosm of the larger scale gradual slowing down. Similar pizzicato sounds accompany the climatic bars 102 to 104. Here the descending cello pizzicatos have been replaced with the same descending glissandos but aggressive, bowed and over a much wider range (almost identical to bars 75 – 77 in the acoustic version as seen in Figure 1).

The second set of recorded sounds accompanies the cello in bars 29 to 62. These consist of two melodic lines performed on cello. Occasionally these lines are transformed with electronic distortion making them sound like distorted electric guitars. These lines were composed in advance then performed and recorded several times without any rehearsal and no click track or other obvious indication of pulse. The original melodies were then discarded and the two accompanying lines composed by combining different sections of the recordings. The intention was to create two recorded and processed music lines that sound effortless and idiosyncratic for the instrumentalist. I extended this idea in Springtime in which errors from sight-reading a vocal line form part of the compositional process (chapter six).

The second long section of electronic sounds starts after bar 62. This is essentially a reversal of the initial sounds so that the electronics build up to a gradual frenzy of activity to match the increasing virtuosity of the cello line. As this section of acoustic music features less conventional melodic cello writing, I wanted the electronic sounds to duplicate this transformation during the gradual increase in tempo. The process used is reversing the original pre-recorded sound, which emphasizes this transformation. Simply electronically reversing the original electronic track was too clumsy to sound effective. Instead each individual sound was electronically reversed and then reassembled in a new gradual accelerando. The reversed sounds are still, for the most part, recognisably from an acoustic source but are much more obviously electronically processed.

The final electronic sounds of the movement are almost all recorded piano sounds. As part of a larger scale pre-occupation with moving towards or away from more conventional sounds I wanted to reference the convention of a melody instrument
accompanied by piano. Here the music is inspired by a section from my piano piece *My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name* (chapter three). Some of the recorded piano chords are much too larger to be possible for a single pianist and some of the notes are retuned by a quartetone. In bar 110 - 111 (version with electronics) there is the chord which is made up of all 88 notes of the piano played simultaneously which is then repeated six times. This was the most obvious moment of ostentatious spatialization in the original surround version, as each of the six fast repetitions move quickly around the six speakers. This is followed by less than ten seconds of aggressive rhythmically driven electronic music, loosely inspired by breakcore electronic dance music and with particular reference to Venetian Snares. Breakcore is dominated by very fast aggressive rhythms; ‘...the blueprint for much of breakcore’s sound, a high-bpm mash-up of hyperkinetic, post-jungle breaks, feedback, noise, and Jamaican elements paired with a devil-may-care attitude toward sampling that pulls from the broadest musical spectrum of styles.’8 Using this kind of sound as an event in this piece was intended as an acknowledgement of the dance music context of the premiere. This section of the piece is the most flippant and does not appear in the acoustic version partly because of this and because the section is reliant on the electronic sounds.

It had always been my intention to make a more substantial acoustic work with *the vermillion border* at the heart. The first movement of *the terminus wreck, the cedar-limbs* is the most conventional of the three. If the aggressive glissandos of the middle movement are an acknowledgement of 20th century modernism, clearly influenced by the cello music of Iannis Xenakis (as discussed in Chapter One), then this first movement is a slightly more elusive reference to Romantic cello music of the 19th century and early 20th century. The first half of the movement is taken from the ending of a piano quintet I wrote in 2002/2003 *I wear you on my sleeve*. This quintet ends with a surprising two minutes of solo cello. Coates had wanted this ending to be turned into a solo work and I was more interested in using this music as a starting point for a new, more varied piece.

If *the cedar-limbs* is based in more conventional, romantic sounds and musical lines and *the vermillion border* aspires to Xenakis-like modernism then the third movement is intended fuse these two together in order to create more individual music. The C string is now retuned down by a major 7th allowing for a surprising
new register and the piece is punctuated by a series of three unusually wide intervals. The first and third (Figure 2) are played as an artificial harmonic on the G string and the open retuned C string. There is slight contrary-motion between the two pitches as the C string changes tension with the changing dynamic level and gradually sharpens then flattens.

![Figure 2](image)

**Figure 2** (the C string sounds a major 7th lower than written)

This culminates at the very centre of the movement with the bow placed under the strings so the same effect is achieved on the C and A strings (Figure 3). Here the interval reaches over six octaves.

![Figure 3](image)

**Figure 3** (the C string sounds a major 7th lower than written)

These three passages emphasis the retuned low string but the sounds are so extreme there that the pitches become slightly ambiguous. In bars 19 – 21 (Figure 4) this lower string is much more apparent in a series of consonant tenths. Unlike in the previous examples, where the dramatic change in dynamic changes the pitch of the lower note, this phrase has to be precisely in tune (emphasised by the consonant interval). This is more difficult and obviously temperamental for the player and the resulting tentative performance adds to the tension of the line.

![Figure 4](image)
Figure 4 (the C string sounds a major 7th lower than written)

The last 8 bars of the piece are intended as a culmination of the two key structural ideas that have run throughout the piece. Throughout the three movements the music becomes increasing individual. Simultaneously there have been numerous sections of music that are intended to become clearer as they progress. This includes the slowing down electronics in the opening section of the *vermillion border*, the two electronic pizzicato sections and the more straightforward bowed downward glissandi in bars 74-77 (Figure 1). This can also be seen in the first movement with a comparison between bars 19 – 23 (Figure 5) and 40 – 46 (Figure 6). The latter is the same sequence of pitches but the convoluted rhythm of the earlier section has been replaced with a simpler dramatic decrease in tempo. The identity of the two lines is maintained as the opening is identical, the rhythm at the end is identical and they both have a distinctive low C sharp (in bars 22 and 45 respectively) as well as sharing the same pitches.

Figure 5

Figure 6

These trends are summarised at the end of the final movement with music that is both evocative of something familiar and alien. The melody suggests stylized folk music (it is composed and not quoted) as something familiar but is played on the
retuned C string. This means the sound is also alien; the instrument sounds like a strange double bass (Figure 7).

Figure 7

This final phrase serves as both the culmination of a process of musical clarification and also frames the entire piece. This music journey is emphasised by the dramatic difference in register from the opening high artificial harmonic and the unusually low retuned ending. The music frames the piece as the final eight bars of the last movement is the most recognisably melodic music since the first movement.

There are considerable issues in the effective notation of this work. One distinct advantage of working closely with a performer on a work is that the final performance is as much a reflection of the dialogue regarding the development of the piece, as it is the notation on the page. A disadvantage is the possibility of neglecting notational issues in the score as they have been effectively covered elsewhere.

The notation issues in The Terminus Wreck pertain more to the subtlety of interpretation rather than anything fundamentally impractical in the writing. This is because the piece relies on a certain amount of familiarity with the conventions of expressive, romantic playing as well as the more abstract sound world associated with modernist playing. These two aesthetics rely on very different traditions and approaches. In the first movement the vibrato markings are intended as purely expressive markings. In the second movement vibrato is more often an effect, distinct from the transitional expressive vibrato found elsewhere. Although the music is detailed throughout it would be possible to add another layer on densely packed detailed onto the score. While this might clarify certain notation intentions this level of detail could become obstructive. The music is intended, despite the care and detail, to be played quite recklessly and irreverently. Coates and I had numerous discussions regarding the vermillion border
in which the abrasive features of this music is more closely related to experimental rock music than experimental classical music. Coates would often talk about the piece before a concert as ‘Jimmy Hendrix for the guitar’. Although one possible notation solution is to include this kind of anecdotal interpretive detail into the score I feel this could be too easily misinterpreted.

Coates and I, having worked on this substantial solo work together as well as a substantial number of my other chamber works, have decided to address some of these issues by working on a smaller scale and more single-minded piece. The next work will be partly designed to develop a more appropriate notational approach to balance the ‘romantically’ informed writing and the less conventional writing.

The title comes from one of the short poems by Paul Celan in his collection Snow Part.

LILAC SKY, yellow paned,

Jacob’s Staff above the Terminus wreck,

Lighting-up time, as yet nothing intercurrent,

from stand-up bar to snow bar.⁹

The three movements are a response to my initial reaction when reading this poem and the collection; the surprising tenderness, the remembered violence and the pervasive bleak landscape.
CHAPTER THREE

My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name.

My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. was written in 2007 in response to a commission from the pianist Sarah Nicolls. The piece is written for amplified grand piano with electronics consisting of a full size electronic keyboard placed on top of the acoustic piano and a distortion pedal. The piece is in seven movements and lasts approximately 15 minutes. The brief required a specific relationship between performer and electronics and the expansion of the performance environment with the performer-controlled electronics was a primary concern of the piece. A brief description of the project is included on Sarah Nicolls’ website.

“Funded by the AHRC, Sarah commissioned pieces which used the performer as an interactive element… The concert was entitled ‘Hyper-piano’ and intended to add objects to the pianist’s normal performance environment, to enable the autonomous control of electronics - either by triggering sounds or manipulating live processing.”

The starting point for the piece and the inspiration for its title comes from Paul Auster’s novel The New York Trilogy, in particular the first book of the trilogy and its graphic novel counterpart City of Glass. The novel is a series of three highly original considerations of the conventional detective story and there is a familiar film noir-like rhetoric to the language, characters and setting of the book. The novel is also a self-consciously literary distortion of this model with surreal motivations, unconventional resolutions and eventually a surprising revelatory explanation of the first two sections in the third. The novel is particularly concerned with the ambiguity of its characters’ identities and Auster tackles his post-modern concerns by applying this to the novel’s narrators, the characters’ names, novelists/writers within the novel and elusively to himself.

When writing My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. I was concerned with treating the numerous parameters of the music with a comparable approach to Auster and in particular his ambiguous characters and narrators. The familiar expectations of the piano and conventions of the piano recital are presented alongside more idiosyncratic writing removed from this tradition. This includes
the expansion of the instrument’s parameters with the addition of a second keyboard and an electronic distortion pedal but is also applied to the samples allocated to the keyboard, the harmony of the piece, the phrase shapes and the small and large-scale structuring of the work.

The electronic keyboard instrument is made up of 88 specially-made samples and each of these samples is made up of between one and 97 pre-samples (N.B. For clarity the 88 samples triggered by the each keyboard note are referred to as samples and the various samples that make up each of these 88 keyboard notes are referred to as pre-samples). All of these pre-prepared sounds are recorded, modified piano notes. The keyboard is divided up into five sections of related samples linked by their attacks and harmony. The lower register of the piano is dominated by a section of samples made up of predominantly very loud staccato notes that have been retuned by a quartertone in any given direction away from their corresponding keyboard note. Six of these low staccato notes are also accompanied by other chords (Figure 8).

Figure 8

The mid range of the keyboard is dominated by sustained or staccato (although occasionally both on one key) single notes that have been retuned by a quartetone in any given direction away from their corresponding keyboard note (Figure 9).
Figure 9
The upper register of the piano is dominated by a series of loud, mostly staccato three to eight note chords which contain a combination of retuned and normal notes. Three of the chords are sustained and they provide longer-lasting harmonic material. These sustained chords are played on their own, in combination with each other, with chords played on the acoustic piano and with the staccato chords from the electric piano (Figure 10).

Figure 10
Seven of the top eight notes of the piano are made up of vast 88-note chromatic clusters most of them with other louder, expansive and retuned chords superimposed on them. The very top C is made up of a 34-note chord consisting of major thirds displaced by a semitone. This is designed to compliment the density of the other seven chords. The lowest four notes of the keyboard provide four related, quieter, chords without accompanying cluster displaced by a perfect fifth (Figure 11).
Finally there are six quiet, sustained and related chords that appear in both the middle and lower register of the piano they provide a relationship between the staccato chords of Figure 3 and the vast chords of Figure 4 (Figure 12).

One feature of the keyboard instrument is a hierarchical series of sounds that highlight the discrepancy between the physicality of the performance and the aural effect. This is central to the piece’s dichotomy between more familiar rhetoric and the distortion of this rhetoric into the more idiosyncratic sound world. This is particularly emphasised by the visual dimension of the second keyboard. For example, in the first movement the electronics are almost exclusively limited to the middle range of the keyboard (Figure 2) and, as each keyboard key triggers a single pitch, there is a seeming physical relationship between the performer’s movement and the aural effect. Despite this there are other discrepancies between what is heard and what is seen. In systems 12, 13 and 14 of the piece (specific references for this piece are to systems rather than bars because of the unusual barring system) the relatively gentle pace and mood of the music is set against the pianist’s frenetic movement between the two keyboards; this is the most structurally problematic and (one of) the most harmonically unusual movements.

In contrast systems 93 to 98 start both aurally and visually frenetically but make way for an extended period of each hand remaining on each keyboard; this is an assertive and more conventionally structured movement. Here a subtler ambiguity is implied by the occasional interjections of the high pitched chords and clusters which, while impossible to perform if the keyboard was simply a retuned piano, is
still in keeping with the frenetic nature of the music. The most extreme example of this discrepancy between the visual and physical and a focal moment in the piece occurs at systems 57 to 71; vast clusters are triggered with single notes on the keyboard and the acoustic piano’s line is distorted with the effects pedal. This is the loudest point of the piece, a climatic moment, and far removed from the visual and aural conventions of acoustic piano performance.

The function of the amplification and electronics, especially when considering the starting points for the piece of character and narrator from the Auster, are not limited to discrepancies between physicality and aural effect. The fifth and the final movements are the only two not to use either the keyboard or the distortion pedal and the amplification is switched off for the final movement. This highlights contrasts between these two related sections of music, the former occupies the extremes of register on the instrument and the latter is more confined to the middle register. Both are examples of more diatonic music in the work and the former employs a relatively fast harmonic rhythm with a series of cadence-like patterns rooted in open 5ths and 10ths. The final movement is rooted around a harmonically static D major triad, despite other notes colouring this triad as an aural echo of the various clusters that have occurred throughout the piece, it is this triad that is the most distinct and consistent throughout.

Turning off the amplification in the final movement also highlights the overall structural journey of the work. The opening of the piece has the most problematic structure, harmony and balance between the more familiar and alien. The ending is completely acoustic and far more harmonically consistent and familiar. Unlike the opening this final movement is very limited in every parameter; there is little rhythmic variety, it is harmonically static and is dominated by one upward moving musical shape.

The relationship between these two bookend sections is reflected in the rest of the piece. Each movement is constructed using two sets of contrasting material that interact in different ways. The second and fourth movements are the most straightforward with the two sections adjacent and separated. The fifth is structured as an intermezzo with a contrasting middle section and the third shuffles two sets of contrasting material together connected by a consistent double dotted
rhythm. The short penultimate movement creates the greatest sense of ambiguity between its two contrasting musical ideas; although superficially there are violent flurries of chords and clusters with contrasting sustained and quieter chords immediately afterwards, these are echoes of the more violent material and not designed as separate contrasting music. Here the contrast is made when similar musical material transfers from the piano to the keyboard. This is a unique moment in the piece as it is the only complete musical phrase that is performed exclusively on the keyboard, the pianist stands to emphasise this (as well as complementing the high dynamic level). This is also the only occasion when the different sections of the keyboard interact simultaneously; this is a densely packed microcosmic recapitulation of the keyboard instrument as a whole.

The opening of the piece is the most musically problematic as the keyboard instrument is used as a consistently disrupting force within what would otherwise be a more conventional pianistic context. This is also a movement where the distortion pedal is used on the acoustic piano but again, only for brief disrupting interjections. Closely related retuned notes disrupt long melodic lines throughout. As the music progresses these two elements become more integrated, in system 19 a sustained low D quartetone flat occurs on its own and joins with the melodic shape over the rest of that system. This disruption is initially consolidated in a series of cadence-like sequences that are dominated by rich, usually low register, retuned chords (systems 7, 9 (although less so), 15 and 20). These are intended as uncomfortable otherworldly resolutions because of the unusual tuning applied to a familiar harmonic function.

In the second movement a more dissonant first section gives way to a focal and climatic section of the piece, which owes its origins more to rock music than any other musical starting point. Throughout the first section the eventual arrival point is hinted at by a series of punctuating octaves (for example the end of system 26, the second bar of system 31, the end of system 34 and so on). There are also moments of surprising consonance in this section, the most pronounced at the start of system 33 which is marked slightly slower for emphasis. Interjecting, aggressive retuned chords from the keyboard all eventually subsume these. When they first occur they provide an accompaniment for an acoustic piano melody (system 40).
but when they recur there is a much more balanced sense of aggressive densely packed chords (system 56).

In the second section of this movement (systems 57 to 70) there are seven long phrases each introduced by a vast 88 note cluster either on its own or alongside a louder, substantial retuned chord (Figure 11). This is followed by a final more disjointed phrase introduced by a 34-note chord made up of stacked major 3\(^{\text{rd}}\)s and minor seconds. The first seven phrases, a significant number because of the number of movements, are driven by a distorted melody that becomes acoustic at the phrases’ halfway points. A series of acoustic chords introduce the non-distorted half of the phrases and these are constructed out of closely packed notes in the centre of the piano (linked to the vast initial cluster) and a higher pitched interval (linked to the intervals in the melody itself). The eighth and final phrase serves as a coda to the movement as a whole. Here the melodic phrase is more disjointed and a violent central explosion is loosely related to the music of the first half of the movement.

The third movement is characterised by a double-dotted rhythm that runs throughout apart from brief interjecting sequences of notes of even greater activity, for example in systems 78, 82, and particularly 99, and a single calmer separate phrase in system 91. This is the movement in which the piano and keyboard are most evidently integrated; after an introduction in which the three music ideas for the section are introduced (aggressive double dotted music lines in rhythmic unison, faster rhythmically more diverse runs and a slower paced melody to a double-dotted accompaniment) the keyboard and the piano sound together, often in rhythmic unison, for extended periods of music. An interrupted climatic passage in which both the double-dotted rhythmic material and the violent running passages reach their zenith (systems 98 and 99) makes way for a quieter, calmer and consonant ending. This consonance not only allows for necessary harmonic relaxation but also hints at the cadence-like material that links every movement of the piece. In the final two systems a recurring E to G in the left hand eventually ends on a G and D suggests the ghost of a plagal cadence.

The first three movements of the piece are the most substantial and the remaining four serve, in context, as distorted echoes of these. The fourth movement opens
with a series of chords directly related to the second half of the second, which similarly introduces a series of phrases although in this case made up of closely spaced chords. Here the initial chords are rooted with a major 10\textsuperscript{th} on C and E rather than on G and B giving a sense of harmonic resolution from an imagined chord V to chord I over an extended period of music. This relationship also associates with the similar but reversed relationship from the end of the previous movement. With the silently depressed keys at the start of the fourth movement the chords begin to resonate all the piano’s strings and imply the decay of the vast cluster from the second movement emphasising the relationship between them. The implication of echo is further highlighted by the deliberately ‘thinner’ quality to the pre-samples making up the keyboard’s chords here (this is partly achieved by using a different process to retune the notes), by the emphasis of the piano’s natural resonance using the distortion in system 109 and with a more lyrical distorted melody in system 111. Despite these links with the second half for the second movement there are close links with the first half as well. They both have four sections, the former separated by keyboard interjections and the latter demarcated by initial keyboard chords, and both are preoccupied with frenetic activity, in the latter a particular relationship can be seen at system 110. Given this, it is unsurprising that the second half of the fourth movement, seemingly made up of new material, is also closely related to the second half of the second movement; there are seven phrases each introduced by a chord with a central closely spaced element and a higher interval linked to a now elusive melody.

The fifth movement takes the implied cadence patterns in the whole piece so far and attempts to make more exposed sense of them. The music is in complete rhythmic unison exploring extremes of register in the instrument and uses no electronics except amplification. Each phrase or section of a phrase is rooted with either a 10\textsuperscript{th} or a 5\textsuperscript{th} that quickly moves to another open 5\textsuperscript{th} giving a sense of fast harmonic rhythm. As so much of the consonance in the piece is directly alongside minor seconds and clusters here the central section explores some of these harmonies, also in the extreme registers of the instrument. The final section is a loose harmonic and rhythmic retrograde of the first section.

The penultimate movement is the echo of all of the most violent material in the piece so far as well as being significant, as already mentioned, as the only section
of music that is played solely on the keyboard and the only moment where the different areas of the keyboard are employed together. Again the significant structural sections from earlier in the piece are in evidence here; there are four main explosive shapes divided into seven more elusive phrases.

Throughout the piece there is a sense of music material being shuffled between movements, as if different sections of music are infecting others. At its most obvious there is an almost exact quotation from the opening of the fifth movement in the second (systems 51 and 52) and towards the end of the latter (system 72) there is a very clear reference to the dominant material in movement six. These obvious moments of shared material help to cement the piece together and also provide the surface element to the less obvious structural and musical interrelationships. Significantly they also create a parallel in the music and on the acoustic piano that is fundamentally endemic to the keyboard instrument. This is because each sample triggered by the keyboard is identical every time it is played not just in pitch but also in the usually more various parameters of attack and decay. While this is not significant for some of the samples (for example any that are played only once) this is a mechanical feature of an instrument which, despite the vast chords that would be usually impossible to perform, has been designed to sound as non-mechanical as possible. As there are sections of the piece where the material from other movements appears seemingly or at least partially arbitrarily this creates a bond between the music and the construction of the keyboard instrument itself.

The keyboard instrument sounds relatively non-mechanical despite not being a touch sensitive instrument not just because it consists completely of audio recordings of a acoustic grand piano and the context in which the samples are triggered but also because of the variety of processes applied to each note. Each sustained note (and many of the staccato notes) has had the volume of their attacks and decays altered artificially but no two have been altered in exactly the same way. Likewise a variety of different techniques for retuning the notes where used, either on their own or in combination, to create a convincing sense of variety within the instrument.
The feature of the keyboard instrument that highlights its precarious position between seeming like a natural acoustic instrument and artificial one is the electronic processing that has been applied to the decay of notes; every sustained note in the piece has had its decay electronically altered. This is most apparent in the second movement where the vast 88-note cluster samples each last approximately 15 seconds although they seem to decay naturally; the normal decay time for these impossible chords would be well over a minute. In this case the alterations have been made to fit in with the pacing of the piece. The sustained single note samples that particularly occur in the first movement have their natural decay artificially emphasised and shortened. Here this means that the notes can, when the acoustic piano is louder and/or busier, seem like short note interjections and stick out or blend with the acoustic melody accordingly (for example systems 13 and 14) but the samples can also, when more exposed, take on a more obvious sustain note role (for example systems 16, 19 and 20).

The title of the piece comes from a speech made by the character Peter Stillman in City of Glass. He makes a beautiful, evocative and very long speech that seems to make little sense at the time but becomes apparent though the story and other two books. This was the model for the each movement being made up of sometimes seemingly unrelated material that becomes clearer over time. Auster describes Stillman’s voice and movements as:

‘Machine-like, fitful, alternating between slow and rapid gestures, rigid and yet expressive, as if the operation were out of control, not quite corresponding to the will that lay behind it.’11

This inspired much of the contrasting raw material for the piece as well as the nature of the electronic keyboard and the kind of physicality required to perform the piece.

There is also a vital movement in City of Glass where a man posing as a private detective has to follow Peter Stillman (senior) off a train and two identical Stillmans appear. He has to make a decision and knows that this will affect him (and the story) dramatically. I was thinking of the duality of two tangents explored in different ways throughout writing this piece; the extremes of dissonance and
consonance, the sense of stillness and activity, harmonic stasis and variety and the acoustic piano and artificial keyboard instrument. The keyboard instrument also alludes to the composer in parallel with Auster’s references to himself and the narrators in the books; another presence is felt throughout the piece not just in the chords that would be impossible to play without assistance or the tuning that would be impossible without electronic manipulation but also in the well prepared attack of notes when samples are played in very quick succession. This sense of the presence of something outside the music is taken privately one step further as the first movement of the piece is a very dramatic re-imagining of the second movement of an earlier piece for saxophone and piano Skeins which is also reworked into the short piece for the house of bedlam, Skein (2).
CHAPTER FOUR

*Things that are blue, things that are white and things that are black.*

This piece was also written for Sarah Nicolls and is a development of some of the ideas in *My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name.* It is a piano concerto scored for the same setup of piano, electric piano and distortion pedal but the pianist also plays a prepared piano in the middle movement. This is accompanied by four groups of performers; clarinet in b flat doubling bass clarinet in b flat and cello, both with pedals to trigger samples prepared in advance; cor anglais, horn and viola, all with pedals that allow them to record themselves and play the recordings back; at least 16 violins (20 were used in the premiere); two live electronics performers to mix the performance (all the instruments are amplified) and monitor and control the performance software.

*Things that are blue, things that are white and things that are black* was commissioned as part of the London Sinfonietta’s *blue touch paper* scheme in which young composers are offered money to spend on developing their composition for the ensemble with no other creative restrictions. I chose to focus these resources in two main areas; making a new work of considerable scale and working with the London Sinfonietta’s electronics specialists Sound Intermedia.

The scale of this work was essential to the initial idea. The piece is intended to pay homage to the romantic piano concerto and, perhaps more honestly, my childhood perception of the piano concerto which has stayed with me into adulthood. This piece, despite its relatively modest forces, gives the impression of a larger-scale orchestral experience. This is particularly because of the very large violin section but also the amplification and therefore volume the music, and technology is used to generate sounds from far more instruments than are present. The staging of the piece also helps with this large-scale orchestra impression. There are two grand pianos on stage, one prepared and one attached to a sampler, pedals and further full size keyboard. The cor anglais, horn and viola are all acoustically separated from each other with Perspex shielding either side and behind them (this is so they can record themselves live with minimal interference from other instruments but their live acoustic sound can still be heard by the audience). The piece is 30 minutes long, which is my longest to date.
The piece, as with most traditional concertos, focuses relentlessly on the soloist and the relationship between the pianist and orchestra highlights this. The pianist usually plays the most important material and the ensemble is predominantly in an accompanying role. Even where instruments perform musical lines that could dominate the foreground these are usually subsumed into the background. This is particularly the case for the cor anglais, horn and viola that, for the whole of the first and last movements of the piece, play recognisable romantic-like melodies independently from the rest of the ensemble. These are always immediately repeated which diminishes their foreground-like quality. When all three instruments are playing these melodies repetitively and simultaneously the effect is more like an accompanying texture than three individual lines. This is taken to extremes in the third movement where the instruments also record their own melodies that, in the end, build up to fifteen lines of music (seen in looping section 3 on pages 82 and 83 of the full score. When the piano is in a more accompanying role the music is particularly virtuosic (or at least sounds virtuosic). In bars 277 –

Figure 13

280 (Figure 13) the high soaring violins pick out the most tangibly musical line in the texture. However, the piano’s accompanying music for this is a series of
aggressive and widely spaced retuned chords (with more consonant material in the acoustic piano to contrast with and emphasize this). Although the music is not particularly virtuosic at this point (these chords are achieved by a relatively simple single line at the top of the electric piano, this material returns in a genuinely virtuosic form for the pianist towards the end of the third movement) the sound is immense and sounds like a virtuosic accompaniment. Although the clarinet and cello are playing very active lines they are also triggering samples (the number 19 refers to which sample needs to be triggered), which superimposes similar pre-recorded material emphasising this music as background or middle ground rather than foreground.

The piece is in three movements as this is typical for a 19th century concerto and, although the movements do not exactly follow the convention of fast-slow-fast, it is certainly suggested. The middle movement does contain the most slow-tempo music, is much more consonant and tends, overall, to be sparser. The outer movements are both end with fast, violent climatic sections of music.

This three-part structure also relates to Paul Auster. This concerto is written as a continuation of my interest in his novel The New York Trilogy. For this piece the titles are taken from the middle novella in the series Ghosts. Unlike with My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. the titles are not direct quotes from the book but a description of a key section of it. In Ghosts the characters names are colours and this, like the names in the first section, leads to confusion of individuals and strange associations with the key protagonists and other objects in the story. The novel’s key paragraph relating to this (and the direct inspiration for the title) reads;

“And then, as his eyes group heavy and sleep begins to wash over him, he thinks how strange it is that everything has its own colour. Everything we see, everything we touch - everything in the world has its own colour. Struggling to stay awake a little longer, he begins to make a list. Take blue for example, he says. There are bluebirds and blue jays and blue herons. There are cornflowers and periwinkles. There is noon over New York. There are blueberries, huckleberries, and the Pacific Ocean. There are blue devils and blue ribbons and blue bloods. There is a voice singing the blues. There is my father's police uniform.
There are blue laws and blue movies. There are my eyes and my name. He pauses, suddenly at a loss for more blue things, and then moves on to white.

There are seagulls, he says, and terns and storks and cockatoos. There are the walls of this room and the sheets on my bed. There are lilies-of-the-valley, carnations, and the petals of daisies. There is the flag of peace and Chinese death. There is mother's milk and semen. There are my teeth. There are the whites of my eyes.

There are white bass and white pines and white ants. There is the President's house and white rot. There are white lies and white heat. Then, without hesitation, he moves on to black, beginning with black books, the black market, and the Black Hand. There is night over New York, he says. There are the Chicago Black Sox.

There are blackberries and crows, blackouts and black marks. Black Tuesday and the Black Death. There is blackmail. There is my hair. There is the ink that comes out of a pen. There is the world a blind man sees. Then, finally growing tired of the game, he begins to drift, saying to himself that there is not end to it. He falls asleep, dreams of things that happened long ago, and then, in the middle of the night, wakes up suddenly and begins pacing the room again, thinking about what he will do next.”

This three-part structure is intended to refer to this paragraph but also to the collection as a whole. I intend to write a second series of solo pianist pieces to correspond with the third book of the trilogy and so this middle movement, as the largest of those three, references the two outer movements as well. The first movement of the concerto relates more closely to My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. and the third movement will become the starting point for the next series of piano pieces. The first movement, although through composed, is essentially in seven sections to correspond to the seven movements in the original piece.

The middle movement, Things that are white, is therefore the movement that contains musical material unique to this piece in the set. This is emphasised by being performed on prepared piano with no other technology other than amplification. Like the first movement it is separated into sections but they are more clearly demarcated; the five sections are essentially five separate short pieces. Not only is the music distinctly different for each of these five but also each movement is scored for prepared piano, violins and then one of the remaining five
instruments respectively for each. This demarcation can be further emphasised with a series of animated projections made for the piece by students from Kinston University. Each of the five animations is made by a different group of students and has quite different characters corresponding with the music. The number five is significant as the sections are so clearly separate this combines with the outer movements into another group of seven, again corresponding with the structure of *My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name.*

The prepared piano seemed like a natural instrument to incorporate into this series. Cage’s prepared piano, in particular, is an iconic alteration of the sound of the piano and, when I made the first recording for the electric piano instrument in *My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name.,* I was struck by the surprising similarity between the sound of the large, retuned staccato chords (Figure 10) and large chords played on a prepared piano (especially if these chords are played in quick succession). This does not occur much in the solo piano work but dominates the ending of the first and last movements of the piano concerto (Figure 13 is a short example of this).

To this end the prepared piano is closely related to Cage’s experiments. All of the materials and sounds are found in Cage’s pieces for prepared piano (although the preparation setup does not correspond directly to any of his pieces). The amplification is of particular importance in this movement as the volume of the prepared piano is artificially increased far more than the normal and electric piano. This is so that even discrete sounds, usually associated with intimate solo or chamber performance on a prepared piano, can sound over the rest of the instruments and in a large hall. The main exception to the Cage-influenced preparations is the large piece of glass placed over some of the lower strings. This is intended as an acoustic equivalent of the electric distortion in the outer movements.

Over the last two years I have been working closely with the electronica artist and DJ Mira Calix. This collaboration has been focussed on her learning about acoustic instruments and conventional musical notation and I have expanded my knowledge of electronic music and related software and hardware. There has also been an exchange of aesthetic ideas and this, in particular, has had considerable
impact on the second movement. At the start of this collaboration I was asked to make a remix of one of Calix’s early tracks *I may be over there (but my heart is over here)*. Although, for this project, I treated the electronic sounds like a more traditional remix I approached her original synthetic piano music differently and wrote a series of short acoustic piano pieces to go with the electronics. Two of these directly inspired the first and fourth (bar 62) section of the third movement. I used my first response to the Calix as the first section of this movement rearranged again for clarinet and strings (taking the role of the electronics) and the piano part converted for prepared piano. My initial response to the Calix was so far removed from the original that I felt comfortable using such a similar version for my own music. The arrangement that inspired the fourth section is much closer to the original Calix track so I discarded the electronics (the cello and violins are completely new here) and, as the piano part is essentially an embellishment of the original, I kept the embellishments but discarded all the original music.

There is a simplicity and naivety in the Calix track and I was intent on capturing some of the immediacy and single-mindedness in her music in my own. This has been of particular significance regarding the music I have written for the house of bedlam (chapter seven). I wanted to balance my more intellectual processes with my response to her instinctive composing and often-irreverent approach captured in this short statement for *The Cambridge Companion to Electronic Music*,

‘As far as the future of electronics goes: I’m fairly easy to please, and as long as I can get my hands on a good string sound, muck up my own voice, and sample a couple of pebbles, I’ll be happy…’

This immediacy is evident throughout the movement and is not limited to the aesthetic influenced by Mira Calix. In the third section (bars 47 – 61) the violins play a very simple melody intended to evoke a strange and individual folk-like music. This strangeness is accentuated as the violins are all a semitone apart. The viola provides a more complex connecting line and the piano plays a similar line to the violins, slightly offset, and very ambiguous in pitch because of the extreme register and preparations. The left hand simply chooses particular hand shape and then moves that shape according to the pitches/contour on the page. This creates an unusual harmony which is not a completely identical transposition from chord...
to chord but does emphasise the parallel movement of the line (Figure 14). It is also relevant that this dramatic section of music, the most violent in the second movement, is halfway though the piece and, like the entire piece itself, is in three distinct sections.

![Figure 14](image)

The fifth and final section of the middle movement investigates similar territory as *Springtime, 9413: The life and death of a Hollywood extra, riviniana and the vermilion border*. The piano parts start extremely fast and gradually slows down punctuated by five independent interjections from the violins and cor anglais (bars a – i and 104 – 135 on pages 46 and 47). This slowing down naturally brings this movement to a close and, as the individual sounds on the piano become clearer is a preparation for the return to the acoustic and electric pianos. As the piano brings the movement to a close the cor anglais prepares for the third; the opening lines in the third movement for the cor anglais (looping section 1 on page 75) is the same five phrases from the end of the second movement, now electronically recorded, looped and superimposed.

The electronic piano for *Things that are blue, things that are white and things that are black* is similar to the one for the solo piece but with significant differences. The highest eight notes of the piano are still huge chords but now, rather than all being very loud, they represent a gradual increase and decrease in dynamics (although the high F and F sharp are still full 88 notes clusters, sustained and staccato respectively). The section where all these chords are used in succession is in bars 145 – 174 of *Things that are blue*…. This section is closely related to the rock-music inspired second half of the second movement of *My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name*. (systems 57 – 73) where each electronic chord provides a trigger for a simple piano melody. In the concerto this section has a clearer sense of
growth towards bar 159 – a small climactic moment preparing the first time the cor anglais, horn and viola all come in together in bar 160. This section also uses the lower range of the electronic piano, which has been dramatically changed since the earlier work. Instead of aggressive retuned low notes with occasional high clusters (Figure 8) the notes, still retuned, are quiet and sustained. The occasional high clusters have been turned into four pitches; two compound major 3rds and two compound perfect 5ths. This section of the electric piano is therefore, in dynamic and harmony, the mirror image of the earlier instrument. Five of the low pitches in this section of the new instrument also glissando upward over the duration of the notes’ natural decay (Figure 15). This is contrary to the conceit for the electric piano in My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. as the electric piano always had to give the illusion that it could have be made without electronic interference. This was no longer necessary in the piano concerto; there are so many electronic elements to the piece and, at the end in particular, electronic sounds briefly take over the role of the orchestra.

Figure 15

The central section of the new piano is similar to the original, just organised differently; there is still a mix of dynamics and staccato and sustained pitches. This section is larger in the concerto and there are more staccato pitches and a greater variety of dynamics. The series of very large staccato chords, which appear in the original piano, is developed for the concerto instrument. There are more chords and greater variety of registers. These chords dominate the end of the first and last movements and are therefore of particular significance. As with the original instrument there are some related sustained chords (Figure 16). This development came about from session improvising with the original instrument after the piece was composed and the success of these chords in quick succession.
Other electronics in the piece include a series of pre-prepared recordings of cello and clarinet sounds triggered by the respective instrumentalists. Throughout the first movement these recordings gradually become less dense but consist of more elaborate musical lines. The first recording in each instrument is a giant static cluster (bars 13 - 14) and the final series of recording in each instrument are always two to four lines of complex counterpoint (bars 235 - 284). These two instruments do not trigger any more recordings until near the end of the third movement (bars 174 - 178). These recordings are synchronized with the exact rhythm of the two players. They are made up of sections of the initial cluster from the opening of the first movement.

The electronics for the cor anglais, horn and viola do not start until the third movement. Their function is to dramatically develop the material that these instruments perform acoustically in the first movement. In the first movement these instruments play melodies that are repeated out of time with the rest of the orchestra. When all three are playing simultaneously the separate melodic lines start to transform into a continuum of accompanying sounds (Figure 17).
In the third movement this process is extended electronically. The three instruments record themselves then this music is electronically repeated. There are three of these ‘looping sections’ in the piece. The longest of these is *looping section 2* which starts in bar 29 of the main score although the music for the trio in the back of the score starting on page 76. This section starts with solo viola which is gradually joined the cor anglais then, later, the horn. At the end of this section
there are twelve simultaneous melodic lines, three played live (larger staves) and the rest recorded (smaller staves) (Figure 18).

These instrumentalists do not follow a conductor (other than for the initial cues) or closely follow each other. Each phrase is separated by a pause partly to accommodate the time it takes to make sure one recording has been captured and partly to make ensure that the phrases do not line up together in blocks. By this stage in looping section 3 it is essentially impossible to pick out individual lines and the large-scale transformation from line to musical texture is complete. Looping section 3 takes place during the frenetic final section of orchestral music and builds up much quicker; the individual lines are not intended to be easily identifiable at any point here because of the denser texture of the music.

The electronic samples for the clarinet and cello in the first movement and the looping sections in the third serve as one of the main structural features of the complete piece. The electronic samples in the first movement start as giant clusters and complex multilayered textures and end as more focussed contrapuntal lines. By the third movement these two instruments are only playing single lines, the final samples only decorate these lines in rhythmic unison. By contrast the cor anglais, horn and viola gradually build up from the opening solo horn at the start of the first movement to, at the end of the third movement, fifteen lines of complex counterpoint. This ending resembles the dense pre-recorded samples in the clarinet and cello from the start. This long term exchange of roles between these two groups helps demarcate the middle movement, control the relationship between the outer two movements and imply the sense of inevitability of the section immediately prior to the final piano coda (bars 142 to 184 of the third movement things that are black…).

The programmes for looping and for the triggering the samples were designed in Max/MSP by David Sheppard (of Sound Intermedia). This meant that a single piece of software could operate both requirements and Sheppard could customise the interface for easy of performance and so he could monitor any mistakes or problems and correct them during the performance. I tested the principles for the looping sections using the more straightforward Ableton Live. Ableton Live is structured more like usual software sequencers but, as different tracks can play
music simultaneously but independent of each other, allows for greater flexibility in live performance ‘Live’s nonlinear, intuitive flow, alongside powerful real-time editing and flexible performance options, make it a unique studio tool and a favourite with live performers’.

In bar 182 of the third movement a barrage of electronic sounds takes over from the full orchestra (and the 12 looping recorded lines of music from looping section 3). This is prepared by a gradual crescendo of sub-bass electronic sound from bar 175. This dramatic transformation adds to the theatre to the final climatic section of music. As the electronics take over the role of accompanying the piano this clarifies something of the relationship between soloist and technology that has been more ambiguous throughout the piece. This section also means that all attention is directed at the soloist without having to lose accompanying music. The original electronic sounds here are made using The Cloud, processing software designed by David Sheppard in Max/MSP. Any sound processed using The Cloud is treated though a series of delays, pitch-shifters and tone degraders. These sounds were then separated then reassembled to create and explosive electronic climax. As the sounds are processed beyond recognition the original sounds used are of no consequence to the piece.

The first movement of the piece is in seven sections. These are, a short introduction in bars 6 to 12, then bars 13 to 84, 85 to 111, 112 to 130, a short cadenza-like passage in bars 131 to 144 and finally bars 175 to 284. The movement is closely related to My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. and, in particular, the second movement The two William Wilsons cancelled each other out. As well as the penultimate section directly relating to the second half of this movement the second section directly relates to the first half. Here the music is separated into a series of violent interjections that that are subsumed into a more ambient orchestral middle and background. Although the piano writing is not identical it the rhythmic lines are and melodic contours are similar. Overall, apart from the final section, the remaining music is a reflection or development of the music in this second concerto section with less relation to the original solo piano piece.

The final section is still related to The two William Wilson cancel each other out as these both share the aggressive and expansive retuned staccato chords. Here
however John Cage is a more tangible influence and, in particular, his *Sonata IV* from *Sonatas and Interludes*. The opening of the final section of the first movement (Figure 19) closely relates to the opening nine bars of the Cage (Figure 20) in the rhythm and contour of the musical line.

![Figure 19](image)

![Figure 20](image)

The rest of the movement takes this initial Cage-inspired phrase and develops this entirely independently from the Cage sonata. Taking this fragment as the starting point for this section is a preface to the Cage-inspired prepared piano in the second movement and also an acknowledgement of the elusive relationship between the sampled electric piano and the Cage.
CHAPTER FIVE
Small scale chamber works

Over the last four years of research I have written various instrumental chamber works, three of which I have included in my portfolio. All of these pieces have served, as well as fulfilling commissions, as studies and satellites pieces to the larger scale works. I have included three of these in the portfolio.

riviniana

Radius and Ian Vine commissioned riviniana as part of a sequence of short pieces for the composer Simon Holt in his 50th birthday year. riviniana was intended as a short, unpretentious gift (the title is the name of a violet wild flower).

This was the first piece I wrote which uses a simple slowing down of the music as a key structural feature of the music. Here the piano and vibraphone play, independently of each other, a series of pitches that gradually slow down while the rest of the ensemble of alto flute/piccolo, bass clarinet and cello play a sequence of four short simple interjections. The penultimate of these interjections is also a sequence of pitches that start fast and gradually slow down; this microcosm of the background in the foreground ties these two layers together. This section of music forms the basis for sections of various other pieces and is the principle starting point for Springtime.

A second version of riviniana was made for a concert programmed by the cellist Oliver Coates. After discussions on the careful presentation of concerts we decided to open with an installation-like experience that becomes a piece of music. I adapted the riviniana music for piano and vibraphone so there is a version where the music speeds up from a very slow starting point then reverts to the original and slows down. This can loop as many times as necessary and the rest of the performers come on stage when they are ready, wait for the music to get to its central very fast moment (or, if the two instruments have because too displaced, wait for one of them to reach this point) then launch into the original piece. At the
The premiere of this version the opening music ran for over twenty minutes as people arrived at the concert.

Another particularly significant feature of *riviniana* is the ending. The piece finishes with an extended solo for piano that is identical to *Once there was time only to write three sentences*, the fifth movement of *My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name*. This is one example of my interest in sharing material between pieces and assembling pre-composed sections of music as a compositional process rather than starting each piece from scratch. Some of the pieces for the house of bedlam share re-imagined material with some of the concert works. This self-quotation and less literal equivalents are an extension of sharing structural or other musical ideas between pieces. Towards the end of *riviniana* the requirement was always for a solo piano sequence that combined some of the register and forward momentum from the initial piano and vibraphone music, with some of the more harmonically focussed ensemble interjections. *Once there was time only to write three sentences* achieves both these things. Its outer sections serve as a sequence of cadence like passages and the two hands move consistently in extreme registers and relatively quickly. As the movement is in rhythmic unison it is also very distinct from the opening of *riviniana*.

*The life and death of a 9413, Hollywood extra*

This piece was written for Psappha and commissioned by Opera North Projects for the Leeds Film Festival 2008. The commission was for a soundtrack to the 1928 silent film of the same name written and directed by Robert Flory and Slavko Vorkapich. The soundtrack exists in two versions; the electronic sounds synchronized to the film with or without the live ensemble of clarinet/bass clarinet, trumpet, cello and percussion.

The soundtrack was an exercise in a specific kind of electronic music. At the heart of electronic sounds is a private conceit; the real instruments’ sounds are all taken from existing software, and controlled using MIDI piano roll, and the electronic sounds are all processed acoustic instruments using my own recordings. This was an exercise in my first use of MIDI piano roll and early experiments in electronic processing.
I used the software Logic Studio to assemble the electronic sounds for this piece. The decelerating acoustic sounds are made using sampler instruments from the Logic library. I used six different sampler instruments; glockenspiel, metal string guitar, nylon string guitar, harp, piano, vibraphone and I used several tracks for each instrument for variety in panning and tuning. MIDI piano roll is a visual notation system which allows solid bars to be placed on the screen with their horizontal position indicating when the note occurs, the vertical position indicating the pitch, the length of the bar indicating the duration of the note, and the colour of the bar indicating the dynamic and intensity of attack. This was an experiment in a more improvisatory approach to composition. I imported sequences of pitches from other pieces then moved them around on the screen relying on instinct to co-ordinate these with the film. The rhythmic quality of the material is partly, again, the instinctive positioning of this material, and partly the electronic slowing down of the material. In order that the sound not become too regimented each of the tracks was electronically slowed down separately at different rates. This creates an initial confusion and gradual comprehension similar to the performer controlled slowing passages in Springtime and riviniana.

The more obviously electronic sounding distorted drones were more carefully constructed. There is a sequence of piano chords that were composed to fit with the film. These chords, to relate to the slow down passage, gradually become more and more consonant from a dissonant base. These were recorded as loud staccato chords and then processed by first having an artificial reverb applied. This reverb allows the resonance of the short chord to last for a minute. These resonances are then electronically distorted using software that allows for a full range of distortion alterations. These chords were then reassembled according to their approximate original positions but now fading up and down and usually overlapping. Generally there is less distortion of these sounds towards the end of the piece, which helps to emphasize the simple harmonic shape.

The film is awkward to add music to because of the large numbers of sudden cuts to different scenes. By electronically adding part of the soundtrack I was able to occasionally cut layers of music to coincide very specifically with these but also make sure some music flowed through sequences of sudden cinematic edits. This
means that the ensemble version can synchronise more freely with the film and
does not closely coincide with the sudden scene changes.

The film used a very low budget and very simple technology – much of the film is
made using simple models and reflecting these in mirrors. Partly because of the
low-fidelity equipment and partly because of the available technologies in 1928 the
film often flickers and the reflections and silhouettes are very obviously of models.
It was my intention to use high-fidelity techniques that deliberately imitate some
of these effects; the fast and chaotic MIDI score and the electronic distortion of the
artificial piano resonance both have a flickering quality that is sympathetic with
the image on screen. The music is intended to make the film look like it could be a
contemporary piece of work that consciously decided to use flawed techniques.

five Kerouac haiku

This short five-movement work was written for Sounds Underground, a flexible
ensemble curated (at the time) by Oliver Coates. This was written under
considerable time pressure and this became a factor in the compositional approach
and the broader aesthetic approach to the piece.

One concern was my tendency to write excessively inward looking pieces with
exclusively academic compositional concerns. One aspect of this approach was to
consider aspects of my writing, originally confined to music written for the house
of bedlam, as simple functional pieces written for a specific occasion and then
discarded. The material for this music could then be dismissed or assimilated into
other pieces. I am concerned that contemporary classical music works are often
treated like museum pieces, arbitrarily performed with the priorities of earlier
music. This music is not indeed to align itself with this way of thinking nor is it a
detailed compositional attempt at a solution. I intended to start discarding this
way of thinking in order to make this piece.

A suitable starting point for this work, and this way of thinking about music, are
the haiku written by Jack Kerouac.
'The Japanese Haiku is strictly disciplined to seventeen syllables but since the language structure is different I don’t think American Haikus (short three-line poems intended to be completely packed with Void of Whole) should worry about syllables because American speech is something again…bursting to pop. Above all, a Haiku must be very simple and free of all poetic trickery and make a little picture and yet be as airy and graceful as a Vivaldi Pastorella.'

This description inspired an approach relying on instinct and immediacy and each title of the movements of five Kerouac haiku are taken from his collection. The titles are The bird trashing the bath., Katapatafataya, The bottoms of my shoes are wet., The drunkards of Mexico and The office girl unloosing her scarf. These titles are taken from the following haiku:

After the shower
among the drenched roses
the bird thrashing in the bath.

I’ll climb up a tree
and scratch Katapatafataya.

Evening coming –
the office girl
Unloosing her scarf.

Early morning yellow flowers,
thinking about
the drunkards of Mexico.

The bottoms of my shoes
are clean
from walking in the rain.

Uniquely of all my compositions these short pieces are intended to be programmatic. Each of these haiku captures a moment of motion, and so finding a way to convert these into music seemed quite natural. The programmatic element
is entirely personal and, beyond the title, there is no intention to inform the audience of all the haikus.

The piece shares some of the structural ideas of *Four letter words* (chapter six) but on a much smaller scale. The first and fourth movements are closely related; the cello plays a sequence of melodies in each and the violin is responsible for fierce interjections. However, in the first movement (Figure 21) the violin is entirely independent of the cello and percussion, and in the fourth (Figure 22) they are scored together. This provides the piece with a sense of inevitably coalescing in the fourth movement. The percussion also swaps between the two movements providing, in the first, a gentle tuned accompaniment to the cello and in the fourth an aggressive un-pitched partner to the violin.

![Figure 21](image1)

![Figure 22](image2)
This means the final movement serves as a coda and the music is predominantly more straightforward and consonant than before. The last eight bars of music serve in part as conclusion, the sustained A in the strings implied resolution but at the same time the vibraphone chords and strings start to expand, the former obviously and the latter minutely (Figure 23). This leaves the end of the piece open and compliments the whimsical haiku.

Figure 23
CHAPTER SIX

Music for voices and ensemble

Almost all the words I have set to music have been written by Matthew Welton. I have included two examples of sung music and words in the portfolio. These two pieces are *Four letter words* and *Springtime*. Full texts for these pieces are in Appendix 3.

*Springtime*

*Springtime* was commissioned for the London Sinfonietta for the ensemble’s 40th anniversary. Is it scored for amplified soprano, two clarinets and classical guitar as a foreground ensemble, and locally amplified electric piano and unamplified piano, vibraphone/glockenspiel and harp. There is also a pre-recorded soundtrack, which is a recorded second vocal line.

This piece was the direct culmination of the experiment in *riviniana* with a free, gradually slowing background ensemble providing the musical backdrop to a simpler and more linear foreground. After Welton and I had collaborated more directly in the house of bedlam and with *Four letter words* I decided to set one of his existing poems. I chose this poem because of its extreme simplicity and very clear emotive personal sentiment. Many of Welton’s poems are abstract, and *Springtime* is much more descriptive. After five Kerouac haiku I was intent on exploring more music that I perceived as emotive and musically immediate.

As well as the straightforward sentiment of this poem, the rhythm and structure is simpler than in most of his other poems. Welton employs a straightforward iambic pentameter (rather than his preferred hexameter) and the poem is split into two sections both of which are also split in half. I chose to dramatically accentuate this structure and there is a long pause of a minute and twenty seconds in the middle of the song. As well as complementing the structure of the poem this allows the background ensemble time to be heard on its own. Each of the four sections of the poem, each of two lines, is characterised by a different music. Unusually for Welton there are no obvious variations of his text in this poem and so, although all the melodic material in the song is related, I have avoided any direct
recapitulations or obvious repetitive variations of my own. Despite this the first
and fourth sections of vocal writing are more obvious and elaborate melodies
framing two sections of more static linear writing. This helps prepare the
emergence of the voices from the long pause in the middle of the piece.

The notion of a pre-recorded voice and live voice in the piece was initially inspired
by a line from the poem:

the shadow that it spread long the ground
was hardly there…

I was affected by this description of time in the poem as two objects, one solid and
real and the other elusive gradually spreading apart. The two voices behave in this
way throughout the piece. The pre-recorded voice starts by following the live
voice (bars 5 to 35). In the second section the voices start to come together; initially
they are separated not only because the recorded voice is still following the live
voice but also because the former is in the lowest range and the latter in the higher
bars 31 to 52). When the two voices come together in pitch (bars 53 to 62) the
intervals are dominated by minor and major seconds also supported, sometimes
with quartertones, by the two clarinets. The effect is extremely dissonant so when
the two voices separate in register again there is still a sense of the two coming
together as the intervals are consonant.

The opening of the third section (bar 75) is the point at which the two voices have
finally come together. This makes most obvious use of the discrete click track the
foreground ensemble have been using to co-ordinate with the film as, after a
minute of silence, the two voices come in simultaneously a major 3rd apart. Here
the music is dominated by consonant intervals but they are offset by more
quartertone tuning in the clarinets and now the voices. The final two sections
repeat the first two in reverse so that, in the end, the final phrase is taken by the
pre-recorded voice alone with the background ensemble.

The piece can be performed with a film, made by myself and Flat-E, London based
filmmakers, of the singer singing the second vocal line. This adds to the sense of
unreality as the singer, Juliet Fraser, intended to dress the same for the film as for
the concert performance. The film looks, at the start, like a live film of the performance until the live singer begins and the filmed singer remains silent. I am also fascinated by the behaviour of performers when they are on stage but not performing. We filmed the long pause in the middle of the piece as if it were a performance. The tiny discrepancies between Juliet’s stillness live, and on the film, in this central pause, help to emphasis the coming together of the two voices.

Allowing the ending of the piece to be dominated by the pre-recorded voice was also an idea that partially emerged from a discussion with the filmmakers. As experienced filmmakers, used to projecting moving image during concert performances, they argued that there are inherent problems with film in this context. The activity on stage is so engrossing and highlights the weaknesses in moving image; that it is highly susceptible to light interference and, because it is projected onto a flat screen, even if the content is spectacular something relatively mundane can dramatically diminish the illusion. Most cinema is seen in the dark and it is still unusual for live and filmed media to interact (rather than simply happen simultaneously). By ending the piece without the foreground ensemble and the lower light I intended to allow the music to arrive at more ideal conditions for film.

An unusual feature of Springtime was how the vocal line was recorded. As the vocal line was to be filmed the options were limited. In order for the recorded vocal line to be identical to the written line and therefore fit with the other parts we would have to use a click track (which would be visible on the film), a visual click (which would have diverted Fraser’s attention and therefore been noticeable) or mimed the film to a previously sung line. None of these seemed very satisfactory as, despite the music being relatively complex, the performance had to compliment the unpretentiously descriptive poem. I decided that we would film without miming or any kind of click track and then I would re-notate the results and write the piece around this. Although Fraser was extremely accurate in the filming, there are numerous small discrepancies between the original and the final results. Figure 24 shows a short section from the pre-recorded vocal line and Figure 25 is the original music we used to record. Fraser’s involuntary rhythmic alterations and variations in spaces between musical phrases informed the rest of
the vocal writing, and the piece features more idiosyncratic vocal writing because of this.

![Musical notation]

**Figure 24**

**Four letter words**

After my first setting of a Matthew Welton poem, *Tighten up* (for soprano and symphony orchestra, 2006), we decided to collaborate on a new work. *Four letter words* was commissioned by The Society for the Promotion of New Music, now part of Sound and Music. The commission was for a short (10 to 20 minute) music theatre piece for small ensemble and one singer. The piece is scored for baritone, clarinet, horn, violin and double bass.

Our initial concern for this collaboration was that I should not simply set some of Welton’s words to music but there would be a more integrated collaboration. To this end we decided that we would discuss a drama together and the words and music would complement this; the words would not directly describe the drama any more than the music and would certainly not describe a narrative. This story or dramatic narrative is simple, a singer is performing with an ensemble and is gradually interrupted by an initially off-stage clarinettist who increasingly insinuates himself into the ensemble. He starts to take over as the key performer.
and, as a consequence, they have a violent argument which results in the clarinettist stealing the ensemble away. Now the roles are reversed and a clarinettist is performing with an ensemble and a forlorn singer is relegated to the outskirts of the performance. A sympathetic percussionist rejoins the singer for his final solo after the rest of the ensemble has left.

Welton decided, partly for a personal artistic restriction and partly to find some correlation between the words and the relatively small chamber ensemble, to limit the text to only four letter words (this explains the movement titles eins, zwei, drei, vier, funf and coda). He then wrote a sequence of three texts, all variations of each other and each subsequent variation is more substantial. These form the first three sections of Four letter words. He also wrote, at my request, a shorter section of text based on the same variations for funf. For the coda I wrote the music first and Welton set words to this; as a consequence this section has a very different sound in the music and the words.

For the fourth section, the argument between the singer and clarinettist, I wanted words I could set without worrying about the diction and meaning of the words always being clear. We decided on a nonsense text. We had also been discussing whether the piece should have swearing in it – writing a piece with only four letter words seemed to demand this but we were both keen to avoid operatic setting of actual swear words. Each of the nonsense words in vier therefore are made up of two swear words combined to make a nonsense word (for example fuck and cunt combined become either funt or cuck). Welton made a grid showing the possible combination of all the four-letter swear words we could think of and then I arranged them for the setting. I decided to keep the words in their natural groupings, there are three different types of four letter words that emerge; funt or cuck as seen above are most like the original words; some words combine leaving two vowels in the middle (for example wank and shag can combine to make waag) and; finally there are some combinations that make words without any vowels (for example shit and wank can combine to make shnk). I decided to set (almost) all the nonsense words so the words with double vowels always split into two syllables for emphasize their distinction (Figure 26) and the words without vowels converted into a free and extended series of sulking noises from the baritone (page 38 of the score).
The nonsense words meant that the clarinet and voice would enter into real dialogue without the use of words highlighting the significance of sung line. In this movement the voice is simply another instrument (Figure 27).

The decision to treat the voice as an instrument in this movement also informed the rest of the vocal setting, to satisfactorily contrast with this, the writing is vernacular and, without resorting to pastiche, the vocal line is inspired by rhythms in folk music and is a stylised response to folk-like melodic shapes.
In the first movement of *Four letter words* the horn plays two melodies each repeated four times (pages 5 and 8 – 9 in the score). Throughout the second and third movements of the piece variations of these melodies start the movement but they are now less freely placed within the context of the ensemble. This repetition and variation helps connect the music to the sequence of variations in the text. This also supports the drama of the piece. In the fifth movement the instrumental ensemble join the horn in music based entirely around the original sequence of repeated melodies and the baritone has a sequence of four related melodies which fit freely into the ensemble part. When the clarinettist has taken over the ensemble from the baritone his music is rhythmically independent from the ensemble.
CHAPTER SEVEN

the house of bedlam

I formed the house of bedlam in June 2007 at the start of this period of research. It is an ensemble of clarinets/saxophones (one player), cello, guitars/banjo and percussion with live electronics (performed by myself) and spoken word performed by Matthew Welton. I formed the ensemble with several aims in mind; to develop my writing and performance skills in electronic music; to create an ensemble to perform the same works on at least several occasions; to create music that shares some of the sound and approach of folk, blues and rock music without writing pastiche or imitative music; to find a balance between improvising and composition that I would be happy applied to my own compositions and; to form an ensemble based on the suitable performers and then build the repertoire around this rather than the other way round. We have commissioned work and played some music by other composers but I have written most of the music for the ensemble either with or without their direct support and the last concerts we have performed have been exclusively of my/our music.

At the heart of this project was the intent to find a more immediate approach to composing that could be flexible for the ensemble and less precious than I perceived I had been in my concert work. By drawing a distinction between music for the ensemble and my commissioned concert works I felt I had the freedom to explore a more irreverent creative process.

I formed the ensemble having written only one piece with electronic music (the original version of Sinew for cello and video projectors written at Aldeburgh Music) and having never performed live electronics before. Although this first piece was written under the supervision of David Sheppard on a short course at Aldeburgh Music, and I have sought his and other specialists’ advice since, it was gratifying that a significant aspect of the writing and ensemble would fall entirely outside of my training up to this point.

I decided that one defining aspect of the electronics for the house of bedlam should be that the sound reproduction should be as high fidelity as possible. This was a reaction to a large body of experimental music concerted with low fidelity
electronics and sound reproduction using, for example, old-fashioned hardware and basic hardware such as Dictaphones or detuned radios. I also decided to avoid, for the most part, electronic music hardware preferring to operate exclusively within computer software. I also decided, this time as a reaction to my experience of diffusion concerts (where a very large number of extremely high fidelity loudspeaker are placed around the audience and the music is spatially diffused around the room live), to impose certain rules on spatializing electronic music in the ensemble. The setup should focus on stereo rather than surround, any surround setup should not be more than quadraphonic and sounds should not be passed between speaker do give an illusion of a moving sonic object. To date the only music for the house of bedlam that has been spatialized is *riviniana and the vermilion border* (originally *the vermilion border* was commissioned for cello and six-channel electronics). The quadraphonic version of this piece simply involves different aspects of the background electronics, first slowing down then speeding up, so that this continually surrounds the audience and that the two occasionally distorted pre-recorded cello lines are fixed behind and to the left and right of the audience respectively. As the electronics are treated as a feature of the chamber performance everything else is in stereo and, as the ensemble is also amplified, the two blend.

Many of the electronic sounds for the house of bedlam are processed sounds taken from the ensemble, however this is simply for practicality and not an aesthetic priority. Limiting the electronic sounds to those exclusively related to the ensemble was restrictive and unnecessary; given the possibilities of sound transformation it is not significant what sound source is used.

This approach is intended to provide a wide range of possibilities with sufficient limitations to provide some inherent identity to the electronic sounds. This has changed as the project has developed. The original pieces use straightforward processing. *Sinew* only uses distortion and artificially slowing sounds for the processing (the latter responsible both for the extreme bass noises and the subtler quartertone retuning). Most of the electronic sounds from this piece are recorded from the cello (and the rest from a violin) however many of the sounds are transformed beyond recognition. In *riviniana and the vermilion border* the only processes used are again changing the duration and pitch of sounds.
simultaneously and distortion and reversing sounds. More recent pieces such as *Blind Jack’s silent house* use a combination of pre-made sampler instruments, more sophisticated melodic delays and some very elaborate processing to create the two electronic interjections (in the opening at bar 8 and the solo electronics in bar 91). I was concerned, listening to the development between these two pieces, that a more straightforward approach yields more effective results. However, I believe that it is simply quicker and easier to achieve more effective results with simpler resources and I would rather treat this as a reason to continue developing a more elaborate approach over time rather than revert to the earlier methods.

All of the pieces for the house of bedlam have been performed at least several times and the intention is to continue performing them. Although increasingly my concert pieces are performed on multiple occasions I find that usually my expected involvement with the music ends after the premiere. With the repertoire for the house of bedlam I never consider a piece to be in a completed form only that an essential musical identity in structure and identifiable sounds has been arrived at. Aside from this the music can always change. For this reason there are often multiple versions of the pieces. *Deaf John’s dark house* exists in versions for clarinet and cello, clarinet and cello with electronics and a version for the entire instrumental line-up. *Sinew*, the most extreme example of this, exists in version for solo cello and tape, with live electronics, with video projections, for two cellos and electronics, for the house of bedlam instrumental line-up without cello and for the full ensemble instrumental line-up. Moreover I have made four slightly different versions of the *Sinew* for cello and live electronics, two for each of the cellists who have performed it.

This approach has had a positive impact on my concert music. I have become much better at workshopping pieces (prior to my experience with the house of bedlam, workshops tended to be straightforward rehearsals with some discussion). By immersing myself in the ensemble playing live electronics I started to develop a different relationship with the performers and a different vocabulary to discuss my music in rehearsal. I have also grown accustomed to making changes and decisions about pieces during rehearsals and thinking about the compositions as fluid and constantly changing pieces. I have also become much more comfortable with revising pieces after initial performances (where before I
would prefer to incorporate new ideas that emerged from a performance into a new piece).

More importantly I started to consider how to articulate the essence of any of my compositions. The question was, what made all the different versions of any particular work into the same piece and, more importantly, to what extent could the music differ from the original and still be considered the same piece. In the case of *Sinew* this seemed obvious. In each version the sounds are similar, the overall structure, one of a series of vertical blocks of sound gradually transforming into a straightforward melody, is the same although different sections last different durations. The first half of *riviniana and the vermillion border* (which can be performed alone and itself exists in versions with and without cello) is less apparently related to the acoustic *riviniana*. Although the foreground material is almost identical, albeit on different instruments, the background piano and vibraphone has been dramatically transformed into a much wider array of timbres and very different harmonies. It is clear that the specific harmony and timbres of this section is much less important to the identity of the piece than its function of gradually slowing down and pacing the music. Acknowledging this through the conversion of pieces into various versions has helped pinpoint the function of material; the function can be made more apparent and more flexible imagination can be applied to any musical parameters that are not essential for the function of the piece.

In the final section of *riviniana* the two versions share harmonic and melodic material however the register and timbre has changed dramatically. In the house of bedlam version (Figure 28) the timbre and register of the soprano saxophone is sufficiently different from the instruments in the earlier sections to provide a different identity and the tension of the extreme register is maintained but now in the unusually low saxophone rather than the high piano in the original ensemble version (Figure 29). There is still parallel movement in the music but, with the addition of a two other instruments, this is not completely consistent. The rhythmic variation provides an equivalent to the piano pedalling in the original. Most importantly the unusual melody, rhythmic but free from an obvious sense of pulse, is the same and there is a still the dramatic change in the music that is essential to the structure of the original.
One of the reasons for the different versions of the house of bedlam repertoire is the significance of the players. I wanted to treat, as is often typical in folk, blues and rock bands, the players as an absolutely essential part of the music. These pieces are written for them and if one of them cannot attend a concert then I would rather rewrite the music for the rest of the ensemble rather than involve another player. If another player does come into the ensemble I would want to rewrite the music to suit them. As the personality of the performers is more significant that the instruments they play a stand-in instrumentalist is as likely to play a different instruments as the same one. This would obviously require considerable rewriting. It is completely usual for a rock, blue or folk band (and many other genres of music) to have numerous version of the same song; acoustic versions, core line-up versions, versions with orchestra and I wanted to reflect this but with sensitivity to
my own aesthetic considerations and no forced compromise to the detail in the score.

Matthew Welton writes new texts and performs spoken word with the house of bedlam. In keeping with the spirit of the ensemble Matthew initially joined because I wanted to incorporate the artists I work regardless of their field of practice.

Matthew’s creative involvement has been of enormous value because of the differences in his practical approach to creating his work despite aesthetic similarities. His writing is essentially non-narrative, even his short story *Piece-in-six-sections* is not a conventional linear narrative. His priorities are the structure of his poems and the sound and rhythm of the words and systems he uses. In this respect when we work together, especially in the house of bedlam, our approaches and discussion are as colleague composers; the pieces for words and music are structured through discussion and then Welton is responsible for one musical element in the spoken word. However, his writing process is different to mine and, more significantly, extremely different to the creative approach of the ensemble. The instrumentalists and myself, when working together, are used to a practical approach with trial and error and a very strictly adhered to schedule of writing, recording and rehearsal. By contrast Welton may, in the same time, read a book of Iris Murdoch essays and write down 20 key words to discuss with the rest of the ensemble before proceeding with any more text. This approach helps me maintain an arterial link to more inventive writing processes when I am also rehearsing with the ensemble. This also provides an entirely unfamiliar perspective for the performers. This encourages discussion and imagination in our approach to creating new work and has directly contributed to some new music for the ensemble through new working methods.

As Welton does not read traditional western notation we have accommodated this into the pieces by teaching musical ideas by ear or allowing the natural rhythm of the texts to take priority and notating the music around this. Again Welton’s approach and understanding of rhythm has been vital in informing aspects of the writing and performance with the instrumental ensemble. As Welton’s work is detailed and specific in its rhythm but also, by its very nature, variable. This has
provided a starting point for some of the improvisation with the house of bedlam and informed some of our discussions about interpretation.

It had always been my intention to incorporate aspects of improvisation into the ensemble while wanting to avoid free improvisation. As the ensemble had been formed on the understanding that the musical decisions would be taken by a composer free improvisation felt contrary to the spirit of the endeavour. This was particularly important at the start of the project as improvisation would have provided a too easy solution to the limited repertoire. It is partly for this reason that the first pieces are more strictly notated.

The intention was to incorporate improvisation in the ensemble very gradually. We started discussing details of interpretation and instrumental technique with the idea that this trajectory would eventually arrive at a suitable approach to improvisation. This approach was helpful from two perspectives. That improvisation was incorporated into the discussion when dealing with usual rehearsal practice meant that there was an extensive creative discussion about the interpretation of the music with the intention of weakening the barrier between composer and performer and allowing greater autonomy for the performer. This also meant that we could arrive at an approach that incorporated improvisation as individual as possible without relying on approaches which, as all of the instrumentalists in the house of bedlam are experienced improvisers, does not sound like a combination of their improvising in other contexts.

In practice this partly worked. We have two pieces that incorporate some improvisation techniques for the house of bedlam, *The Bilberry Hill Shim-Sham* and the more devised *Piece-in-six-sections*. I think the musical identity of these pieces is consistent with the rest of the ensemble’s repertoire and the approach to improvising was different to most of the instrumentalists’ usual practice. However the roles of the performers in this ensemble context remained the same throughout the project; the performers were generally happy to improvise when asked but not to bring strong creative ideas to the pieces unless it was clearly an improvised section. We are continuing to address this.
The Bilberry Hill Shim-Sham has a score, which is a guideline to the piece. This score is straightforward, there are explicit instructions to improvise and it is obvious when the music is composed. Piece-in-six-sections has no score. Although we started with a sequence of written phrases and other musical ideas, this piece was, in the end, entirely devised. Although this piece has no tangible score, the music is far more fixed than The Bilberry Hill Shim-Sham, as the discussion for the piece was considerably more comprehensive. This was the first time the ensemble has responded, as a group, creatively to Welton’s words and, with such an extensive accompanying text, this was an ideal starting point for this devised piece. Despite the discussion and the ensemble’s input into the music, Piece-in-six-sections I consider that I have more ownership over this music than The Bilberry Hill Shim-Sham as I made the majority of the creative decisions for the piece.

The repertoire for the house of bedlam covers a wide range of notational approaches. In Sinew and deaf John’s dark house, the music is strictly notation and detailed. In Sinew, the electronics are also notated very specifically. In deaf John’s dark house, although the electronic part is much freer, this constitutes some of the most complex and rhythmically problematic ensemble music that the house of bedlam plays. At the other end of the spectrum, there are, as mentioned above, pieces with either very open scores or (currently) no scores at all. This quasi-improvised and instruction-based music is essentially extremely specific because of the manner in which it is rehearsed and devised. In a rehearsal situation, the ensemble always starts out responding much more warmly to strictly notated pieces, and find the initial discussions for the freer piece much more difficult to manage. I presume this is simply because the latter approach is much less familiar, and this contributes to the difficulty of working on new pieces in this way. Towards the end of the rehearsal process, this situation has entirely reversed. The ensemble is now in a situation where they are polishing the difficult notated music, and the final stage of rehearsal is the most laborious. In contrast, the less strictly notated pieces are often mostly memorized; they seem and feel much more straightforward but they do not necessarily sound it.

From my own perspective as the composer, I find this process very different. For the notated music, the initial rehearsals could be perceived as more frustrating. There is a longer period of becoming familiar with the notation before there is
sufficient fluency to discuss interpretative detail and other more musical concerns. This contradicts the initial plan surrounding the house of bedlam i.e. a more irreverent approach to music making. It is vital for the experiment that the approach is part of the working methodology as well as the final musical result. In contrast the devised music is a much more satisfactory process from the outset, but by the time the music has been assembled and is as detailed as it is likely to get, I feel there is a composed layer missing (even if this is a sequence of compositional or interpretive options).

The next stage in developing this compositional and rehearsal process is to combine these two distinct methods. The first stage of this is to strictly and elaborately notate *Piece-in-six-sections* based on the recordings we’ve made, and the other recordings of the rehearsal/development process. I would like to approach this more like notation for dance. By this I mean that the score and parts are simply a record of what was worked out and may be obstructive, initially, to sight-read or play quickly. This is likely to be the case as I intend to overlay a large number of different options for each part, some subtle and interpretive, and some with much more significant compositional implications. These new documents will become both the instruction manual for devising the piece again from scratch, and the part to refer to when the piece has reached a certain level of detail.

Ultimately I would like to experiment with this approach to composition by incorporating, on a much larger scale, some of the ideas around *Springtime* (see Chapter 6). I would write and finish a new work for the ensemble. We would then rehearse this piece treating the score as both a detailed musical document and a starting point for a devised piece of music. We would record the new work which would, hopefully, have aspects of the original score and tangential music. I would then rewrite the score based around these discussions and the recordings from the rehearsal. This would not only explore the working process for the house of bedlam in much more detail it would also allow, like the filmed part of springtime, for an instinctive feature of interpretation to become a notated aspect of a composition.
CHAPTER EIGHT
Creative collaboration

One of the defining features of my work over the last four years has been a series of close creative collaborations. I have divided these into two categories, collaborations with creative artists and collaborations with instrumentalists. Although not all of the music and other outputs from these collaborations have been included in this submission (particularly where there are questions of ownership, where the outputs are not suitable for an academic submission or where the outputs are sufficiently similar to other included pieces), this is an area of work that has had sufficient impact on my writing to merit further investigation here.

The reason for initiating creative collaborations is key to the overall aim of this period of work. I have been able to explore a much wider range of approaches to creative work and challenge my own writing methodology. To this end the collaborations have been diverse in their aesthetic starting points and in their projected outputs. My work with the writer Matthew Welton (with whom I have discovered a lot of creative common ground) and the DJ and composer mira calix (where, despite both working as composers, our creative starting points are more removed from each other) have already been mentioned in this commentary. I have also worked on new music and arrangements with the blues and rock singer-songwriter Sandy Dillon, have made an installation with the neuroscientist and artist Dr Beau Lotto, and created new physical and electric instruments with the sound designer and sonic artist David Sheppard.

These collaborations tend to rely, initially, on discovering some common ground. This has been most enriching when working with artists from other disciplines. When Matthew Welton and I first discussed our mutual fascination with, for example, repetition and small-scale variation or approaches towards rhythm and pacing, we discovered surprisingly similar attitudes given the differences in our crafts. This has, over time, revitalised aspects of my work as I have investigated ways of converting some of his literary approaches into compositional ideas. The repetitive and lyrical horn melody that plays rhythmically independently from the rest of the ensemble in Four letter words was part of my response to Welton’s
restriction and repetition in his text for this piece. This idea is dramatically developed in *Things that are blue, things that are white and things that are black* as three instruments (including the horn) behave in a similar way in the first movement and, in the last, this is developed further in the electronically enhanced ‘Looping Sections’ (see Chapter 4). Working so closely with another creative artist provides a uniquely detailed insight into their technical approach as I have witnessed and discussed Welton’s complete working method. The significance of this insight is enhanced when you recognise, as is the case and in Welton’s and my work, that the starting point for the new piece often bears little resemblance to the final product.

Exploring common ground has been the natural starting point for my collaborations with creative artists and has had a positive impact on my writing. However, the most interesting work within any particular collaboration has been in investigating ‘uncommon ground’. A good example of this has also been with Matthew Welton. *Four letter words* is a theatrical work and this is an area in which neither of us has had much experience. Our discussions were centred on the narrative and dramatic trajectory for the work. We established the priorities for our individual requirements for the piece, which we were able to then respond to more independently. In exploring this less familiar area we were able to find a vocabulary and working approach that could be applied more effectively to our respective disciplines. We are currently working on a much larger-scale work (a full-length chamber opera) in which several of the scenes explore this collaborative approach in different ways.

Over the last four years I have also been developing closer collaborative relationships with performers. This particularly includes, as is evident from earlier chapters in this commentary, the cellist Oliver Coates, the pianist Sarah Nicolls, the soprano Juliet Fraser and the instrumentalists that form the house of bedlam. Some features of these collaborations are detailed in earlier chapters however these experiences have led me to draw some broader conclusions on the composer-performer collaborative process.

When approaching collaboration with a specific performer I have found that deciding on an appropriate starting point presents difficulties. I have found myself
in scenarios in which a performer will simply run through a list of extended or unusual techniques on their instrument. I would not want to trivialise the importance to discovering details of an instrument however this has often led to a straightforward exchange of musical ideas and demonstrates limited true collaboration. As Fabrice Fitch and Neil Heyde observe in their article ‘Recercar’ – The Collaborative Process as Invention:

‘The relation between composer and performer is very complex. Although the role of the instrumentalist may be very important, it is rarely that of an inventor. In fact it usually works the other way round. If an instrumentalist writes music for his own instrument, the result is often not interesting in the technical sense, for he tends to write something that is comfortable to perform, or to over-exploit certain personal facilities.’

One avenue of exploration has been to share roles between the instrumentalists I work with and myself. This was part of the starting point for the house of bedlam and part of the reason I started performing live electronics. As noted in Chapter 7, this has led to some improvisation that is informed by my compositional methodology and removed from what I perceive as the traditions of free improvisation. I have invited the instrumentalists to contribute creatively to the composition through improvisation and a more invasive approach to interpretation than is usual in my concert music. I am now finding, particularly with Oliver Coates and Sarah Nicolls, that questions of interpretation are informing the composition process in a similar way in my concert music. Ultimately this has all been because of more comprehensive dialogues between the performers and myself. This improvement began by simply casting myself in the role of performer, even though my technical contribution is quite simple. Comparing the transformations in the detail of the dialogue between Coates, Nicolls, the other instrumentalists in the house of bedlam, and myself has also helped me understand the pace of this process. I believe that a possible hindrance to a creative collaboration between a composer and an instrumentalist is the discrepancy in the rate of progress for interpretation and composition.

In order to help decode the complex relationship between performer and composer I have divided the process into three areas. This is not designed to be
exhaustive and there is considerable crossover within these categories. I have made these distinctions as a personal methodology for approaching these collaborations.

The first category is the collaboration with the individual. This is an analysis of what impact the performer wants and expects to have on the end product. Before any detailed examination of the instrument or interpretation takes place this helps establish what roles each individual will take on for the collaboration. This is where, with the house of bedlam, I would try and let go of some aspects of the creative process that are traditionally the preserve of the composer. In another scenario this is where a performer would make it clear that they intend to contribute to the creative process beyond discussion with the composer and interpretation (for example through joint composition or improvisation). The potential performance contribution from the composer seems likely to be more informed by practical considerations (if there is a scheduled performance for a set number of players or if the stipulations of a commission preclude the involvement of any other performers) however this is not always the case. In Sarah Nicolls’ research project ‘hyperpiano’ (see Chapter 3) although the brief was to expand and reconsider the performance environment of the pianist with technology several of the projects also required the composer to perform an electronic component of the piece at the same time.

The second category for my approach to performer-composer collaboration is collaboration with the instrument or instruments. This is when a performer would provide an insight into the history and physical properties of their particular instrument. This is also, as Fitch and Heyde point out, when a ‘non-performing composer often comes up with ideas that will force the player to look for new solutions on the instrument’\textsuperscript{25}. This detailed examination of an instrument distinct from the performer’s interpretative approach can allow for an idiosyncratic approach to the composition but can also lead to a reinvention of that particular instrument. Fitch and Heyde cite Helmut Lachenmann as the ideal example of a composer who has considered the instrument in this way. ‘In an article from 1986, \textit{Über das Komponieren}, he argues that “composing [can be taken to mean] building an instrument”, an idea he develops in many other places in his published writings. By this he means that the compositional process entails the building of
“an imaginary instrument”, the exploration of whose properties (by the composer) brings about the piece itself.” This aptly describes my own approach in My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name and Things that are blue, things that are white and things that are black. where I developed new ‘imaginary instruments’ through technology to sit alongside the unaltered piano. The invented instrument often explores innate features of the acoustic instrument. An example of this would be the 88-note piano chord in the electric piano which is a re-imaging of the sound heard when the sustain pedal of the piano is depressed aggressively without touching any of the keys of the instrument.

The literal application of Lachenmann’s metaphorical ‘building an instrument’ can provide another potential model for performer-composer collaboration. In the project ‘sound/rebound’ David Sheppard and I designed and built new acoustic instruments from scratch. Part of the culmination of this project was the house of bedlam performing a new 45-minute work incorporating these new instruments and David Sheppard’s live electronic improvisation. Here notation for the new instruments varies from the more specific (rooted in the notational conventions to the specific player’s instrument) to the graphic and instructional. Even the apparently more specific notation is open to wider interpretation that would be associated with a familiar instrument. Here the performers’ explorations of the new instruments in rehearsal and performance provided substantial impact on the composition.

Sarah Nicolls has developed a new piano in which the strings of the instrument are readily accessible, the pitches of the instrument are reversed and there are objects, controlled electronically by the pianist, which can affect the strings of the piano during performance. Initially Nicolls developed her own repertoire for this instrument, essentially by exploring the possibilities of her new instrument as Lachenmann might suggest as composer interprets their approach to a familiar instrument. Now she is inviting composers to collaborate with her to develop new works for this instrument.

My final category in my personal approach to collaborating with performers is collaborating with the instrument technique. This is essentially a combination of the previous two categories but I find making a distinction for technique allows for
greater clarity when exploring the properties of an instrument. When discussing instrumental technique with a performer I find this often leads to the most penetrating discussion on the performer’s approach to interpretation. It is through this dialogue that a composer-performer discussion can fine-tune an appropriate interpretative approach for a new work or body of work. The question of instrumental technique also allows for a distinction between what is physically learnt and automatically applied in performance and rehearsal and what is intellectualised. As a composer I am as interested in the former as much as the latter. An example of this is in the *The Terminus Wreck* (see Chapter 2) where discussions with Oliver Coates led to the close juxtaposition of deliberately more and less idiosyncratic writing as a feature of the second movement.
CHAPTER NINE
Epilogue

Looking back on the last four years of composition and research I perceive this period as one type of personal compositional experiment. With an emphasis on collaboration and with the formation of the house of bedlam I have tried to take on as much composing and compositional work as possible and generate music to tight deadlines under considerable time pressure. This has been consistent with the emphasis on a more straightforward approach to writing and has helped make a division between the music of my M.Phil. and my Ph.D.. Overall I feel there is the greater sense of immediacy that was missing from earlier pieces. I also believe this approach has consolidated certain ideas of compositional technique. When I was writing more slowly I found that I was agonizing over musical minutiae and would often end up contradicting my initial idea or approach. I find that often the first idea is the strongest; this seems a way of identifying certain strengths and weaknesses in the overall technique.

I inevitably feel that the completion of the Ph.D. is a punctuation mark in my overall compositional development and feel now that the time is possibly right for a radical change. Over the next few years I intend to work on projects taking more time and allowing for some of the original fussiness to reassert itself alongside a more instinctive approach. This will also be a way of challenging complacency in the music; I am wary, whether I realise the same musical territory repeatedly or not, if the same core musical statements and ideas are continually explored. It is also by self-consciously acknowledging this recent body of work as an aesthetic experiment that explains this as academic work. I am always aspiring to write music that I take pleasure in and I am pleased when an audience seems to empathize with this. I agree with Morton Feldman in the necessity for a very broad definition of compositional and musical academia, ‘you have no idea how academic music is, even the most sublime. What is calculated is for me academic.’

Community has also become important to me over four years. The close-knit community of colleagues, fellow composers and performers is, of course, important and much of the music I have made over the last four years has
capitalised on these relationships. I have also begun to understand the importance of a local community both in Manchester and in London. I am keen, now, to be less estranged from any audience, for my music where possible, and this has been easier with the house of bedlam than any other work. I am keen to perform and write for a particular place over and over again, and enter into a collaborative relationship with an audience, where the supply and demand is satisfied by a mutual desire for better work.

I have also been grappling with what constitutes musical identity for a composer. I am certainly wary of the notion of a compositional voice. Aside from being a cliché (which I would prefer to avoid) this also seems to imply that a basic consistency between compositions is an asset. I do not consider this an aesthetic asset or handicap.

I would prefer to subscribe to a Xenakis metaphor, ‘music is not a language. Every musical piece is like a highly complex rock with ridges and designs engraved within and without, that can be interpreted in a thousand ways without a single one being the best or the most true. By virtue of this multiple exegesis, music sustains all sorts of fantastic imaginings, like a crystal catalyst.’ This implication that the assessment and appreciation of a piece of work is more interesting for understanding the assessor, not the music.
APPENDIX ONE

List of recordings, broadcasts and selected performances

Recordings

10/2009  Springtime on The Jerwood Series 6, The London Sinfonietta, Juliet Fraser (soprano), The London Sinfonietta Label

02/2007  the tentacles of memory on New Music for Oboe Volume Two, Melinda Maxwell (oboe), Dutton Epoch

08/2002  walking underground on Live at State of the Nation, London Sinfonietta, Pierre-André Valade (conductor), NMC

Broadcasts

10/07/2010  Things that are blue, things that are white and things that are black – BBC Radio 3’s Hear and Now, Sarah Nicolls, André de Ridder (conductor), London Sinfonietta

03/07/2010  Interview with Mira Calix: progress report on collaborative project Exchange & Return include various extracts of pieces from the project – BBC Radio 3’s Hear and Now

03/2009  sinew, deaf John’s dark house, Poppy (texts – Matthew Welton), talking microtonal blues, riviniana and the vermillion border – BBC Radio 3’s Hear and Now, the house of bedlam

12/2008  Springtime – BBC Radio 3’s Hear and Now, London Sinfonietta, Juliet Fraser (Soprano) (texts Matthew Welton – Text)

08/2008  My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. – BBC Radio 3 Hear and Now, Sarah Nicolls (piano)

11/2007  Popular Mysteries – BBC Radio 3’s In Tune, Sarah Nicolls (piano)

01/2006  Swerving with the weave – New Zealand’s Concert FM, 175 East

12/2005  turning aperture slowly clockwise spinning – BBC Radio 3’s Hear and Now, The Continuum Ensemble

02/2003  I wear you on my sleeve – BBC Radio 3’s Hear and Now, The Nash Ensemble

04/2002  something like a sense of detachment – BBC Radio 3’s Hear and Now, BBC Philharmonic, James Macmillan (conductor)

04/2001  walking underground – BBC Radio 3’s Hear and Now, London Sinfonietta, Pierre-André Valade (conductor)
Selected performances from September 2006

05/09/2010  for Anne and Jess – (composed with Bill Thompson), Bill Thompson and Larry Goves (electronics), Sofia Jernberg (voice), Jan Hendricks (bass flute) and Martin Larson (piano), Café Otto, Dalston, London

16/07/2010  Pedotin, Eyepoe – (both composed with Mira Calix), Mira Calix and Larry Goves (electronics) and the London Contemporary Orchestra, Latitude Festival, Suffolk

26/06/2010  The Bilberry Hill Shim-Sham – Tom McKinney (electric guitar), Larry Goves (electronics), The Chadlington Festival, Oxfordshire

18/06/2010  Virtual Airport – Seaming To and Sofia Jernberg (voices), Oliver Coates (cello), Sarah Nicolls (piano), Larry Goves (electronics) Matthew Welton (text), The Howard Assembly Rooms, Howard Assembly Rooms, Opera North Projects, Leeds

17/06/2010  Sinew – Tom Bayman and David McGann (cellos), Steven Jackson (electronics), The Carol Nash Recital Room, The Royal Northern College

03/06/2010  Things that are blue, things that are white and things that are black – Sarah Nicolls (piano), The London Sinfonietta, André de Ridder (cond.), The Queen Elizabeth Hall, London

14/04/2010  the terminus wreck – Oliver Coates (cello), Larry Goves (electronics), University of Manchester

05/03/2010  On the Easter bus to Rothes – Notes Inégales, Hoxton Hall, London

27/01/2010  vapour trail – Orchestra Viva, André de Ridder (cond.)

11/01/2010  the vermillion border – Oliver Coates (cello), Larry Goves (electronics), Kings Place, London

04/12/2009  various works – the house of bedlam, Cove Park, Hellensburgh, Scotland

05/12/2009  various works – the house of bedlam, Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow, Scotland

10/12/2009  various works – the house of bedlam, The Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester

27/11/2009  Skeins – Sally MacTagart (saxophone) David Horne (piano), North West Composers’s Festival, RNCM

26/11/2009  Sinew Tom Bayman (cello) Larry Goves (electronics), North West Composers’s Festival, RNCM, Manchester

07-19/09 New installation for 77 speaker sound wall with visuals by Dr Beau Lotto, developed by Lottolabs, part of the exhibition The Brain Unravelled, Slade Research Space, London

05/09/2009 *the terminus wreck* – The London Sinfonietta (Oliver Coates – cello), Kings Place, London

01/07/2009 25 Brook Street – (composer with Charlie Piper, Christopher Mayo and Mark Bowden, text – Helen Cooper) London Handel Orchestra and Singers, St George’s, Hanover Square, London

29/06/2009 *Sound/rebound* – performance of new hour long work incorporating the new instruments designed for the installation with improvisation by David Sheppard, the house of bedlam, Aldeburgh Festival, Suffolk

15-29/06/2009 *Sound/rebound* installation of new physical and digital instruments with David Sheppard, LAB Technology Residencies, Aldeburgh Festival, Suffolk

24/05/2009 *Extracts from Shipwrecks* – songs by Sandy Dillon arranged and with new material by Larry Goves performed by Sandy Dillon, Larry Goves, Ray Majors, David Coulter and members of Solistenensemble Kaleidoskop, openhouseMusik, Berlin

26/04/2009 *the terminus wreck* – Oliver Coates (cello), Kettle’s Yard, Cambridge

01/04/2009 *the concrete scatter* – Psappha, Sheffield International Concert Series, City Hall, Sheffield

08/03/2009 *My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name.* – Sarah Nicolls (piano/electronics), Kettle’s Yard, Cambridge

08/03/2009 *the terminus wreck* – Oliver Coates (cello), Larry Goves (electronics) The Wigmore Hall, London

06/03/2009 *My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name.* – Sarah Nicolls (piano/electronics), University of Huddersfield

26/02/2009 *My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name.* – Sarah Nicolls (piano/electronics), Newcastle University

02/12/2008 *Springtime* – (text – Matthew Welton), Juliet Fraser (soprano), London Sinfonietta, The Queen Elizabeth Hall, London

21/11/2008 *sinew, Poppy* – (text – Matthew Welton), *deaf John’s dark house, riviniana and the vermillion border, skein, talking microtonal blues* the house of bedlam, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival

19/11/2008 *the concrete scatter* – Psappha, St Ann’s Church, Manchester

16/11/2008 *Skeins* – Meriel Price (saxophone), Jordi Bitloch (piano), Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
14/11/2008  9413: The life and death of a Hollywood extra – (new music to the 1928 film of the same name) Opera North Productions/Psappha, Leeds International Film Festival


11/11/2008  Skeins – Meriel Price (saxophone), Jordi Bittloch (piano), Udk, Berlin


05/11/2008  the terminus wreck, deaf John’s dark house, skein – the house of bedlam, non-classical, The Macbeth, Hoxton, London

24/10/2008  Five Kerouac haiku – Sounds Underground, Great Hall, Bishopsgate Institute, London

11/10/2008  sinew, skein, riviniana – Larry Goves (electronics), Meriel Price (saxophone), openhouseMusik, Berlin

26/09/2008  riviniana – The Ossian Ensemble, Royal College of Music

27/08/2008  the terminus wreck – Oliver Coates (cello), Arundel Festival

28/06/2008  the vermillion border – Oliver Coates (cello), Larry Goves (electronics), Faster than Sound, The Hush House, Bentwaters Airbase, Suffolk

22/06/2008  My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. – Sarah Nicolls (piano & electronics), Soundwaves Festival, Brighton

25/03/2008  faladra – (extract) Isabel Chaplais (piano), Orléans Concours International, France

01/03/2008  sinew, deaf John’s dark house – the house of bedlam, Poets and Players, The Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester

09/02/2008  Four letter words – Psappha, Nick Kok (cond.), Lancaster International Concert Series

08/01/2008  riviniana Radius, The Wigmore Hall, London

29/11/2007  My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. – Sarah Nicolls (piano & electronics), The Warehouse, London, (BMIC’s Cutting Edge Series)

21/11/2007  let-down erosion – Psappha, St. Anne’s Church, Manchester

20/11/2007  skein, sinew, deaf John’s dark house – the house of bedlam, Lawrence Batley Theatre, Festival Hub, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival
19/11/2007  My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. – Sarah Nicolls (piano and electronics), St. Paul’s Hall, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival


30/10/2007  extracts from My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. – Sarah Nicolls (piano and electronics), The Holst Room, Morley College, London

24/06/2007  skein, sinew, deaf John’s dark house – the house of bedlam, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester

01/07/2007  skein, sinew – the house of bedlam, The Poetry School Garden Party, The Tai Chi Village Hall, Manchester

17/05/2007  as kingfishers catch fire – BCMG, Peter Wiegold (cond.), The CBSO Centre, Birmingham

25/03/2006  Four letter words – Psappha, Nicholas Kok (cond.), Cosmo Rodewald Concert Hall, Manchester University

26/10/2006  four curious incidents – Hallé Orchestra, Rory McDonald (cond.), Bridgewater Hall, Manchester

APPENDIX 2

Full text for the music

_Springtime_

She only lives a street or two away.
Still, every day there’s something in the mail –

a picture-card without too much to say,
just where she’s been and who she’s seen, that’s all.

She never telephones or comes around.
This morning where the postman left his bike

the shadow that it spread along the ground
was hardly there, and no one was awake.\(^{30}\)

Matthew Welton
Four-letter words

eins

Push your door shut. Turn down your lamp.
Pour your self some coke. Grab some blue-bean soup.

Some days here it’ll feel like it’ll grow warm; some days it’ll rain.

Then, when some nice dumb idea gets into your mind,
Tune into that folk rock show.

Don’t talk. Don’t stir.

Next – oops! – some tiny grey bugs will fall onto your desk.
Don’t shoo them away.

Don’t shoo them away.

zwei

Lose your door keys. Kick over your lamp.
Pour your self some beer. Grab some fish-head stew.

Most days here don’t feel that warm – well well well well – most days here deep
snow will fall.
Chew your lips till they itch. Pour more beer.


When some zany idea goes – blam blam – into your mind,

Stay wary. Don’t call home.

Then, when some soft oozy slug gets – urgh – onto your desk,
Lock your room. Hide your bike.

Don’t undo your coat.
drei

Why’d your back door just slam shut? Why’s your room this warm?
D’you want some fizz?

hmmm?

Does your roof leak? How’s your wife? Who’s that ugly girl?
Why’s some body like this need that much cash?

well?

D’you like riot-grrl punk more than lo-fi folk? D’you like blue beat more than soca?
Soca more than soul? Soul more than glam? Glam more than prog?
Prog more than hard-core suco suco?

whew..

What have they done with your nice tidy flat?
D’you find you’d have more lice here than itsy pink ants? More bugs than bees?
More grey mice than rats?

vier

funt funk fuse; fume fusm fuss futs fuss; furk fumn full furd
cuck wack want cunk cuck wack cuck wack cuse wase cume
wame cusm wasm cuss wass cuck wack cuts wats cuss wass
curk wark cumn wamn cull curd ward dint arnk jick cont
dink arck cose jime dise arme cosm jiss cose dime arsm coss jick
dism arss jits cosm diss arck cots jiss coss arts coss jirk dits arss
cork jinn cots diss arkk comm jill coss dirk armn coll jird cork
dimm arll cord jick comm dill arrd jint coll dirk arck cont jink
cord arnt conk jick

slck slck quck shck smck slck shck crck twck frck drck slnt slnt
qunt slnt smnt slnt slnt crnt twnt frnt drnt slnt slnk slnk qunk shnk
smnk slnk shnk crnk twnk frnk drnk slck quck shck smck slck
shck crck twck frck drck slck quck shck smck slck crck
twck frck drck slse slse quse shse smse else shse crse twse frse
drse slme slme qume shme smme slme shme crme twme frme
drme slsm slsm qusm shsm smms slsm shsm crsm twsm frsm
drsm slss slss quss shss smss slss shss crss twss frss drss slck
slck quck shck smck slck shck crck twck frck drck slts slts quts
shts smts slts shts cts twts frts drts slss slss quss shss smss slss
shss crss twss frss drss slrk slrk qurk shrk smrk slrk shrk crrk
twrk frrk drrk slmn slmn qumn shmn smmn slmn shmn crmn
twmn frmn drmn slll qull shll smll slll shll chrll twll frll drll
slrd slrd qurd shrd smrd slrd shrd crrd twrd frrd drrd
fuag fuut cuut fuim cuim waim fuag cuag waag coag fueg cueg waeg coeg dieg fuit cuit wait wait coit diit arit fuit cuit wait cuit diit fuap cuap waap coap fuit waat fuig cuig jiag slim piut sleg caim slap tiag slat toeg slig jeit slat dait slim tuat sleg tuag drat heut drig daim drat jeag drap toey drit cait dieg piap drag smit sleg sheg shap crag creg crit crit twim twag tweg twit twil twap frat frim frag freg frit frit frap frat

funf

Push your door ajar. Fill your guts with good, weak wine.

Play with your hair. Flip open your head.

coda

Push your, hush
Push your pour your beer your door
More beer more here your more
More push-pull lush-lull hush-mush-mull

Grab your flab, grab your drib-drab crab-slab

blub-blub

Mish-mosh mash; much more such:-
Fish-mash hash-mush dish-rash

Some oozy, lazy loop
Mere dozy, cosy, more hazy
When your door won’t open
Must push much more

Matthew Welton
Poppy

Scout puts a record on. In the kitchen sits Tujiko. Naomi and Damon eat too much rice. I came back from Sao Paulo expecting twins.

Joanna and Rachid have a feel for the seasons and an amateur interest in entomology. I cycled slowly into the small greed field. Somewhere on the tape there’s someone singing hymns.

After the sun sets, the sound of a piano is like a gradual fluctuation in the colour of the chords. The birds were reappearing; the wind is on its way.

Bailey is thought to have abandoned his wife in a house in Manhattan build from small wooden blocks. The store proprietor drove though London. Mika and Philippe are righteous people.

Ursula start to bore me. Thursdton started to bore me. Sunlight becomes twilight; flowers bloom and it rains. McGregor restrains his impressive voice.

I never understood my conversation with Didi. I expect Jakob to separate from Yoshimi, his wife. My older brother stood away from my friends. I’m sitting on a sofa with maracas in my hand.

Matthew Welton32
Talking microtonal blues

One

The extent to which perception is a form of acceptance – that the matter of having a take on a thing and the matter of how well we take to that thing are, in the fundamental sense, indifferent to differentiation – can be seen, it can be argued, like most things, as a question of quantity.

Two

A small white bird almost pauses in the sky.

A breeze ruffles the rushes; the shadows shudder.

A small white cloud drags through the sky.

The ridges in the land resemble the ripples on the lake.

Three

One method by which the quantitative and the qualitative elements here – what we see and how we feel about seeing it – might be described in like terms would be to impose on the world a grid of proximity and to devise a set of axes by which matters of sense – as in perception – and sense – as in logical process – could equally be assigned their own coordinates, so allowing each particular relation between the things of the world to be rendered with unequivocal numerical accuracy.

Four

If one method of registering the proximity of things could be with regard to how different things relate to one another – the similarity, for instance, of a small white bird travelling across the sky and a small white cloud travelling across the sky – another might be to record how differently different things relate to one another – the dissimilarity, for example, between the similarity between a small white bird travelling across the sky and a small white cloud travelling across the sky, and the similarity between the structure of the language we use to speak of birds and clouds and skies and the structure of the language we use to speak of proximity and similarity and dissimilarity.
Five

How different things relate to one another,
as in

the relation between relation and difference as opposed to the difference between relation and difference

or as in

the difference between the relation between relation and difference and the difference between relation and difference

as opposed to

the relation between the relation between relation and difference and the difference between relation and difference;

how as in the way, as in show me how to do it, as in show me the way to do it,
as opposed to

how as in in what way, as in how do you do it, as in in what way do you do it;

as in as in as in as opposed to as opposed to as in as opposed to.

Matthew Welton33
APPENDIX 3

Selected programme notes

_Five Kerouac haiku_

These borrow lines from Kerouac haiku. I wanted to dip the tip of my toe into his dreamy, stinking, honky-tonk, whiskey-breath, junk heap tin and iron and soft skin landscape for a first go at programmatic music. Still, there's some concert music reserve; they're haiku after all.

(Larry Goves – 2008)
"Four letter words"

The four letter words are not what you might think: they belong to a sequence of poems by Matthew Welton – poems made, indeed, of four letter words and nothing else. ‘Push your door shut’, the text begins, ‘Turn down your lamp.’ But this tone of gently calming advice, encouraged in the text by the fact that ‘your’ is a four letter word, changes. And so does the music. A set of songs becomes a game, a mad scene, a combat: interpret it how you will. The clarinettist, who plays only one low note in the first song, comes to challenge the singer for central position. Repercussions are acted out on the concert platform.

Beyond the drama, or beneath it, one may note how the composer uses varied repetition – and a gift for the slyly potent phrase, vocal or instrumental – to maintain a state of attention at once alert and laid back. The horn figure heard at the start, and directly repeated, seems to set the tone for the whole piece. From this lazy horn solo will grow what high heat we’ll hear – also what cold, what cool.
(Paul Griffiths - 2008)
riviniana

riviniana is a short piece for chamber ensemble using material from a recent large piano and electronics work *My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name.* Two distinct sounds, one dominated by the piano and vibes and the other by the rest of the ensemble, emerge changed and superimposed in the solo piano. Viola Riviniana is a common, wild, fragile violet flower. The piece was commissioned by Radius with funds provided by Ian Vine and is dedicated to Simon Holt for his birthday.

(Lary Goves – 2007)
Springtime

I love Matthew Welton's short, elusive love poem Springtime. I wanted to preserve its simplicity and sense of melancholy. The two ensembles, one amplified and one acoustic, was my starting-point for the sense of distance and perspective in the poem. This is emphasised in the differences between the live and pre-recorded vocal lines. I chose the foreground ensemble of two clarinets and classical guitar because of its potential fragility and gentle resonance with folk music.

(Larry Goves – 2008)
the terminus wreck

the terminus wreck is in a unaccompanied cello work in three movements. The first movement, the cedar-limbs, is the most straightforward. In this movement I have attempted to revisit something from the past. Here the musical lines and sentiment owe much to my interpretation of music during the 19th Century. This was also a personal look back at the past; the starting point for this movement is a cello solo that appears at the end of I wear you on my sleeve, a piano quintet I wrote in 2003.

The second movement, the vermillion border, is more abstract and aggressive. It opens with a warped melody that introduces some of the more unusual tuning, glissandi and eventually double stopping that dominates most of the movement. This happens in a fiercely difficult passage of double stopped melody and elusive counterpoint. The vermillion border is where the soft pink of the lips in the corner of the mouth meet the skin of the cheek. Something of the character of this movement might be owed to a dental surgeon who badly burnt my vermillion border with a faulty drill.

The third movement, the terminus wreck, is my account of what happens when you force the more conventional melody of the cedar-limbs and the aggressive dissonance of the vermillion border together and the music fractures. This is a bleak landscape populated by suggested recapitulation, a strange folk-like melody that sounds as if it’s coming from a distant double bass, the combination of obvious melodic patterns with relentless glissandi all shuffled around a more static centre of a two note chord made up of a shifting six octave interval.

This piece was written especially for Oliver Coates and has benefited from his candid advice and considerable discussion about the music, especially for the problematic vermillion border, which also exists in a version for cello and electronics. The piece has also benefited from the kindness of Aldeburgh Music – the piece was largely developed and written at residencies there.

(Larry Goves – 2009)
“...Everything we see, everything we touch – everything in the world has its own colour... Take blue for example, he says. There are bluebirds and blue jays and blue herons. There are cornflowers and periwinkles. There is noon over New York. There are blueberries, huckleberries, and the Pacific Ocean. There are blue devils and blue ribbons and blue bloods. There is a voice singing the blues. There is my father’s police uniform. There are blue laws and blue movies. There are my eyes and my name. He pauses, suddenly at a loss for more blue things, and then moves on to white. There are seagulls, he says, and terns and storks and cockatoos. There are the walls of this room and the sheets on my bed. There are lilies-of-the-valley, carnations, and the petals of daisies. There is the flag of peace and Chinese death. There is mother’s milk and semen. There are my teeth. There are the whites of my eyes. There are white bass and white pines and white ants. There is the President’s house and white rot. There are white lies and white heat. Then, without hesitating, he moves on to black, beginning with black books, the black market, and the Black Hand. There is night over New York, he says. There are the Chicago Black Sox. There are blackberries and crows, blackouts and black marks, Black Tuesday and the Black Death. There is blackmail. There is my hair. There is the ink that comes out of a pen. There is the world a blind man sees…”


This new work is the second in a planned series of three pieces focussing on the piano each partly inspired by the New York Trilogy by Paul Auster. This piece is a piano concerto with the pianist required to perform simultaneously on acoustic and electric piano and also on prepared piano. In response to the novel’s subversion of conventional detective stories, narrative, character and identity I wanted to reference conventional aspects of the concerto. Therefore the piece is in three movements with the soloist consistently taking centre stage, the 16 violins allude to larger orchestral forces and the instruments are primarily concerned with conventional performance techniques. On the other hand the electric piano plays re-tuned pitches and expansive chords unavailable to an acoustic piano, the acoustic piano is sometimes electronically distorted, the clarinet and cello are supported by pre-recorded material and the cor anglais, horn and viola often play
repetitive material entirely independent from the rest of the ensemble. The five sections of the middle movement complimented by films made by animation students from Kingston University. The piece is written for and dedicated to Sarah Nicolls and is also inspired by her playing and approach to performance.
deaf John’s dark house

The central movement of deaf John’s dark house is a brief whirlwind where flurries of activity quickly decay and are then re-imagined. This is framed by two movements which are some possible results of this decay; static, repetitive and exploring extremes of certain instrumental registers.
(Larry Goves 2008)

Poppy

Poppy was composed by making an audio recording of the reading aloud of the entire April 2007 edition of The Wire magazine and then using the programme to cut, splice and re-edit the text. The music was developed using a mathematical formula derived from the timbres present in the original vocal track.
(Matthew Welton 2008)

riviniana and the vermillion border

Here two pieces are fused; the vermillion border is a piece for cello and electronics and riviniana is an ensemble piece which exists in various arrangements. The aggressive cello music infects the fragile ensemble scoring although in the end the entire group finds some kind of equilibrium. Riviniana is a wild violet flower and the vermillion border is where the pink corner of the mouth meets the skin of the cheek.
(Larry Goves 2008)

Sinew

Sinew was first conceived as short piece for cello and two video projectors and has been extensively re-imagined for the house of bedlam. A series of acoustic statements break down and increasingly merge with distorted electronics. Eventually the music reforms with a more readily identifiable but pre-recorded melody.
(Larry Goves 2008)
Talking Microtonal Blues

The compositional process for *Talking Microtonal Blues* involved taking Iris Murdoch’s essay *Against Dryness* and filtering it through Skeat’s Etymological Dictionary. From the final performance draft this may not be immediately apparent.

(Matthew Welton 2008)
ENDNOTES


6 Beau Lotto, ‘Passing through’

7 ‘Faster Than Sound’ (2009), <http://www.fasterthansound.com> (accessed 3 September 2010)


12 Auster, p. 185.
13 Mira Calix, ‘I may be over there (but my heart is over here)’, Skimskitta (Warp, WARPCD104, 2003).


20 Kerouac, Book of Haukus, p. 179.

21 Ibid. p. 32.

22 Ibid. p. 12.

23 Ibid. p. 8.


25 Fitch and Heyde, p.71.

26 Fitch and Heyde, p.92


29 Iannis Xenakis ‘Xenakis on Xenakis’ Perspectives of New Music, 25/1-2 (1987), 16-63 (p. 32).


31 Matthew Welton ‘Four letter words’, in We needed coffee but we’d got ourselves convinced that the later we left it the better it would taste, and, as the country grew flatter and the roads became quiet and dusk began to colour the sky, you could guess from the way we retuned the radio and unfolded the map or commented on the view that the tang of determination had overtaken our thoughts, and when, fidgety and untalkative but almost home, we drew up outside the all-night restaurant, it felt like we might just stay in the car, listening to the engine and the gentle sound of the wind (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2009), p. 35.

32 Welton ‘Poppy’, in We needed coffee…, p. 51.

33 Matthew Welton, Talking microtonal blues (unpublished, 2008).
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