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## The Preservation Of Subjectivity Through Form: The Radical Restructuring Of Disintegrated Material In The Music Of Gerald Barry, Kevin Volans And Raymond Deane.

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THE PRESERVATION OF SUBJECTIVITY THROUGH FORM:  
THE RADICAL RESTRUCTURING OF DISINTEGRATED  
MATERIAL IN THE MUSIC OF GERALD BARRY, KEVIN  
VOLANS AND RAYMOND DEANE

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Submitted for the qualification of PhD

Dublin Institute of Technology  
Conservatory of Music and Drama

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Adorno's concept of 'disintegrated musical material' and applies it to the work of the Irish composers Raymond Deane (b. 1953), Gerald Barry (b. 1952) and Kevin Volans (b. 1949). Although all three of these composers have expressed firm commitments to the ideal of creating new and radical works, much of the material in their music is composed of elements abstracted from the tonal past. This feature of their work would seem contrary to the views of Adorno, who is commonly seen as advocating progressive composition using only the most advanced means. This view comes across most strongly in *Philosophy of New Music*—his most well-known book on music—in which Stravinsky is accused of musical regression with his 'inauthentic' use of folkloric and archaic forms from the past.

On this basis the so-called postmodernist period of the past forty years—which has encouraged the playful re-incorporation of historical material—would seem very much out of step with Adorno's modernist aesthetics. However in some of his lesser known writings on Mahler, Berg, Bartók, and even in some earlier work on Stravinsky, Adorno managed to discern a number of positive aspects to their reincorporation of disintegrated materials in a way that would seem to contradict his verdict on Stravinsky in *Philosophy of New Music*. This thesis aims to unravel the issues at the heart of this contradiction to see if a radical musical aesthetic based on such material remains a possibility in the era of postmodernism. Through a detailed examination of the work of these three composers, this study aims to demonstrate how this material is recycled in their music in a way which attains new structural interrelations that transcend the fragmentary nature of the material itself.

## DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of \_\_\_\_\_, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for postgraduate study by research of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for another award in any other third level institution.

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## INTRODUCTION: RADICAL MUSIC IN A POSTMODERN CONTEXT

In cultural politics today, a basic opposition exists between a postmodernism which seeks to deconstruct modernism and resist the status quo and a postmodernism which repudiates the former to celebrate the latter: a postmodernism of resistance and a postmodernism of reaction.<sup>1</sup>

The three composers who are the subject of this study—Raymond Deane (b. 1953), Gerald Barry (b. 1952) and the South-African born Kevin Volans (b. 1949)—have each, in their various statements throughout the years, articulated an aesthetic that seems committed to the modernist avant-garde tradition of the ‘New’. This commitment has been either explicitly declared or else implicitly suggested depending on the individual composer’s appetite for aesthetic labelling. Volans for instance has described himself as a ‘committed modernist’ while Deane has described modernism as ‘a living challenge’ and warned against the ‘impoverishment’ and ‘flat-surface’ of postmodernism.<sup>2</sup> Gerald Barry, an inveterate side-stepper of aesthetic politics, has nevertheless declared that in music: ‘There’s no point in doing again what has been done by other people. The difficulty always lies in beginning anew’.<sup>3</sup> In one sense this commitment is not surprising given that all three spent formative periods in Cologne studying with Karlheinz Stockhausen, then one of the leading innovators of the post-war avant-garde. However it is liable to be questioned when one glances over any one of their scores where, instead of observing cutting-edge explorations into new territory, one discovers what appears to be a wholesale retreat from the intense abstraction of the kind of music normally associated with

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<sup>1</sup> Hal Foster, ‘Postmodernism: A Preface’, in *Postmodern Culture*, Hal Foster (ed.), (London: Pluto Press, 1985), pp. ix–x.

<sup>2</sup> See Kevin Volans, ‘Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments etc.’, sleeve notes for compact disc Chandos CHAN 9563, 1999, p. 5; Deane, ‘Letters: What was Modernism?’, *Journal of Music in Ireland* 5, 1 (2005), p. 7 and ‘Ripieno’, sleeve notes for compact disc RTÉ 274, 2007, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Barra Ó Séaghdha, ‘Breathing Space’, *Graph* 6 (1998), p. 19.

modernism. The content of their work seems overwhelmingly constructed from material drawn from the past, a trait which sometimes reveals itself through the paraphrasing of historical styles but is more typically manifested in the way that their respective languages draw heavily on tonal materials, diatonic melodies and metric rhythms which are abstracted from any stylistic context and freely mixed with less classifiable though hardly ‘radical’ material. In short there is nothing in their work which would not have been available to a composer working in the early decades of the 20th century. If this is the case, how can any of these composers be described as ‘radical’?

#### A POSTMODERNISM OF RESISTANCE?

The rejection of the high-modernism of the 1950s and 60s and the reincorporation of materials and styles from the past has been a much documented feature of postmodernism, a term which has aged somewhat over the last thirty years but still refuses to be definitively superseded. This development has been seen to reflect the more widespread contention—famously articulated in the writings of Jean-François Lyotard—that the meta-narrative of modernism is now defunct and is to be replaced by a competing plurality of micro-narratives.<sup>4</sup> According to this view, modernism’s belief in the inevitability of progress, its quest for universality and its utopian aspirations are to be greeted with scepticism, overtaken by an intellectual climate which stresses diversity and the relativity of all cultural values. In art the emphasis on innovation, the work’s aspiration towards autonomy and the centrality of the creative Subject have all been cast in doubt. In its place postmodernism has tended to downplay originality, encouraging instead a dialogue with the past through the free

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<sup>4</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (trans.), (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. xxiii–xxiv and p. 60.

mixing of styles from different historical periods as well as promoting an engagement with popular and non-western forms which were previously considered unimportant or peripheral. In recent music these tendencies have been mirrored in countless ways, among the most noticeable being the renewed interest in tonality and notions of expression (Pärt, Rochberg, Górecki), the eclectic mixing of historical and popular styles with avant-garde techniques (Rihm, Zorn, Zappa) and the shift to more direct, transparent musical surfaces (Reich, Riley, Andriessen). While some composers have continued to pursue composition in an ostensibly modernist vein (Ferneyhough, Birtwistle, Carter), from a postmodern perspective, this lingering strand of modernism is viewed as just one stylistic option amongst many others, which cannot, on its own, achieve the status of a cultural dominant.

Many have welcomed this development as a liberation from the stylistic homogeneity which became increasingly characteristic of certain strands of modernism by the end of the 1960s, and have interpreted the plurality and fragmentation of the postmodern cultural landscape as an accurate reflection of the technological and economic changes which have affected western societies in the latter half of the 20th century.<sup>5</sup> Others have bemoaned the loss of the critical impulse that was a distinctive feature of the modernist aesthetic, raising concerns about postmodernism's embrace of commodification, its potential amenability to reactionary ideology and its tendency to slide into a fatalistic relativism. One such critic is Jürgen Habermas who famously characterised postmodernism as representing a range of conservative and anti-modernist viewpoints, arguing that 'the project of

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<sup>5</sup> For an example of an enthusiastic endorsement of postmodernism in music see Susan McClary's chapter entitled 'Reveling in the Rubble: The Postmodern Condition' in McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 139–169.

modernity has not yet been fulfilled'.<sup>6</sup> In doing so, Habermas made a distinction between the process of societal modernisation, with its tendency to neutralise consciousness through the increasing interpenetration of economic and administrative forms of rationality into society, and aesthetic modernism which operates in critical opposition to the false normativity produced by such processes.<sup>7</sup> While the process of societal modernisation continues apace in the postmodern era, it is the critical and subversive strain of aesthetic modernism that Habermas feels is lacking in much postmodern art.

In his preface to an influential collection of essays on postmodernism, Hal Foster similarly warned of the danger of an 'affirmative culture' where postmodernism is conceived 'in therapeutic, not to say cosmetic, terms: as a return to the verities of tradition (in art, family, religion...)' and modernism is 'reduced to a style (e.g., "formalism" or the International Style) and condemned, or excised entirely as a cultural mistake'.<sup>8</sup> However Foster also drew attention to the reification of modernism that has occurred in the meantime where its once shocking productions now take their place comfortably in the museum and in the university.<sup>9</sup> Although clearly sympathetic to Habermas's diagnosis, Foster, cautions against taking an either/or position in which 'one may support postmodernism as populist and attack modernism as elitist or, conversely, support modernism as elitist—as culture proper—and attack postmodernism as mere kitsch'.<sup>10</sup> Instead he proposed a distinction within postmodernism between a 'postmodernism of reaction' and a 'postmodernism of resistance'. This distinction accepts that the fragmentation and

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<sup>6</sup> Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity—An Incomplete Project', in *Postmodern Culture*, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

<sup>8</sup> Foster, 'Postmodernism: A Preface', p. x.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

multiplicity of postmodernism is here to stay but attempts to identify those practices within it which resist the status quo. He echoes Habermas's distinction between the ongoing process of societal modernisation and the subversive practices needed to counter it, but also argues that in order to progress beyond modernism, modernism itself must also be subjected to critique:

A postmodernism of resistance, then, arises as a counter-practice not only to the official culture of modernism but also to the 'false normativity' of a reactionary postmodernism. In opposition (but not *only* in opposition), a resistant postmodernism is concerned with a critical deconstruction of tradition, not an instrumental pastiche of pop- or pseudo- historical forms, with a critique of origins, not a return to them. In short, it seeks to question rather than exploit cultural codes, to explore rather than conceal social and political affiliations.<sup>11</sup>

The strategies of the three composers in this study ought, I argue, to be seen as part of this 'postmodernism of resistance' occurring within the wider cultural condition of postmodernism itself. They have each sought to challenge not only conservative strands within postmodernism but also the institutionalisation of modernism. In a letter written to his colleague Walter Zimmermann in August 1975, Volans wrote that the current state of New Music had become 'a term of administrative convenience' and 'a system of classification [...] standards and formulas'.<sup>12</sup> It was this type of bureaucratisation of modernism and its reification as an official 'style' that the work of Deane, Barry and Volans has reacted against. Yet in doing so, they have sought to keep alive something of the modernist spirit, endeavouring to produce musical compositions which retain a radical, critical and oppositional character. The task of analysing just how they have achieved this however requires the insight of an equally radical thinker.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. x.

<sup>12</sup> Kevin Volans, letter to Walter Zimmermann, 21 August 1975, quoted in Christopher Fox, 'Where the River Bends: The Cologne School in Retrospect', *The Musical Times* 148/1901 (Winter 2007), p. 30 and p. 32.

## THE RELEVANCE OF ADORNO

The work of Theodor Adorno has not featured greatly in the debates on postmodernism which have tended to be dominated by the generation of continental (mostly French) philosophers who came to prominence in the years after his death. In one sense this is not surprising. Adorno is generally considered to be the unrivalled philosopher of aesthetic modernism and although he never had the chance to address the issue of postmodernism directly, it is tacitly assumed that like his student Habermas, he would have deplored some of its affirmative and antimodernist tendencies. This assertion would seem to have plenty of evidence to support it. For a philosopher whose most famous phrase is: ‘To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric’, it could safely be assumed that the thought of ‘serious’ composers engaging with pop music would have appeared to Adorno equally, if not more barbaric.<sup>13</sup>

The common view understands Adorno as favouring exactly the opposite approach, namely an uncompromising advocacy of art’s increasing autonomy, making use of the most historically advanced material and discarding all obsolete and culturally exhausted remnants. This is certainly the feeling that comes across in his most well-known book on music—*Philosophy of New Music*—where the aesthetic dilemma that confronts the modern composer is formulated in the most extreme terms.<sup>14</sup> In this work the figure of Schoenberg is cast as the ‘authentic’ embodiment of musical progress, breaking through established tonal conventions and pursuing the logic of musical development immanently to the point where it crystallises in twelve-

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<sup>13</sup> Adorno, *Prisms*, Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber Nicholson (trans.), (Cambridge MA/London: MIT Press 1981), p. 34.

<sup>14</sup> Adorno, *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1949). Translated as: *Philosophy of Modern Music*, Ann G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Bloomster (trans.), (London: Sheed & Ward, 1973). The most recent translation is: *Philosophy of New Music*, Robert Hullot-Kentor (trans.), (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

tone technique. Stravinsky, on the other hand, stands accused of musical regression with his ‘inauthentic’ use of folkloric and archaic forms from the past as well as what Adorno deemed to be the un-dynamic and repetitious character of his music. As Jonathan Cross writes in his book *The Stravinsky Legacy*, Adorno effectively ‘turned Stravinsky into a postmodernist’, dismissing his work for possessing many of the features—a engagement with historical and popular styles, its technique of juxtaposition and its repetitive character—that have since become distinguishing features of postmodernism.<sup>15</sup>

For Adorno, the value of any artwork rested on the implications it had for the preservation of subjectivity. Throughout his life he had viewed societal modernisation as a force which diminished the self-conscious and self-reflecting capacity of the individual Subject in order to conform with the increasingly rationalised and bureaucratic dictates of modern society. This reduced capacity to reflect and act autonomously and the resultant susceptibility to authoritarian ideology was what Adorno located at the heart of some of the 20th century’s worst atrocities. In order to be ‘authentic’, culture had an imperative to oppose this development. In music, the composer who resorted to the replication of forms from the past—‘second-hand’ material objectified through repeated use and commercialisation—simply reflected and affirmed the conforming tendencies that he identified as operating in modern western societies.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, the most radical works of the avant-garde resisted these tendencies, thereby preserving pockets of subjective

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<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 234.

<sup>16</sup> Adorno refers to this phenomenon using a number of different terms such as ‘mass musical language’ (*Musikalische Massensprache*) or ‘the disintegration of materials’ (*Zerfall des Materials*) and so on. As far as I am aware however, Adorno did not use the exact term ‘second-hand’ material. The term is Max Paddison’s in his book *Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). It is borrowed here and used frequently as it perhaps captures best what Adorno meant by the concept.



resistance. In Adorno's view Schoenberg's music aspired to this ideal whereas Stravinsky opted for the path of musical regression.

Of course, there is much more to it than this, but a straightforward interpretation of Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music* along these lines was used to justify the experiments in integral serialism that occurred after the war and his name has been closely intertwined with the aesthetics of high modernism ever since. For much of the intervening period since his death this association has garnered an image of being rigid and doctrinaire while his pessimism has been dismissed as an outlook frozen within the cultural context of his time. However, behind this reductive stereotype, a more nuanced reading of Adorno reveals that there are many aspects of his work that are highly relevant to the debate on postmodernism. For instance it is not commonly known that despite his reputation as an apologist for the avant-garde, Adorno pre-empted many of the postmodernist concerns with the abstraction of music composed during the post-war years. In an essay entitled 'The Aging of the New Music' published in 1955, he launched an unrelenting attack on the current state of composition, dismissing it as 'Music Festival music', deploring its 'material fetishism' and accusing its adherents of getting no further than 'abstract negation'.<sup>17</sup> Adorno also predicted the collapse of the 'meta-narrative' of modernism owing to the disintegration of traditional music categories and the rise of a second 'mass musical language' consisting of objectified musical remnants carried over from previous stages in the dialectic of musical material.

These insights, along with several others, will be referenced in the following chapters but the central preoccupation of this study is concerned with the relevance of Adorno's writings for adopting a radical 'postmodernism of resistance' based on

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<sup>17</sup> Adorno, 'The Aging of the New Music' [1954, rev. 1955], Robert Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Will (trans.), in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, Richard Leppert (ed.), (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 181–202.

the reinterpretation of second-hand historical material. This endeavour may seem paradoxical since Adorno's rejection of Stravinsky in *Philosophy of New Music* would appear to have settled the issue for good: Stravinsky was rejected precisely because his music was based on such material. Yet in some of his lesser known writings on Mahler, Berg, Bartók, and even in some of his other work on Stravinsky himself, Adorno gave positive accounts of their reincorporation of exhausted cultural debris in a way that would seem to contradict his verdict on Stravinsky in *Philosophy of New Music*.<sup>18</sup> This implies that the crucial criteria for music to qualify as 'radical' lays stress not so much on the precise *type* of material used, but rather on *how* it is used. The issue therefore turns to the question of form.

#### FORM, SUBJECTIVITY AND THE NECESSITY OF STRUCTURE

The concepts of musical form and subjectivity are so closely intertwined in Adorno's conception of an authentic 'radical' music that it is almost impossible to conceive of one without the other. Adorno held that it is as a consequence of the composer's critical reinterpretation of handed-down musical material, and its articulation through the work's 'logic of form', that the Subject expresses itself. However this concept of the Subject has been deeply problematised in much postmodern theory which contends that the notion of a coherent, integrated Subject is ideological, an illusionary fiction in thrall to those same meta-narratives which have now been

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<sup>18</sup> These writings include the following: on Stravinsky see, 'On the Social Situation of Music' [1932], Wes Bloomster and Richard Leppert (trans.), in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, pp. 391–436; 'Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait' [1962, rev. 1963], in *Quasi una fantasia*, Rodney Livingstone (trans.), (London/New York: Verso, 1998), pp. 145–175. On Mahler see, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, Edmund Jephcott (trans.), (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1992); on Berg see, *Alban Berg: Master of the Smallest Link*, Juliane Brand and Christopher Hailey (trans), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); on Bartók see, 'On the Social Situation of Music' and the following articles: 'Béla Bartók' (1921), 'Béla Bartóks Tanzsuite' (1925), 'Über einige Werke von Béla Bartók' (1925), and 'Béla Bartóks Drittes Streichquartett' (1929) in *Gesammelte Schriften Vol. 18, Musikalische Schriften V*, Rolf Tiedemann and Klaus Schultz (eds.) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984).

discredited.<sup>19</sup> If one accepts this perspective then the implications for art are far reaching: if there is no such thing as a unique self then there can be no such thing as a unique artistic style. In an oft quoted passage, Fredric Jameson described this situation as:

A world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum [...] This means that contemporary or postmodernist art is going to be about art itself in a new kind of way; even more, it means that one of its essential messages will involve the necessary failure of art and the aesthetic, the failure of the new, the imprisonment in the past.<sup>20</sup>

With no unique style to offer, much postmodern art has taken refuge not only in a general eclecticism of pastiche styles, but an eclecticism which reveals itself within the work at the level of structure.

One of the first to discuss postmodernism in stylistic terms was the architectural theorist Charles Jencks. Jencks positioned postmodernism as a reaction to the ‘univalent formal systems’ of modernist architects like Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe where multiplicity is quite literally pulled into line by an emphasis on abstract geometric forms. In terms that could equally apply to music he gave the following account of postmodern architecture:

Post-Modernism is fundamentally the eclectic mixture of any tradition with that of the immediate past: it is both the continuation of Modernism and its transcendence. Its best works are characteristically double-coded and ironic, making a feature of the wide choice, conflict and discontinuity of traditions, because this heterogeneity most clearly captures our pluralism.<sup>21</sup>

Jencks describes this heterogeneity as an attempt to realise ‘the great promise of a plural culture with its many freedoms’ and works carried out in a similar vein have often been cited as expressions of postmodernist ‘difference’.<sup>22</sup> This term, abstracted

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<sup>19</sup> Fredric Jameson, ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Society’, in *Postmodern Culture*, pp. 114–115.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 115–116.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Jencks, ‘What is Post-Modernism?’, in Walter Truett Anderson (ed.), *The Fontana Postmodernism Reader* (London: Fontana, 1995), pp. 26–27.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.

from Jacques Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction, has since assumed the status of a popular political ideal, celebrating fragmentation and multiplicity in reaction to meta-narrative solutions which seek to impose unity or achieve consensus. This notion has also been translated into artistic works as a rejection of the integrative character of the modernist work where fragmentation, if it occurs, is always set against an underlying sense of continuity. In contrast much postmodern art has done away with this tension along with ideas of coherence and narrative, a tendency which is often viewed as another reflection of the loss of faith in the notion of an integrated self and the form-producing capacities of the Subject.

In music, where the values of unity and consistency have traditionally been privileged to perhaps a greater extent than any other art form, this downplaying of coherence has been a noticeable feature of many compositions classified as postmodern. As with Jencks's account of postmodern architecture, the reincorporation of diverse second-hand materials has often been undertaken without any attempt to mediate between this diversity or to acknowledge that such materials contain historically embedded meanings. Jonathan D. Kramer cites this unwillingness to adopt a critical relation to material as a major feature which differentiates modernism from postmodernism in music:

Modernist composers often want to take over, to own, to demonstrate their mastery of that which they are quoting, either by placing it in modernist contexts or by distorting it. Postmodernists are more content to let the music they refer to or quote simply be what it is, offered with neither distortion nor musical commentary. Hence postmodern music readily accepts the diversity of music in the world.<sup>23</sup>

Although this is a sweeping generalisation, it does point to the derivative nature of a great deal of postmodern music. It begs the question as to why we need to be

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<sup>23</sup> Jonathan D. Kramer, 'The Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism', in *Postmodern Music/ Postmodern Thought*, Judy Lochhead and Joseph Auner (eds.), (London/New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 15.

reacquainted with musical experiences which the past has already provided us with? Such music is largely powerless to measure up to the recurrent cycles of crises and uncertainty which continue to exist in the world today instead offering only therapeutic or reassuring solutions as well as commercial success for its practitioners. Any attempt to go beyond this will inevitably involve a discussion on subjectivity and its relation to the issue of form. The tendency of much contemporary criticism is to shirk these issues and accept stylistic pluralism as meaningful in itself; something which places little demand on composers to achieve something more than an arbitrary juxtaposition of regurgitated styles. The translator and theorist Robert Hullot-Kentor has accurately described this situation in relation to contemporary poetry but his diagnosis could also apply to much of the music composed in the last thirty years:

The aesthetics of this cultural moment is a postmodernism that shuns the forming of a critical microcosm by preference for a form of montage that never gets beyond juxtaposition. Especially in the arbitrarily dispersed typographical page of much—not all—contemporary poetry, this is an aesthetics that settles opportunistically for a fragile slackness where maker and reader build their secret alliance on the promise not to reveal that neither has the strength of the spontaneity that finding what is alive would require.<sup>24</sup>

In their imaginative reworking of material from the past the composers Raymond Deane, Gerald Barry and Kevin Volans have each forged a distinctive musical language which resists this aesthetic of complacency. This study intends to argue that the site of this resistance can be located in the area of form. Through the creation of critically binding structures which rise above postmodernism's favoured strategies of stylistic pastiche and juxtaposition, each of these composers has contributed a body of work that continues to challenge, provoke and ultimately enrich our musical landscape.

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Things Beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 219.

## AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

The first objective of this study is to ask whether or not it is possible to conceive of a radical music fashioned from second-hand material drawn from the past which preserves traces of the composer's subjectivity in the material's subsequent recontextualisation at the level of structure. The most profound philosophical investigation into the concept of a critical and oppositional music is to be found in the writings of Theodor Adorno. However it should be stated at the outset that this study is not an attempt to validate music according to how well it conforms to a series of aesthetic principals laid down by Adorno. Adorno's views are sometimes contradictory and require a thorough critique in order to expose inconsistencies that often have their root in some highly contentious value judgements. As stated above the key contradiction relevant to this study is the apparent discrepancy between his interpretation of second-hand material in the Stravinsky essay of *Philosophy of New Music* as regressive and his estimation of similarly classifiable material in Mahler, Berg and Bartók as progressive in his other writings. It seems that intertwined within this contradiction are hidden possibilities that if unravelled could provide valuable insights into the potential of using such material in a way that is compatible with a critical and radical approach. The first chapter will therefore undertake an immanent critique of Adorno's writings, situating *Philosophy of New Music* in relation to his other writings on Mahler, Berg and Bartók in order to locate inconsistencies and establish a theoretical framework for a radical music based on reclaimed historical materials.

The second objective of the study involves the application of this framework through musical analysis to the work of the three composers with a view to establishing whether or not their reworking of second-hand materials can be truly

considered radical. The following three chapters are therefore devoted to a detailed examination of the music of each composer beginning with Raymond Deane in chapter 2, followed by Gerald Barry in chapter 3 and Kevin Volans in chapter 4. All three chapters have a similar layout. Each begins with an overview of their careers and an outline of their aesthetic development. This section is particularly important as the early stages of all three composer's careers coincided with a point in history which many theorists have viewed as the intersection between modernism and postmodernism.<sup>25</sup> Added to this is the fact that all three studied for some time in Cologne, then the unrivalled centre of musical modernism in Europe. After this overview there follows an analytical section which comprises the bulk of each chapter. Although these analyses are closely informed by the theoretical framework established in the next chapter, the aim has been to approach the work of each composer on its own terms in order to understand the specific nature of their individual responses.

In order to situate the critical approaches of Deane, Barry and Volans within the wider context of musical postmodernism, in the conclusion to this study I examine the opposite extreme—the uncritical reincorporation of disintegrated materials—by applying the same theoretical framework to the music of John Zorn. Zorn's work is particularly relevant to this debate as his music makes extensive use of borrowed material and has often been cited as an example of a radical postmodernism in much of the critical literature. I would argue that this assertion is inaccurate and that much of the musicological reception on what constitutes a 'postmodernism of resistance' has opted to privilege stylistic pluralism over any critical discussion about how this diversity is recontextualised in the resultant work.

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<sup>25</sup> See for example David Harvey, *The Cultural Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 7. Harvey's study, one of the most grounded in economic and socio-political analysis, locates the break around 1972.

This critique should shed further light on the ‘authentic’ approach of the three composers examined in this study and further illuminate the aesthetic of a radical postmodernism by juxtaposing it with its opposite extreme.

#### RESEARCH CONTEXT

The research context of this study can be divided into two categories: the first relates to Adorno and includes the relevant writings as well as the secondary literature that addresses issues specific to the research enquiry; the second category includes literature on the three composers.

The translation of *Philosophy of New Music* used in this study is the most recent one by Robert Hullot-Kentor and the study also refers to Hullot-Kentor’s translation of *Aesthetic Theory*. For Adorno’s views on Mahler and Berg the main texts referred to are *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy* translated by Edmund Jephcott and *Alban Berg: Master of the Smallest Link* translated by Julianne Brand and Christopher Hailey. For Bartók I have mostly referred to the relevant sections in the essay ‘On the Social Situation of Music’ and *Philosophy of New Music* and as well as the early untranslated articles in *Gesammelte Schriften Vol. 18, Musikalische Schriften V*. In addition to these sources I have also made extensive use of the following collections of Adorno’s writings: *Essays on Music* by various translators; *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music* and *Sound Figures* translated by Rodney Livingstone; and *Prisms*, translated by Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber Nicholson.

As regards the relevant secondary literature, Alastair Williams’s *New Music and the Claims of Modernity* provides an excellent summary of *Philosophy of New Music* and discusses the music of Boulez, Cage and Ligeti through analysis informed



by critical theory; Daniel K. L. Chua's article, 'Drifting: The Dialectics of Adorno's Philosophy of New Music' in *Apparitions: Essays on Adorno and Twentieth-Century Culture* links the work to the wider themes of Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; James L. Marsh's essay, 'Adorno's Critique of Stravinsky' in the *New German Critique* (1983) offers a critique of Adorno's rejection of Stravinsky though it fails to adequately engage with Adorno's interpretation of Stravinsky's neo-classical works; a more robust defence of Stravinsky against Adorno is provided by Jonathan Cross in chapter 7 of his book *The Stravinsky Legacy* while Max Paddison's 'Stravinsky as devil: Adorno's three critiques' in *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky* analyses the motivations for Adorno's differing interpretations of Stravinsky at various stages of his life.

The most thorough analysis of the concept of 'second-hand' or 'disintegrated' historical material is to be found in Paddison's *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* particularly chapter 6: 'The historical dialectic of musical material' and chapter 7: 'The disintegration of musical material'. Paddison's essay 'Postmodernism and the Survival of the Avant-garde' in *Contemporary Music: Theoretical and Philosophical Perspectives* is also an excellent exposition of the idea of a 'postmodernism of resistance' informed by Adorno's aesthetics. In addition his essay, 'The Critique Criticised: Adorno and Popular Music' in *Popular Music, Vol. 2, Theory and Method* (1982) is a demonstration of how to undertake a critique of Adorno on his own terms. Although not much work has been carried out to date on the application of Adorno's critical theory to musical postmodernism through analysis, David Clark's critical analysis of Arvo Pärt's music in his short article 'Parting Glances: Aesthetic Solace or Act of Complicity' in the *Musical Times* (1993) provides some useful pointers in this respect.

A further category of sources consulted includes the wider literature relating to Adorno's aesthetics of music and in addition to the work of Paddison and Williams cited above the study draws on the work of Raymond Geuss, Rose Rosengard Subotnik, Robert Hullot-Kentor, Carl Dahlhaus and Peter Bürger. In relation to musical postmodernism the work of Kenneth Gloag, Lawrence Kramer, Jonathan D. Kramer and Susan McClary has provided much of the contextual framing and with regard to the debates concerning postmodernism as a wider cultural phenomenon the work of key names such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Jencks, Hal Foster and Fredric Jameson have informed the study throughout.

In contrast to the considerable quantity of literature on Adorno, the amount of scholarly work on Irish art music is small. This is partially explained by the fact that the development of musicology in Ireland is a relatively recent phenomenon restricted to the last twenty years or so. However much of the work carried out during this time has been characterised by an excessive focus on issues of national identity as well as an antiquarian interest in minor figures and local traditions. There has been little work devoted to contemporary composers, many of whom deserve much greater attention. In the studies which attempt to give an overall perspective on the development of art music in the country the mentions of any of the composers featured in this study are notably brief. Axel Klein's *Die Musik Irlands im 20. Jahrhundert* offers short descriptions of the work of each of the three composers while Harry White's *The Progress of Music in Ireland* contains a brief discussion of Gerald Barry's music in relation to notions of place and tradition. The recently published *Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland* gives more substantial summaries of their work by Mark Fitzgerald in the case of Deane and Barry and by the author in

the case of Volans but these remain largely introductory. The best attempt to situate the work of any of these composers in an Irish context is an essay written by Raymond Deane entitled ‘Exploding the Continuum—The Utopia of Unbroken Tradition’ published in *The Republic* (2005). This essay discusses a number of historical Irish composers as well as more recent figures including Barry and attempts to link them together in a minor tradition of Irish experimentation.

Despite the lack of contextual studies, there has been some good work done on each composer on an individual level although the quantity of these writings is proportional to their level of international recognition. Being the least well-known outside of Ireland, Deane has received the least attention although he is the only one of the three to have had a book written on his music; Patrick Zuk’s *Raymond Deane* offers a good general introduction to his work, providing a clear synopsis of the aesthetic considerations that lie behind it as well as discussing a wide range of Deane’s works. At the same time, the book is intended as an introduction and the discussions of individual pieces are more descriptive than analytical.

The literature on Volans is dominated by the political and ethical ramifications of his engagement with African music. Martin Scherzinger’s two essays ‘Art Music in a Cross-Cultural Context: The Case of Africa’ in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music* and ‘Whose White Man Sleeps? Aesthetics and Politics in the Early Work of Kevin Volans’ in *Composing Apartheid* argue persuasively for the importance of Volans within the context of South African art music. The later article has some analytical sections which discuss Volans’s transformation of his African sources and provides a rigorous critique of various weak points in the arguments of Timothy D. Taylor (1995), Jürgen Bräuninger (1998) and Chris Walton (2002/3) who accuse Volans of exploitation. A similar

emphasis on political context is pursued by Thomas Pooley in his MA thesis ‘Composition in Crisis: Case Studies in South African Art Music 1980–2006’ (2008) in which Volans’s music is viewed as representing a ‘revolutionary’ response to the larger societal changes occurring in South Africa during this time. Christine Lucia’s article, ‘Celebrating Composer, Kevin Charles Volans’, in *Musicus* (2009) gives a good overview of Volans’s career but is more biographical than critical. Lucia has also written an article on Volans’s string quartets, ‘The landscape within: Kevin Volans and the String Quartet’ in *South African Music Studies* (2009) which traces his journey from exterior sources of inspiration in the early quartets to the more distilled and abstract language of the later works.

Of the three, Gerald Barry has received the most critical attention solely devoted to discussing his music though most of these articles are very short. Vincent Deane’s article ‘The Music of Gerald Barry,’ in *Soundpost* (1981) is a perceptive survey of Barry’s early music containing important information about his working methods and influences. Kevin Volans and Hilary Bracefield’s ‘A Constant State of Surprise: Gerald Barry and *The Intelligence Park*’ in *Contact* (1987) provides comprehensive background material on the opera as well as a discussion of Barry’s pitch sources and how they are manipulated in his music. Adrian Jack’s two short articles ‘Introducing Gerald Barry’ in *The Musical Times* (1988) and ‘Unspeakable Practices’ in *Music Ireland* (1990) are good surveys of his music and despite their brevity make a number of important observations on his music. Also informative in this respect are Anthony Bye’s article ‘Glad Days Spent in Gladness’ in *The Musical Times* (1993) and Ivan Hewitt’s CD review ‘Bob’s Your Uncle’ in *The Musical Times* (1995). Mark Fitzgerald’s analysis of *Chevaux-de-frise* ‘On Constructing a Sonic Gangbang’ in *Irish Musical Studies Vol. 11* (forthcoming) is the most in-depth

discussion of a single Barry piece and gives an extensive account of the composer's idiosyncratic methods of manipulating pitch material. Although brief, both of Michael Blake's entries on Volans and Barry in *Contemporary Composers* are perceptive on many of the technical features of their music.

An important source of information on the aesthetic development of each composer is a number of articles written by the composers themselves. Deane's early essay 'Diabolus in Natura: The "Nature" of New Music' and his short-lived series of bi-monthly 'Tailpiece' columns for the Irish music journal *Soundpost* give an insight into his emerging conceptions of historical material and how these should be approached by a radical composer. Volans has written a number of essays which deal directly with his aesthetic concerns during the African Paraphrase series and give some insight into his working methods. These essays include 'Paraphrase', 'Of White African and White Elephants', 'White Man Sleeps', 'Dancing in the Dark' and 'One Hundred Frames' which are all published on his website [www.kevinvolans.com](http://www.kevinvolans.com). Barry has been the least inclined to write about his own music. The only article written by him is 'The Intelligence Park' in *Contemporary Music Review* (1989) which provides a rationale for his idiosyncratic approach to text setting with several references to musical examples.

All three composers have participated in a number of interviews over the years which sometimes offer valuable insights into their work. Kevin Volans's collection *Summer Gardeners: Conversations with Composers, Summer 1984* contains an important early interview with Gerald Barry and is also informative from an authorial standpoint since he conducts all the interviews himself. All three composers have transcriptions of interviews published on the Contemporary Music Centre Ireland website which contain some useful information. The most important

interviews with Deane are his conversation with Arthur Sealy on the DVD *Order and disOrder* and an interview with Benjamin Dwyer which is published on the composer's website [www.raymonddeane.com](http://www.raymonddeane.com). The most informative interview with Barry is with Barra Ó Séaghdha and was published in *Graph* (1998). Several other interviews of lesser importance are listed in the bibliography. Additional sources of information on each composer, too numerous to detail individually here, include CD sleeve notes, programme notes, newspaper articles and reviews.

## CHAPTER 1: RECYCLING ADORNO: ADOPTING A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ‘SECOND-HAND’ MATERIAL AND THE PROBLEM OF FORM?

What I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else. The form and the chaos remain separate. The latter is not reduced to the former. That is why the form itself becomes a preoccupation, because it exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates. To find the form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now.<sup>1</sup>

Before this study can proceed to apply Adorno’s insight to the music of Barry, Volans and Deane, his verdict on Stravinsky in *Philosophy of New Music* must be addressed. As it stands this verdict constitutes a major obstacle to any application of Adorno’s aesthetics to their work as this rejection of Stravinsky is so categorical that it would seem to make his whole aesthetic outlook totally incompatible with the idea of a ‘postmodernism of resistance’. However as Max Paddison has advised, in order to get the most out of Adorno it is often necessary to turn his own methodology—his ‘negative dialectics’—back against him.<sup>2</sup> This involves holding Adorno to account by his own standards, offering an immanent critique of his work using precisely the same concepts that he himself employed against others to expose hidden contradictions. By placing Adorno’s writings in dialectical opposition I intend to reveal certain incompatibilities which show that the dismissal of Stravinsky is based

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Beckett, quoted in Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (London: Picador/Pan, 1980), pp. 441–2. Beckett is referring to his novel *How It Is*. In an interview with Tom Driver he is reported to have said that previously art had struggled to contain the ‘mess’ within the ‘form’. Now however, the ‘mess’ must be admitted because ‘it invades our experience at every moment. It is there and it must be allowed in’.

<sup>2</sup> The method adopted in this chapter is inspired by Paddison’s approach in his essay on Adorno and popular music where he adopts this tactic to reveal inconsistencies in Adorno’s critique. See Paddison, ‘The Critique Criticised: Adorno and Popular Music’ in *Popular Music 2, Theory and Method*, Richard Middleton and David Horn (eds.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 201–218. A slightly modified version of this essay appears in Paddison’s *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture*, rev. ed. (London: Kahn & Averill, 2004), pp. 81–105.

on a number of hidden prejudices which are rendered unsustainable, even on Adorno's own terms. As with any critique of this type, the aim here is not simply to expose inconsistencies, for even if we ultimately reject Adorno's verdict, the points he raises along the way can often prove extremely illuminating. This is particularly so, I believe, in this case where his writings highlight a number of compositional problems that face the composer working with pre-existing materials. When this critical process is complete it should be possible to reconfigure Adorno's work so that it emerges even stronger and more relevant to the musical analyses that will be undertaken later.

This chapter will therefore be concerned exclusively with Adorno's writings, with *Philosophy of New Music* occupying something of a centrepiece. First I give a general outline of the case Adorno makes for a critical aesthetic. I discuss his concept of musical material as well as his idea of music as an embodiment of truth and I present a schematic account of what he deemed to be the features of both critical, authentic music and uncritical, inauthentic music. This section is followed by a discussion of the main themes of *Philosophy of New Music* where Adorno's objections to Stravinsky's regressive use of second-hand material are laid out and set against what he deemed to be the progressive approach represented by Schoenberg. The third section consists of a critique of the Stravinsky essay, exposing its weaknesses by contrasting it with some of Adorno's other writings on Mahler, Berg and Bartók so that ultimately a broader perspective on the use of disintegrated material may be adopted. The final section concludes with a discussion of a number of remaining issues arising out of the critique of *Philosophy of New Music* which highlight some of the compositional difficulties that working with second-hand materials inevitably entails.



#### D) PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

The first question to be addressed is what exactly does Adorno mean by the concept of musical material? Usually, musical material is defined in physicalistic terms as an inventory of all conceivable sounds available at the composer's disposal. Adorno rejected this description. In his view, musical material, as a product of human consciousness, is social in origin and contains traces of society embedded in its structures.<sup>3</sup> At any one point in time, the composer (as Subject) confronts a set of historically pre-formed musical materials (as Object). For Adorno, this encompasses everything that has been developed up to this particular historical stage including the full range of stylistic conventions, instrumental technology, formal schemata, composition techniques and so on.<sup>4</sup> In addition to being socially derived, Adorno also regarded musical material as a social history containing the sedimented subjectivity of all previous engagements by past composers, now objectified within the material itself.<sup>5</sup> The material received by the present composer thus possesses a whole host of historically and socially built-in expectations and associations that have been embedded in it over time.<sup>6</sup> It also contains certain problems or inconsistencies which, he claims, bestow an obligation on the composer to solve.<sup>7</sup> At each stage in its historical development, Adorno claims that the imprint of the then

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<sup>3</sup> From Adorno's Hegelian perspective, modern society is conceived as a force-field, a dynamic whole incorporating a multitude of diverse particulars with each part drawing its relation from other parts. Just as each part has the ability to absorb influences running through the whole, each part also possesses the capacity to exert an influence on the whole. The consciousness of the individual Subject therefore is not formed in isolation but is moulded by tendencies operating throughout the wider society. Likewise, activities which are a product of human consciousness such as music, and that on the surface may appear to be self-contained and cut off from society, are also mediated by tendencies operating within that same society. The most detailed account of Adorno's concept of material is to be found in the section 'Tendency of the Material' in *Philosophy of New Music*, pp. 31–34. For an account of the development of Adorno's concept of musical material see Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, pp. 65–107.

<sup>4</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Robert Hullot-Kentor (trans.), (London/New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 194.

<sup>5</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p. 32. Also *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 218–219.

<sup>6</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 328–329.

<sup>7</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p. 32. Also *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 218–219.

current state of the social whole and the dominant tendencies which operate within it, leave their mark on the structural make-up of individual works.<sup>8</sup> The problem in the 20th century however, is that according to Adorno, ‘the whole’, has become ‘the false’, a judgement which has profound implications for art.<sup>9</sup>

The reasons put forward by Adorno to justify this position are complex and a detailed account of them here is beyond the scope of this study. It is sufficient to say that the primary mechanism which he believes has brought about this situation is the distorted legacy of ‘enlightenment reason’.<sup>10</sup> In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Adorno argued that rather than liberating the Subject by gaining mastery over nature and myth, rationalisation has become the dominant tendency operating in modern society and instead of freedom has given rise to a new order where the individual Subject becomes enslaved in dehumanising systems of a new kind, among them exchange-based capitalism, the prevailing mode of social organisation in western societies.<sup>11</sup> According to Adorno, the progression of society towards a condition of ‘falseness’ which this form of social organisation induces, places new demands on art which

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<sup>8</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, E. F. N. Jephcott (trans.), (London/New York: Verso, 2005), p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> Adorno relies on a more nuanced conception of the term ‘enlightenment’ which in scope both incorporates and exceeds the actual period of the Enlightenment, and can be seen to refer more generally to any application of human reason with the aim of achieving mastery over nature.

<sup>11</sup> Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, E. F. N. Jephcott (trans.), (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 1–34. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that within the application of human reason, there is an inherent tendency to introduce a separation between the reasoning Subject and its Object, between man’s own embeddedness in nature and the nature he intends to control. Rational thought is based on a mode of thinking, which Adorno terms ‘identity thinking’ which assumes that the concepts it employs are identical with its object. Its faith in the correctness of this identity however, makes it unwilling or blind to those aspects of the object which escape conceptualisation i.e. the non-identical. As the Subject’s domination over the ‘other’ increases, this distance and the rigidity of its concept progressively hardens and the process of rationalisation becomes increasingly systematic until eventually it turns back on the Subject and envelops it. My understanding of this complex aspect of Adorno’s work draws on the following secondary literature: Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923–1950*, 2nd edn, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) pp. 255–269; Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), pp. 20–43; David Held, *Introduction to Critical theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), pp. 148–174 and Brian O’Conner, *Adorno* (London/New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 54–85 and pp. 110–146.

differ from those of traditional aesthetics which has usually concerned itself with ideas of beauty, wholeness or proportion. Art's purpose, he claims, is now to be 'true'—something he seems to locate in art's ability to raise to the level of consciousness certain antagonisms and contradictions which remain concealed within the social totality.<sup>12</sup> This change of purpose in the direction of art towards 'truth' becomes crucial to the creation of authentic art in modern society because increasingly all culture, Adorno maintains, finds itself integrated into the process of total rationalisation that he associated with the advancement of enlightenment reason.<sup>13</sup> This is most obviously apparent in the change that has occurred in art's function where it has become almost fully absorbed into the commodity exchange process, having lost any direct social function which it may have had in previous times.<sup>14</sup> Adorno regards this as problematic since music can now be appropriated by what he termed the 'culture industry' to serve ideologically as an unwitting pawn in the perpetuation of false consciousness. Just as the commodity structure serves to conceal antagonistic social relations, so too can music if it does not confront the falseness of modern society.

To understand just how music can operate critically and maintain its integrity, or uncritically and affirm the status quo, we shall now return to the discussion of Adorno's concept of musical material. The musical material which confronts the composer at any one time is already pre-formed and carries with it a range of

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<sup>12</sup> For example, in the case of music, Adorno writes: 'Music will be better, the more deeply it is able to express—in the antinomies of its own formal language—the exigency of the social condition and to call for change through the coded language of suffering [...] it fulfils its social function more precisely when it presents social problems through its own material and according to its own formal laws—problems which music contains within itself in the innermost cells of its technique'. See Adorno, 'On the Social Situation of Music', in *Essays on Music*, p. 393; also Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture*, pp. 56–67.

<sup>13</sup> The most famous exposition of this view is Adorno and Horkheimer's essay 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 94–136.

<sup>14</sup> Adorno, 'On the Social Situation of Music', p. 391.

associations and socially derived meanings. In music which is uncritical, only material which communicates a standardised range of affirmative and pre-established meanings is admitted as content.<sup>15</sup> While this material may have once communicated ‘authentically’, over time, through sheer force of repeated use, it has become ‘reified’ into an inert object and confined to reproducing worn-out clichés and sentimental reminiscences. Such was the fate, according to Adorno, of much of the music based on tonality in the 20th century. For Adorno, tonality and the forms associated with it were materials which arose during the period of the Enlightenment where they embodied the dominant spirit of the time, a spirit of optimism based on the hope that the power of reason could bring about the social conditions where the interests of the individual and the collective would be harmoniously reconciled.<sup>16</sup> He thus interpreted the wholeness and powerful sense of reconciliation that occurs in much of Beethoven’s music as an ‘authentic’ expression of this optimism.<sup>17</sup> However to produce similar effects today would be false since the underlying conditions of society no longer allow for such optimism. Adorno thus interpreted the progressive disintegration of tonality throughout the 19th century as a manifestation of the fragmentation and decline of bourgeois society itself. This material now increasingly falls into the hands of the burgeoning culture industry where it is reduced to the level of popular or ‘vulgar’ music, masquerading as ‘authentic’ by appealing to the tried-

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<sup>15</sup> This discussion on conformist music draws mainly on the following texts: *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E. B Ashton (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), pp. 21–38; ‘On Popular Music’ [1941], p. 437–469, ‘On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening’ [1938], p. 288–317, and ‘On the Social Situation of Music’, in *Essays on Music*; ‘Commodity Music Analysed’ [1955] in *Quasi una Fantasia*, pp. 36–52; and *Philosophy of New Music*, pp. 8–13. Also Paddison, ‘The Critique Criticised: Adorno and Popular Music’.

<sup>16</sup> In the essay ‘Difficulties’ [1964, rev. 1966] in *Essays on Music*, p. 669 Adorno writes: ‘It is no accident that tonality was the musical language of the bourgeois era. The harmony of the universal and the particular corresponded to the classical liberal model of society’.

<sup>17</sup> For an account of Adorno’s interpretation of Beethoven’s second-period and late-period styles see Rose Rosengard Subotnik, ‘Adorno’s Diagnosis of Beethoven’s Late Style: Early Symptom of a Fatal Condition’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 29/2 (Summer 1976), pp. 242–275.

and-trusted expectations that have been implanted in it over time. Such music is ideological in that it offers no resistance to the status quo. Its ubiquitous presence in society reinforces the sense that everything is normal and as it should be.

In addition to the derivative nature of the material employed in uncritical music, Adorno maintained that this message is reaffirmed in its formal construction. Since its material is by now totally objectified and devoid of genuine subjectivity, such music is obliged to provide a proxy in order to convey the illusion of uniqueness. Devices such as catchy melodies, flashy instrumentation or technical gimmickry are relied upon to fill in and deflect from the music's underlying standardisation. As these devices function merely as surface gloss and lack any wider relation to the whole, they encourage the listener to adopt a kind of intermittent moment-listening, focusing on isolated parts at the expense of the whole. The net result is that any critical engagement on the part of the listener is forfeited and the illusion of a perfectly reconciled, harmonious structure—itsself, a reflection of the society such music is attempting to convey—is communicated, which thus reaffirms society's present state of uncritical false consciousness. Although the most obvious candidate to fall into this category of music is commercial pop music, Adorno extended this categorisation to all forms of music which adopted, in his opinion, an uncritical approach to its material including music which would traditionally be categorised under the bracket of 'serious' music.<sup>18</sup>

Given the nature of the outline sketched above for an uncritical conformist music, it is clear that proposals for a music which could possibly contribute to the formation of any kind of critical consciousness necessarily involves the adoption of contrary positions. The music which Adorno felt constituted the most adequate

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<sup>18</sup> Adorno, 'On the Social Situation of Music', p. 395.

response to the rationalisation of culture was that of the radical avant-garde. However due to the extent to which a reified rationality exerts a stranglehold on society's consciousness, any music which attempts to oppose the existing order of things by negating its commodity status inevitably finds itself in a state of alienation.<sup>19</sup> He maintained that the sense of alienation experienced by this music is not so much attributable to the radical character of the material itself but is rather an indication of the neutralisation of society's consciousness which makes anything that falls outside the narrow boundaries set by the culture industry unintelligible.<sup>20</sup> This entails something of a paradox in that in order to contribute to the formation of a critical consciousness, avant-garde music ends up isolated from society, a position which inevitably compromises its critical capacity. For these reasons, Adorno was pessimistic about music's or indeed any art form's prospects of contributing to societal change, concluding that ultimately change must come from within society itself.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, in order to preserve its integrity and remain true, 'authentic' music was left with no other option but to pursue this course anyway.

The most fundamental characteristic that differentiates critical, authentic music from uncritical, inauthentic music is its dialectical approach to handed-down musical material. This involves a historical perspective which is dynamic rather than static. In uncritical music as we have seen, the material which confronts the composer is simply received passively and rearranged to form compositions which essentially conform to some generally accepted or pre-conceived norm. With critical,

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<sup>19</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, pp. 10–13. Also, 'On the Social Situation of Music', pp. 391–393.

<sup>20</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, pp. 10–13.

<sup>21</sup> In 'On the Social Situation of Music' Adorno writes: 'It is now necessary to face the hard fact that the social alienation of music [...] is itself a matter of social fact and socially produced. For this reason, the situation cannot be corrected within music, but only within society: through the change of society'. p. 392.

progressive music however, material is conceived as having a dynamic all of its own, carrying with it certain immanent demands to which the composer is obliged to respond. Depending on the perspective one adopts, the idea of material possessing an ‘immanent demand’ can, as Raymond Geuss suggests, be viewed in either of two ways but given the dialectical nature of Adorno’s thought it is perhaps best to view both as complementary and mutually intertwined. The first perspective is from the standpoint of the objective ‘material’ which is seen to possess certain unresolved problems, contradictions or undiscovered possibilities latent within it which the composer is supposed to solve. The second possibility is that one views it from the side of the composer who is seen as channelling his creative subjectivity into the material in order to reformulate it into new structures.<sup>22</sup> In any case the process involves a re-contextualisation of the handed-down material which also, Adorno maintains, functions as an immanent critique of the inherited tradition, as well as of society itself in that the standardised meanings that are commonly associated with these materials are negated.<sup>23</sup>

Generally speaking, Adorno’s theory is usually seen as applying only to material at the most advanced stage of its historical development. For him, the music of the avant-garde is the only music capable of measuring up to and confronting the process of rationalisation that characterises modernity.<sup>24</sup> In much the same way that

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<sup>22</sup> Raymond Geuss, ‘Berg and Adorno’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Berg*, Anthony Pople (ed.), (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1997), p. 40.

<sup>23</sup> In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno writes: ‘The dividing line between authentic art that takes on itself the crises of meaning and a resigned art consisting literally and figuratively of protocol sentences is that in significant works the negation of meaning itself takes shape as a negative, whereas in the others the negation of meaning is stubbornly and positively replicated. Everything depends on this: whether meaning inheres in the negation of meaning in the artwork or if the negation of meaning conforms to the status quo; whether the crisis of meaning is reflected in the works or whether it remains immediate and therefore alien to the Subject’. p. 202.

<sup>24</sup> In *Philosophy of New Music* Adorno writes: ‘Music participates in what Clement Greenberg called the division of all art into kitsch and avant-garde, and kitsch—the dictatorship of profit over art—has long since subjugated the particular, socially reserved sphere of art. This is why reflections on the

reason dominates nature, avant-garde music mirrors this process by sublimating the rationality of the empirical world into the work itself through its domination of the received material, purifying it of obsolete elements and articulating it with ever-greater consistency.<sup>25</sup> Adorno cited the increasing pervasiveness of motivic-thematic developmental procedures throughout the 19th century as just such an instance of this tendency.<sup>26</sup> In this way, progressive music is more ‘true’ to society than standardised music as it presents society as it really is by keeping pace with the dialectic of enlightenment. However as this cycle of negation and reconfiguration continues from one generation to the next, more and more material is continually being consigned to the cultural scrapheap.<sup>27</sup> This material is what is referred to as ‘disintegrated’ or ‘second-hand’ material; it is the exhausted cultural left-overs carried over from earlier stages in the dialectical development of musical material which become objectified and no longer possess a sense of ‘immanent demand’ or ‘historical necessity’. As mentioned earlier, Adorno regarded much of the material associated with tonality—including its forms and idiomatic conventions—as part of this defunct collection. For the modern composer this begins to present certain compositional problems. Due to the constant force of repeated negations, it becomes more and more difficult to create coherent and rationally structured works because the handed-down forms themselves increasingly begin to lose their binding-power. This presents further challenges for the modern composer to achieve ‘authenticity’ in the 20th century. Just as the musical work confronts the rationality of society directly

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development of truth in aesthetic objectivity must be confined uniquely to the avant-garde, which is excluded from official culture. Today a philosophy of music is possible only as a philosophy of new music’, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 31–36.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 45–50.

<sup>27</sup> Adorno’s discussion of the diminished seventh chord in the section, ‘Tendency of the Material’ in *Philosophy of New Music* illustrates this point, pp. 32–33.



by sublimating it into the structure of the work, the authentic work must now also reveal society's contradictions and not attempt to conceal this fragmentation like the commodity structure. It must make the fractures and antagonistic relations of society explicit by leaving them un-reconciled. This means that, in Adorno's view, the traditional emphasis on the harmonious reconciliation of part and whole is no longer an option for the authentic modern work because such reconciliation no longer exists in reality. At the same time however, it cannot simply give in to this fragmentation by passively identifying with it and resorting to chaos. Instead, the key dilemma which Adorno identified as confronting the modern work in the 20th century, is that the composer must find a way of creating binding, rational and logical structures which can transcend the increasingly fragmented state of the musical material.<sup>28</sup>

The ambiguity in all of this is whether Adorno's theory is viewed as applying only to material at the most advanced stage of its historical development or whether it can also apply to so-called second-hand or disintegrated material that could be reclaimed from earlier stages. His *Philosophy of New Music* provides one answer to this question.

## II) ADORNO'S *PHILOSOPHY OF NEW MUSIC*

*Philosophy of New Music* was written during Adorno's period of forced exile in the United States, undoubtedly the most pessimistic period of his life. This experience seemed to reaffirm more than ever his conviction that humanity was sinking into a new kind of barbarism which totally undermined the original intentions of the Enlightenment project. The work itself was conceived as a 'detailed excursus to

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<sup>28</sup> In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno writes: 'In artworks, the criterion of success is twofold: whether they succeed in integrating thematic strata and details into their immanent law of form and in this integration at the same time maintain what resists it and the fissures that occur in the process of integration'. p. 8.

*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the major themes of which—the domination of nature, the reification of rationality and the ensnarement of the Subject in a new false totality—were discussed briefly in the previous section.<sup>29</sup> This context is particularly important as it complicates the commonly held assumption that all Adorno did was put forward a manifesto in support of Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School. What Adorno actually did was paint a very bleak picture of the future of New Music from a perspective that seemed to suggest that its very possibility could be in doubt. The disintegration of musical material as a consequence of repeated negations exerted by the avant-garde against established structures reaches its zenith in the work of both Schoenberg and Stravinsky, each of whom ends up succumbing to the need to impose new systems of order to cope with this disintegration. The difference is that Schoenberg's path to this point is considered authentic by Adorno while Stravinsky's approach is dismissed as inauthentic and in league with the false objectivity of the status quo.

The fundamental flaw that Adorno detects in Stravinsky's music is his failure to respond critically to the historical laws within the material. He shirks this responsibility by appealing to 'stylistic procedures' rather than pursuing the immanent logic of the material itself, importing an eclectic range of second-hand materials into his scores that have already been pre-approved by a socially conditioned collective.<sup>30</sup> By using such materials Adorno claims that Stravinsky identifies with the collective rather than with the Subject; he seeks 'authenticity' by appealing to the timeless validity invested in them by society. In *Petrushka* for instance, the material is dismissed as a series of 'conventional recollections' where the 'banality of the hand organ and children's rhymes' pose as 'seductive stimuli',

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<sup>29</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, pp.106–07.

while in *The Rite of Spring* it is the primitive and the folkloric.<sup>31</sup> The regression continues in the transition to the neo-classical, in works such as *Renard* and *The Soldier's Tale*, where 'the triviality, that in *Petrushka* appeared as humour in the midst of sound now becomes the only material'.<sup>32</sup> It is now 'entirely debased', and 'reminiscent of the lowest and most vulgar music, the march, the idiotic scraping on the violin, the outmoded waltz, and, of course, the current dances, tango and ragtime'.<sup>33</sup> Finally there is what Adorno sees as the descent into full-blown neo-classical conformism where Stravinsky assembles a 'compositional armature of putatively pre-subjective phases of music instead of his formal language being able to carry itself primarily by its own momentum beyond the incriminated romantic element'.<sup>34</sup> Thus the dialectical interaction with tradition is jettisoned in favour of a restoration of the outmoded and the archaic; the material is a product of taste rather than necessity; and the method of selection is arbitrary, coercive, and enforced in an authoritarian manner rather than emerging subjectively from an expressive need. In short, Adorno claims that Stravinsky renounces subjectivity and sacrifices the individual to the collective, something which is reinforced by the sacrificial content of works such as *The Rite of Spring*.

Of course Adorno does not quite claim that Stravinsky simply recreates these models in their original styles, acknowledging that he is a composer far too sophisticated for that. Like the seductive products of the culture industry, Adorno argues that Stravinsky realises the ever-same needs to be repackaged and glossed with a flashy veneer in order to make it appealing to fashionable taste. He thus makes frequent reference to Stravinsky's virtuosity and urbanity in conjuring up elaborate

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 133.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*.

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

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 148.

instrumental effects to adorn his music with a phantasmagorical sheen. Again however, Adorno views this as a surrogate for genuine expression, imposed externally rather than arising from any historical tendency in the material itself:

The realism of the façade is manifest musically in the overrated effort to act in accordance with the given means. Stravinsky is orientated to reality precisely in his technique. The primacy of specialty over intention, the cult of the daring feat, the pleasure in agile manipulations as in the percussion of *The Soldier's Tale*, all this plays the means against the ends. The means—the instrument are hypostatised: this takes precedence over the music [...] This earned for Stravinsky a reputation for material command and faultless mastery and the admiration of all listeners who adore 'skill'.<sup>35</sup>

This fetishism of the exterior, Adorno maintains, encourages the kind of part listening which directs the attention of the listener towards the isolated moment at the expense of the whole, thus sacrificing genuine critical engagement.

Indeed, an inability to construct coherent and rational forms is something that he identifies with Stravinsky's music generally, a feature which further marks it out as regressive. This is symptomatic of what Adorno believes to be an inadequate response towards fragmentation. Rather than crafting a form which would achieve some degree of consistency and bindingness amidst all this fragmentation—and thereby preserve subjectivity through construction—Stravinsky simply identifies with this reified debris. His music achieves temporal succession not through variation or development but through static repetition. Entire compositions are divided into a series of exchangeable 'blocks' which are arbitrarily arranged rather than linked by necessity:

Problems of form, in the sense of a forward-moving whole, no longer occur at all, and the structure of the whole is hardly articulated [...]. Of the many possible procedures, the juxtaposition of complexes built on a given pattern is henceforth exclusive.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 128.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 115.

Adorno sees the literal repetition of material as an illusion since it denies any sense of ‘becoming’ through time. It reaffirms static ‘being’ and ‘the way things are’. Indeed in the Stravinsky essay, Adorno goes a step further and frequently describes Stravinsky’s methods of construction using psychoanalytical terminology:

The concentration of music on accents and temporal intervals produces the illusion of bodily movement. But this movement consists in the varied recurrence of the same: in the recurrence of the same melodic forms, of the same harmonies, indeed, of the same rhythmical models. Whereas the motility [...] never actually succeeds in moving the music ahead; the insistence, the pretence to strength, falls prey to a weakness and futility of the same kind as the gesticulatory schemata of the schizophrenic.<sup>37</sup>

The parallel Adorno appears to be drawing with his highly questionable use of psychoanalytic terminology is between the alienated modern Subject and the symptoms of psychotic illness. As Paddison has suggested, what Adorno is implying is that the current state of subjective consciousness has become so alienated and traumatised that it can only be repressed.<sup>38</sup> Rather than overcoming this unacceptable state, Stravinsky’s music becomes identical with it. Its endless repetition of gestures and incoherent orderings of static blocks resemble the repetitive stutterings of those overcome by shock. In regressing into archaism and myth, Stravinsky recoils from confronting this fragmented state by enacting a barbaric suppression of subjectivity.

Against the positivity of Stravinsky, Schoenberg is represented as the dialectical composer who engages with tradition immanently by pursuing the tendencies that are inherent within the received material:

By assimilating the direction of music from Beethoven to Brahms, Schoenberg’s music can lay claim to the legacy of classical bourgeois music much as the materialist dialectic relates back to Hegel.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 132.

<sup>38</sup> Paddison, ‘Stravinsky as Devil: Adorno’s Three Critiques’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, Jonathan Cross (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 192–202.

<sup>39</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p. 47.

According to Adorno, Schoenberg's achievement was to realise the implications of both the increasing trend towards thematic integration in music stretching from Beethoven to Brahms as well as the innovations in harmony and instrumentation that reached their most advanced level in Wagner.<sup>40</sup> The problem which confronted Schoenberg was that up to this point each parameter: melody, harmony, counterpoint, form and instrumentation, had been restricted in its separate development by having to submit to the pre-established law of tonality.<sup>41</sup> By negating tonality Schoenberg made possible a form of unlimited development in which all of these separate parameters were given unrestricted freedom. Such is the conviction with which Schoenberg pursues this logic that all ornamentation and symmetry are discarded in favour of a continuous unfolding. Each work is now forced to construct itself anew each time, developing by its own inner logic without recourse to any pre-established form or the tonal system. Subjective expression is not feigned by employing formulaic gestures but emerges in the course of breaking free from previously sacrosanct 'taboos of form' with the monodrama *Erwartung* marking the culmination of this development.

Contrary to Stravinsky then, Schoenberg's music achieves a form of truth by discarding convention rather than attempting to claim authenticity by appealing to the consensus conferred upon it by society. In doing so, his music acts as a critique of both established musical structures and the society that regards such convention as 'second nature'. The emancipated dissonances of his scores are experienced as a shock to the socially conditioned listener: 'The dissonances that frighten them speak of their own situation; for this reason only are those dissonances intolerable to

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 45–50.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 43–50.

them'.<sup>42</sup> In addition, Schoenberg also aims to work through the disintegration that inevitably arises as a result of such negations rather than becoming identical with it. His music abhors stasis, it is endowed with a forward motion that opposes 'being' and embraces 'becoming' despite all the difficulties that arise when composing with complete freedom. And at the end of it all, his works remain open; they avoid an affirmative reconciliation by refusing closure and thus convey a truth about society:

In this, Schoenberg broke ranks precisely by taking expression itself seriously and by refusing its subsumption to the conciliating universal, which is the innermost principle of musical semblance. His music repudiates the claim that the universal and particular are reconciled.<sup>43</sup>

However Adorno claims that it is this relentless drive to pursue the inherent tendency of the material and dissolve all pre-existing forms that leads Schoenberg to devise the twelve-tone system. Here the development becomes all-encompassing and like any desire to impose freedom from above, the system neutralises itself and reverts to un-freedom. The materials are now predetermined before the process of composition even begins and the techniques of variation and development are inscribed within the system rather than emerging subjectively:

The music no longer presents itself as being in a process of development. Thematic labour becomes merely part of the composer's preliminary labour. Variation as such no longer appears at all. Everything and nothing is variation; the process of variation is itself relegated to the material and preforms it before the composition properly begins [...]. The music becomes a result of the processes to which the material is subjected and which the music itself keeps from being unveiled. Accordingly, the music becomes static.<sup>44</sup>

Adorno claims that because the whole composition is essentially reduced to repeated mathematical modifications of the row, the row itself becomes the totality of the work and all differentiation within the harmonic and melodic dimensions are dissolved. In effect, the material is reduced to a single amorphous mass to which

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 36.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 50.

abstract principles are then applied. Without the presence of any pre-existing schemata from which the work can differentiate itself and thus generate meaning, the material neutralises itself. Faced with this dilemma, Schoenberg is forced to impose order on this matter by reinstating traditional sonata, rondo and variation forms, something which brings him very close to the regressive objectivity of Stravinsky.

And so Adorno's polarisation of Schoenberg and Stravinsky in *Philosophy of New Music* ends in a stalemate. Both composers stand at the very edge of what appears for Adorno to be the end of music and both are ultimately guilty of eliminating subjectivity. Yet it is Schoenberg who emerges as the superior composer; he reaches this point by following the immanent demands of the materials themselves. That this ends in the complete dissolution of all traditional forms and necessitates a system of musical domination is the inevitable outcome of his quest for artistic truth. He 'draws the consequences' to the fullest extent that he is left with no choice: 'It is not the composer but history that fails in the work'.<sup>45</sup> Stravinsky, on the other hand, denies history. He claims authenticity as already won rather than relinquishing himself to the demands of the material, resorting to exhausted cultural relics which are pushed around in a haphazard manner. In this he seeks to concoct an image of a pre-subjective, mythic utopia whose comforting but illusionary appearance in the modern world can only serve as a superstructure for reactionary political propensities.

### III) CRITIQUE

Following its publication in 1949, Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music* found a ready audience amongst the post-war generation of composers who interpreted the claim

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p. 77.



that musical material has its own laws of motion as an indication that future progress in music resided in an unwavering intensification of formalism and the expansion of serialism to other parameters.<sup>46</sup> While this notably un-dialectical interpretation ignored Adorno's deep seated reservations about serialism, it was undoubtedly given further impetus by his rejection of Stravinsky's use of stylistic forms from the past. Indeed it could be argued that the proscription on the use of such materials that lasted well into the 1960s could be traced back, at least in part, to the theory of musical material articulated in *Philosophy of New Music* which, if read selectively, could certainly be construed as advocating such an approach. Yet as the introduction to this chapter has stated, the use of second-hand materials is sanctioned in Adorno's writings on several other composers in a way that would seem to contradict his interpretation of Stravinsky. For instance, in his book *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy* he claims that 'Mahler's progressiveness does not reside in tangible innovations and advanced material'.<sup>47</sup> In direct contrast to the interpretation of Schoenberg in *Philosophy of New Music*, Mahler 'prefers what is actually composed to the means of composition and so follows no straight historical path'.<sup>48</sup> Instead he strikes up a 'provocative alliance with vulgar music':

His symphonies shamelessly flaunt what rang in all ears, scraps of melody from great music, shallow popular songs, street ballads, hits. There are even adumbrations of songs that were only written much later, like the Maxim song in the First Symphony, or even, in the second movement of the Fifth, the Berlin 'Wenn du meine Tante siehst' from the twenties. From the potpourri-like late Romantic pieces he takes over the striking and catchy individual coinages, but eliminates the trivialised connecting material.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> For an account of the reception of *Philosophy of New Music* amongst the post-war generation see Marcus Zagorski, "'Nach dem Weltuntergang": Adorno's Engagement with Postwar Music', *The Journal of Musicology*, 22/4 (Autumn, 2005), pp. 680–701. Also Edward Campbell, *Boulez, Music and Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 68–96.

<sup>47</sup> Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, p. 19.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

In the case of Berg, Adorno frequently emphasised the presence of traditional remnants in his music which he regarded as central to the productive tension that the composer managed to generate through them:

The tension between the familiar idiom and the unfamiliar, the unknown, was eminently fruitful: it was what called forth Berg's individual, recklessly thoughtful tone. Among the exponents of New Music he was the one who least suppressed his aesthetic childhood [...] He owes his concreteness and humane breath to tolerance for what has been, which he allows to shine through, not literally but recurrently in dream and involuntary memory.<sup>50</sup>

What Adorno has in mind here are Berg's use of tonal interpolations and modified versions of traditional forms such as the sonata, variation, rondo, scherzo, passacaglia which feature throughout his work, most famously as the organisational scheme of the opera *Wozzeck*. Regarding the same opera, he also had several positive things to say about the presence of kitsch in places such as the tavern scene where 'vulgar popular music, the shabby, tarnished joy of servant girls and soldiers is heard in all its concrete foreignness and becomes music.'<sup>51</sup>

On the question of folk music, Adorno, as we have seen, tended to be quite critical of composers who attempted to incorporate folkloric elements in their music regarding it as an attempt to avoid confronting modernity by retreating to a pre-modern condition, a move which had obvious political implications. Yet in the case of Bartók, Adorno was sympathetic towards the composer's incorporation of folk material and regarded his music as having 'a power of alienation that associates it with the avant-garde and not with nationalistic reaction'.<sup>52</sup> He claimed that Bartók's use of folk material was legitimate at that time because Hungarian folk music remained untouched by the dominant forces of western industrialisation which

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<sup>50</sup> Adorno, *Alban Berg: Master of the Smallest Link*, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p. 88.

<sup>52</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p. 176n.4.

therefore validated its use for progressive ends.<sup>53</sup> Strangely, this verdict is not extended to Stravinsky where it would also seem to be applicable considering the source of much of his folkloric material in a comparably under-developed and still largely pre-capitalist Russia.

What these examples demonstrate is that Adorno's rejection of Stravinsky would be proved contradictory if it rested solely on his use of stylistic forms from the past. In all three cases discussed above, the recycling of pre-existing materials from serious, popular and folk music are accorded a positive reception by Adorno. However this on its own would not be enough to dismiss Adorno's critique, as his criticism of Stravinsky also centred around the issue of formal structuring. The question is therefore: just what is the difference between the music of Mahler, Berg and Bartók and the music of Stravinsky in the way that they employ second-hand materials in their work?

In Mahler, Adorno describes a 'second whole [...] shored up from the fragments and scraps of memory' but claims that, 'unlike Stravinsky [...] Mahler does not deride his infantile models'.<sup>54</sup> Instead he writes that 'in his much-quoted ironic moments the [S]ubject complains of the futility of its own exertions instead of mocking the lost and charmed world of images'.<sup>55</sup> What Adorno seems to be referring to here is the composer's sense of nostalgia for a reconciled totality that is now no longer possible.<sup>56</sup> In his scores Mahler incorporates those fragments—the popular song, the waltz, the lullaby—that may have once spoken with a genuine immediacy but which have since become so commodified and sterilised by the rationalisation process that they are now debased to ideology. However instead of

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, p. 39.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

subjecting them to a process of ‘malicious archaicising’ as he accuses Stravinsky of doing, Mahler injects these images with a dynamism and presents them as though trying to regain this lost totality. His themes develop but at the same time their development is continually thwarted. Throughout his music thematic progression is interrupted by disjunction, fractures, collapse and breakthroughs. By elevating the disintegration of second-hand material by developmental means to a formal principle, Mahler manages to fuse together a binding whole from these worn-out images while simultaneously raising to the level of consciousness the impossibility of achieving a fully reconciled totality under current conditions, an achievement which, for Adorno, marks his music out as progressive:

Mahler’s music is the individual’s dream of the irresistible collective. But at the same time it expresses objectively the impossibility of identification with it.<sup>57</sup>

Adorno’s analysis of Berg’s progressiveness is somewhat similar to his account of Mahler. He describes Berg’s compositional technique as a process of disintegration where the ‘traditional categories and the tonal idiom, deep as their traces may be, are broken from the outset by an emphatic tendency towards particularisation’.<sup>58</sup> The means through which this technique of dissolution is enacted, according to Adorno, is a highly personalised adaptation of the Schoenbergian technique of developing variation:

While he adopted the technique of ‘developing variation’ from Schoenberg, he unconsciously steered it in the opposite direction. Generating, according to Schoenberg’s idea, a maximum of shapes from a minimum of elements is just one level of Berg’s compositional technique; the other lies deeper: that music by its very process, dissolves. It ends in the minimum, virtually in a single note.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Adorno, *Alban Berg: Master of the Smallest Link*, p. 37,

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

In discussing the *Three Orchestral Pieces*, Op. 6, Adorno provides a concrete example and compares Berg's approach with that of Stravinsky and Satie:

At the beginning of the third piece, four shattered old-fashioned march formulae are stitched together and reconstituted into form by the same force that had disintegrated them. [...] While the Stravinsky of the *Soldier* and the Satie of the *Cinq grimaces* allowed such fragments to stand, bald and inflexible as a mask, Berg's humanity discovered in them the moving force of their decomposition and translated that into the moving force of composition.<sup>60</sup>

Again, the justification here for the re-inclusion of these fragments is that they function as a foil for subversive procedures. In a world where the culture industry ultimately appropriates everything, such commodified fragments, if left untouched, could only function as masks as Adorno claims they do in Satie and Stravinsky. By subjecting them to a thorough process of liquidation through developmental technique and integrating them into the overall form of the work, Berg divests them of any illusionary powers they may still hold.

And finally there is Bartók's use of South-Eastern European folk material. Adorno makes it clear that the 'authenticity' in his music resides in making explicit the unattainability of the folkloric reconciliation that such material usually implies, comparing him, by way of contrast, with what he perceives as the 'inauthentic' approach of Kodály:

He [Bartók] refutes the fiction of formal objectivity and goes back instead to a pre-objective, truly archaic material, which, however, is very closely related to current material precisely in its particular dissolution. Radical folklorism in the rational through-construction of his particular material is, consequently, amazingly similar to the practices of the Schoenberg School. In the realm of objectivism, however, Bartók is a totally singular phenomenon; his earlier collaborator Kodály, on the other hand, falsified authentic folklore as a romantic dream image of a unified folkish life which denounces itself through the contrast of primitivising melody and sensuously soft, late-impressionistic harmony.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p. 74.

<sup>61</sup> Adorno, 'On the Social Situation of Music', pp. 405–06.

As with both Berg and Mahler, the truth of Bartók's music lies in his dissolution of illusions—in this case that of a 'unified folkish life'—achieved using Schoenbergian developmental techniques in a subversive capacity.

From these examples it becomes clear that Adorno's theory allows for the incorporation of second-hand material as long as it satisfies two interrelated conditions: i) that the relation to the material is critical and that it proceeds by a negation of the materials standard implications, and ii) that there is an objectively binding tension between the part and the whole that at the same time does not conceal the contradictions inherent in the material. The issue that concerns Adorno most is what he sees as the danger of a work simply becoming identical with the fragmented nature of the material itself.<sup>62</sup> Since second-hand material has long been hardened by an exclusion of subjectivity to the point where it resembles mere convention, it requires the composer to breathe new life into it by reformulating it in new ways, otherwise it comes to resemble a mere thing, a lifeless object easily assimilated by the culture industry. This reinterpretation occurs through the work's form. As we have seen Adorno regards subjectivity as manifesting itself through construction; the basis of this contention is that if materials are arbitrarily arranged with no means of creating a dialectical interaction between the various components, the Subject is effectively bypassed and the form of the work reduced to a chaotically arranged scrapyard for debased materials. Adorno's views on montage are illustrative of this crucial point:

The idea of montage [...] becomes irreconcilable with the idea of the radical, fully formed artwork with which it was once recognised as being identical. The principle of montage was conceived as an act against a surreptitiously achieved organic unity; it was meant to shock. Once this shock is neutralised, the assemblage once more merely becomes indifferent material; the technique no longer suffices to trigger communication between the

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<sup>62</sup> Paddison 'Stravinsky as devil: Adorno's three critiques', p. 200.

aesthetic and the extra-aesthetic, and its interest dwindles to a cultural-historical curiosity.<sup>63</sup>

While these are valid insights for the preservation of subjectivity when using second-hand material, the problem with Adorno is that he only allowed for a very limited means of achieving these connections; namely those techniques associated with traditional Austro-German motivic-thematic development. Adorno seemed to conceive the expressive Subject in music predominantly in melodic terms and it is through the development of the theme—a development which overrides established structures—that the Subject is liberated within the confines of the musical work. His rejection of Stravinsky's use of stylistic forms from the past and his positive estimation of similar materials in the work of Mahler, Berg and Bartók seems to be entirely based on the presence or absence of traditional developing variation technique. This predisposition goes hand in hand with a very traditional, not to say romantic, notion of 'expression' communicated through dynamic gestures and climaxes in contrast to the cool, flat surfaces of Stravinsky's 'objectivism'. These prejudices are clearly apparent in certain passages of *Philosophy of New Music*:

The concept of dynamic musical form, which has dominated occidental music from the Mannheim school to the contemporary Viennese school, presupposes precisely a motif that is clearly shaped and fixed in its self-identity, however infinitely small it may be. Its dissolution and variation is constituted exclusively through contrast with what is enduringly maintained in memory. Music knows development only to the extent that it knows the solidified, the definite; Stravinsky's regression, which would like to reach back prior to this stage, therefore replaces progress with repetition [...] [He] is distinguished from the subjective, dynamic principle of varying what has been unambiguously posited by a technique of ever-new beginnings that search futilely for what they in truth cannot reach and could not hold.<sup>64</sup>

In another passage Adorno's prejudice is even more explicit:

Stravinsky's music remains a marginal phenomenon in spite of the dispersion of its style across an entire younger generation because it avoids the

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<sup>63</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 204.

<sup>64</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p. 122.

dialectical confrontation with music's temporal progression that has constituted the essence of all great music since Bach.<sup>65</sup>

It therefore becomes clear that despite setting himself up as the relentless critic of all *a priori* assumptions, Adorno himself was far from immune to subconsciously regarding certain compositional principles as sacrosanct and 'natural' in the first principle sense of the word.<sup>66</sup> At least up until quite late in his career, Adorno seems to have been singularly incapable of conceiving any other means of achieving musical coherence between part and whole other than developing variation. Not surprisingly his inflexibility in this regard has come in for much criticism. Carl Dahlhaus for instance has stated:

No-one would deny Adorno's premise that an engagement with time is essential for Stravinsky's music, as for all music. However, the consequence, that developing variation is the only legitimate way to fulfil the formal law of music as a temporal art, is dogmatic.<sup>67</sup>

This blind-spot in Adorno's thinking came to a head in the mid-1950s when—in a move which confounded the dominant view that he was an unwavering advocate of New Music—he dismissed the entire school of post-war serialism as 'an empty, high-spirited trip' due to the absence of traditional categories such as 'thematic construction, exposition, transitions, continuation, fields of tension and release'.<sup>68</sup> These criticisms, articulated in an essay entitled 'The Aging of the New Music', elicited a forceful response from the theorist Heinz-Klaus Metzger:

Musical significance is not confined to first and second subjects, and there is compelling musical coherence, too, beyond all thematic-motivic relationships

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, p. 138.

<sup>66</sup> It should be stated however that Adorno never actually uses this term.

<sup>67</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, 'La polemica di Adorno contro Stravinskij e il problema della "critica superiore"', in *Stravinskij oggi* Frances Degrada (ed.) (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 1982), pp. 47–48. Cited in Jonathan Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 233. Translation by Cross.

<sup>68</sup> Adorno, 'The Aging of the New Music', p. 187. For more discussion on this essay and its reception in Darmstadt see Martin Iddon, *New Music at Darmstadt: Nono, Stockhausen, Cage and Boulez* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 110–141.



(which Adorno sees as the only elements in ‘musical language’). Has he not heard of Stockhausen’s concept of groups?<sup>69</sup>

If left as it stands such a myopic vision places a severe restriction on the applicability of Adorno’s theory, particularly in a study of this sort where the composers in question see themselves as opposed to the type of linear thematic developmental processes Adorno had in mind. However if his theory can be broadened to allow for ways of achieving temporal relatedness through techniques other than developing variation then there is no reason why Adorno’s insights cannot be productively applied as there is no compelling reason why melodic development should be privileged above all other parameters. It thus becomes possible, and indeed much more convincing, to see Stravinsky’s skill and virtuosity not as deceptive seduction but as a critical negation by de-familiarising the familiar. Indeed in an essay written in 1932 entitled ‘On the Social Situation of Music’, none other than Adorno himself viewed Stravinsky in precisely these terms, making one wonder whether the subsequent experience of World War 2 prompted him to artificially force Stravinsky into the position of acting as a regressive counterpart to Schoenberg in *Philosophy of New Music*:

In his best and most exposed works—such as *The Soldier’s Tale*—he provokes contradiction. In contrast to all other objectivist authors, Stravinsky’s superiority within his *métier* endangers the consistent ideological positivity of his style, as this is demanded of him by society: consequently, in his case as well, artistic logical consistence becomes socially dialectical.<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, with regard to Adorno’s criticism of Stravinsky’s arbitrary ‘juxtaposition of complexes’ it becomes possible to interpret the composer’s method of structuring as striving for a different type of relatedness than Adorno was able to envision. For example, if one takes a work such as the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*—surely

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<sup>69</sup> Heinz-Klaus Metzger, ‘Just Who is Growing Old?’, Leo Black (trans.), *Die Reihe* 4 (1960), p. 70.

<sup>70</sup> Adorno, ‘On the Social Situation of Music’, p. 406.

the most extreme example of the kind of ‘arbitrary’ block structuring that Adorno criticised—several analysts have since discerned a number of levels where Stravinsky’s constructive methods can be shown to constitute much more than a haphazard juxtaposition of sections. Edward T. Cone in his seminal analyses of the *Symphonies* describes Stravinsky’s technique as a method of ‘stratification’ and ‘interlock’ where changes in instrumentation, harmony, rhythm and register in the various blocks are placed in opposition while tension is generated from the constant sense of disjuncture combined with the expectation that earlier blocks will be taken up and varied.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Pieter van den Toorn in his analysis of the work identified simultaneous oppositions between degrees of dynamism/stasis and continuity/discontinuity generated by the allusions to ‘dominants’ and ‘tonics’ as well as between diatonic and octatonic sections.<sup>72</sup> In addition, Richard Taruskin has uncovered the work’s underlying liturgical structure which demonstrates its continuity with a fundamentally Russian rather than European tradition, where simultaneous degrees of continuity and discontinuity are more intrinsic.<sup>73</sup> What these and other analyses show is that it is possible to satisfy Adorno’s criteria in terms other than those endorsed by Adorno himself. By examining how certain composers approach second-hand material critically through negation and yet manage to structure it in a way that is meaningful and coherent while preserving some of its fragmentary qualities, the idea of a critical approach to second-hand material should be perfectly viable. This has the dual benefit of taking advantage of Adorno’s deep insight into the condition of art in modernity while leaving aside his highly

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<sup>71</sup> Edward T. Cone, ‘Stravinsky: The Progress of a Method’, *Perspectives of New Music*, 1/1 (1962), pp. 18–26.

<sup>72</sup> Pieter C. van den Toorn, *The Music of Stravinsky* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 342.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through Marva* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 1452.

prejudiced value-judgements. It is analysis of this type which will be pursued in this study.

#### IV) IMPLICATIONS

There is another aspect to *Philosophy of New Music* which is relevant to the current study and it concerns a number of compositional problems that have arisen during the transition from modernism to postmodernism.<sup>74</sup> As we have seen Adorno's dialectical view of musical progress is predicated on recurrent cycles of negation and reconfiguration which impact upon pre-existing musical structures. At the same time however, even though each new work derives its meaning from the negation of older material, Adorno realised that the very concept of the 'new' in this sense was dependent upon the sustained existence of traditional categories without which new works would have nothing to draw their relation from. He was also aware of the implications of this position, namely that if avant-garde music continued the practice of dispensing with any element as soon as it was perceived to be obsolete, then this presented a potentially fatal threat to the sustainability of the movement itself as a whole:

If musical nominalism, the annulment of all recurring formulae, is thought through to the end, differentiation tumbles. In traditional music, the here and now of the composition in all its elements ceaselessly confronts the tonal schemata. Limits to the specification of the composition were set by convention, that is, by what was largely heterogeneous to the individual work. As a result of the dissolution of convention, the specific was unshackled: Right up to the restorative Stravinskian putsch, musical progress meant progressive differentiation. Deviations from the pre-existing schemata of traditional music carried decisive, meaningful weight. The more binding the schema, the more subtle the possibility of modification. But what once turned the balance could often enough no longer be perceived at all in emancipated music. This is why traditional music admitted much more subtle nuance than is possible when each musical event stands for itself alone. Refinement is ultimately paid back with coarsening.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> For a comprehensive overview of this phenomenon see Paddison's chapter 'The disintegration of musical material', in *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, p. 263–278.

<sup>75</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p. 61.

Schoenberg's break with tonality and the transition to serialism was seen by Adorno as part of this historical process of levelling-out, where those idiomatic features that had been intrinsic to the tonal system—a hierarchy of intervals, numerous modulatory possibilities, etc.—were gradually erased. He predicted that the end-result of this tendency would be total disintegration, the return of music to a kind of pre-compositional state of nature where all historically acquired features would be completely neutralised. This accords with the thesis articulated in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* where reason, after freeing mankind from the bonds of myth, succeeds in abolishing all 'natural' bonds between human beings and reduces them to abstract functionaries in 'mythic' systems of a new kind. After the war, the search for a *materia prima*—material as yet untouched by history—seemed to constitute for Adorno a realisation, in musical terms, of this tendency. The experiments in integral serialism in its most radical early phase led by Karl Goeyvaerts, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez attempted to eradicate the last semblances of tradition from the work. Moreover, the aesthetic stance of John Cage seemed to take this radicalism one step further, advocating the abolition of the distinction between life and art in what could be construed as perhaps the ultimate negation of all, that of the very concept of the work itself.

Although, as Metzger noted, Adorno's inflexibility prevented him from seeing that many of the compositions that arose during these years might have actually managed to craft compelling musical forms from this disintegration and thus constitute significant artistic achievements, the underlying basis of his critique of post-war music, despite its numerous defects continues to have a certain degree of relevance to contemporary debates on postmodernism. Above and beyond the polarisation of Schoenberg and Stravinsky the fundamental issue at the heart of

Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music* and in his post-war writings such as 'The Ageing of the New Music' is the irreversible loss of nature. The great works of modernism achieved much of their significance from the negation of traditional categories which had over time become so ingrained that they acquired the status of 'natural laws'; categories such as tonality, its associated forms, even down to such central categories as the 'theme'. The sense of 'newness' and occasional shock which modernist works managed to generate through their negation of these 'laws', was at the same time predicated on their continued existence, without which no such shock would be possible. The experiments of the early 1950s could be interpreted as the final disintegration of these perceptual categories, the definitive negation beyond which further attempts at such radicalism could only pale in comparison. With their demise, postmodernism is forced to continue in the absence of these 'natural laws' and without the ever-present feeling of entrenched convention, the parameters having now been staked out so wide. This is no doubt one of the major factors contributing to the so-called 'waning of effect' that has been one of the most debated features of postmodernism, where new works have struggled to generate the same impact as their modernist predecessors. Fredric Jameson has succinctly summarised the importance of this loss in the transition from modernism to postmodernism:

In modernism [...] some residual zones of 'nature' or 'being', of the old, the older, the archaic, still subsist; culture can still do something to that nature and work at transforming that 'referent'. Postmodernism is what you have when the modernisation process is complete and nature is gone for good. It is a more fully human world than the older one, but one in which 'culture' has become a veritable 'second nature'.<sup>76</sup>

In addition to this internal process of disintegration, there is also the external process of disintegration which Adorno saw as occurring at each successive stage of the

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<sup>76</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late capitalism* (London/New York: Verso 1991), p. ix.

dialectic where material which once occupied the position of the most technically advanced becomes objectified, normalised and increasingly at risk of being appropriated by the culture industry. Due to the spread of mass culture throughout the 20th century Adorno documented what he perceived to be the emergence of a new 'mass musical language'. Paddison describes this phenomenon as consisting:

not only of standardised progressions in tonal harmony, but whole genres and styles of music, which, in their disintegration from the 'logic of form', and through their function in, for example, advertising and film, have become available now as cultural relics which, even though culturally mediated, appear to communicate on a level of resistance-free immediacy.<sup>77</sup>

Paddison has further argued that this 'mass musical language' can now be seen to incorporate the gestures of the avant-garde up to the 1960s:

This new communicative language contains not only the mainly tonal gestures of so-called 'popular' or 'light' music, and of the well-known museum repertoire of the Classical and Romantic traditions. It can be argued that it has now gone considerably beyond Adorno's original description of it in his 1932 essay, and has assimilated and historicised many of the typical gestures of what was once the radical avant-garde, the extremes of expression and technical experimentation now reduced to an unambiguous and restricted range of meanings through functioning, for example, as 'sound tracks' for powerful visual imagery on film and television.<sup>78</sup>

Given the extent to which this process of disintegration, both internal and external, inevitably affects all musical materials today, the suggestion has been put forward that perhaps the quest for advanced material is at an end and that all there is left for composers to work with in the era of postmodernism are the cultural leftovers of a now defunct tradition. In addressing Adorno's dual concept of disintegration, Paddison had this to say about the possible implications of such a position:

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<sup>77</sup> Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, p. 272–73.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p. 273. Incidentally, Adorno himself seems to have sensed this himself when he wrote: 'The reification of structural types of composition today takes the form of involuntary clichés at the very point where the rational creation of something completely unforeseeable would like to prevent them. An instance of such a cliché was the use of pointillist methods, which have now fallen into disuse; one of the most recent consists of sound surfaces organised in patches and separated from each other with exaggerated tidiness. These unified sounds and the pieces that deploy them are as alike as two peas'. Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle' [1961, rev. 1963], in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, p. 312.

It could well be that a critical and self-reflexive music today has had to give up the dream of a coherent and integrated, internally consistent musical language. In its place, it can be argued, there is, as material, only the used and the second-hand, the found objects and 'ready mades' from the cultural scrap heap.<sup>79</sup>

In a similar vein, Fredric Jameson has also hinted that the possibilities for the discovery of new material may be exhausted, suggesting that perhaps everything has already been done:

There is another sense in which the writers and artists of the present day will no longer be able to invent new styles and worlds—they've already been invented; only a limited number of combinations are possible; the most unique ones have been thought of already. So the weight of the whole modernist aesthetic tradition—now dead—also 'weights like a nightmare on the brains of the living', as Marx said in another context.<sup>80</sup>

Such predictions, I feel, could be accused of attaching too much importance to the traditional categories which are, in effect, hypostatized, with the implication being that when all such categories have been negated the possibilities for further advances in material disappear with them. I would argue that the major element which has disappeared in postmodernism is simply the presence of these categories themselves, which, as historically entrenched 'second nature' convention, formerly provoked such strong reactions when transgressed. The postmodern notion that 'everything has already been done' ignores the fact that several notable innovations and expansions in musical materials have occurred long after the generally accepted transition from modernism to post-modernism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In music, one particularly notable example that quite clearly contradicts such statements is the field of spectral music which emerged in the early 1970s and takes as its basic material the timbral structure of sound to produce compositions informed by an array of mathematical and computer-assisted analytical procedures. This particular

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<sup>79</sup> Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, p. 274.

<sup>80</sup> Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in *Postmodern Culture*, p. 115.

compositional strand combined with advances in electronic music more generally has indeed uncovered materials which can be deemed to constitute something definitively 'New' and provide the material basis for a critical and internally consistent musical language. The problem for such movements may be that they can no longer be seen to occupy a compositional mainstream as comparably advanced music of this sort once did. With the decline and ultimate dissolution of the great bourgeois traditional categories in the 1950s, these movements inevitably find themselves forced to compete amongst a plurality of different movements, each of which no longer derives its meaning from the presence of a grand tradition. This does not necessarily need to be construed as a major problem; it just means that the impact of these innovations will be noticeably more dispersed.

Indeed considering the extent to which this 'waning of effect' eventually impacts upon all music today—even the most advanced material that forms the content of experimental practices such as spectral music—the critical transformation of reclaimed traditional elements may just be one of the more effective ways of maintaining a radical avant-garde position. Such material, by its familiarity, can still draw forth the necessary degree of tension demanded by a modernist approach if carried out critically and with a self-conscious relation to history. This material however poses a different set of problems. The major issue which confronts a composer working with second-hand disintegrated material, the aspect which differentiates it from advanced material, is its lack of what Adorno termed 'immanent demand' or 'inner compulsion'. An example of just what he means by these terms in relation to advanced material is to be found in the 'The Aging of the New Music':

When the mature Wagner added the minor ninth to the diminished-seventh chord, and when Schoenberg in his *Verklärte Nacht* used the forbidden last



inversion of the ninth chord, the potential of such chords unfolded into what Webern called a sea of never-heard sounds, a sea onto which *Erwartung* ventured.<sup>81</sup>

What Adorno is referring to here is the inherent potential within advanced material to determine or at least exert substantial influence upon the organic unfolding of a work's form. When the harmonic innovations of Wagner and Schoenberg hit up against the boundaries established by the formal conventions of their time, they had the effect of not only breaking through them but of also demanding accommodative formal solutions. This task of integrating advanced material within pre-existing forms was a form producing power in itself. The same can be said of contemporary advanced material in areas such as spectral music where problems inherent in the material itself play a decisive role in determining the work's temporal unfolding.<sup>82</sup>

The problem with second-hand materials is that much of their sense of inner compulsion has already been exhausted at a previous point in history so that temporal succession can no longer be propelled by resources contained within the material itself. This creates the problem of achieving an effective relationship between part and whole that amounts to something more than arbitrary placement. As we saw in the previous section it was the perceived failure of Stravinsky's music to achieve this that constituted the nucleus of Adorno's rejection of the composer in *Philosophy of New Music*. Yet it was not simply that Adorno's critique was founded on false premises, it was rather that his own reified concepts prevented him from seeing other ways of achieving effective form with this material.

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<sup>81</sup> Adorno, 'The Aging of the New Music', p. 190.

<sup>82</sup> As an example one could cite the opening of Gerard Grisey's *Partiels* (1975), perhaps the paradigmatic work of early spectral thought. The piece is based on a spectral analysis of the attack of a low E2 on trombone and the opening attempts to map the temporal unfolding of this attack into music by assigning different partials of the analysed spectrum to different instruments.

This insight brings us back to some of the issues identified in the introduction with regard to tendencies within postmodernism that have rejected notions of coherence and integration, opting instead for a diversity which carries right through to the structure of the work itself. This fragmentation has to be seen as a reflection of the lack of ‘immanent demand’ inherent in second-hand materials where a form-building capacity is no longer a property of the material itself. However as Adorno recognised in his discussion of montage and in his essay on Stravinsky (despite its obvious deficiencies), the failure to achieve binding relationships that such juxtaposition strategies inevitably entail is ultimately irreconcilable with the idea of a radical work. This is because the form is achieved by circumventing the Subject without whom there can be no ‘authentic’ expression. Subjective intention is sacrificed to an arbitrariness which—despite its radical pretensions—ultimately constitutes an anti-intellectual, conservative position. As Robert Hullot-Kentor observes, it is this thesis developed by Adorno in his essay on Stravinsky in *Philosophy of New Music* that functions as a powerful critique of certain practices prevalent in postmodernism:

in spite of the fact that ‘Stravinsky and the Restoration’ is easily the most reviled and automatically dismissed of anything he wrote [...] Adorno’s treatment of *neoclassicism* amounts, *avant la lettre*, to what may be the most incisive critique of postmodernism written to date. The essay deserves to be recognised and studied as such. [...] What Adorno discerned in Stravinsky is an appeal to authenticity that is fundamentally a desideratum of authority, achieved by obliterating subjective intention. Adorno develops this thesis in his remarks on Stravinsky’s use of pastiche—a kind of abstract diversity—musical quotation, self-reproduction, wilful fragmentation, imitation of ancient forms, and so on.<sup>83</sup>

If it is possible to look beyond the essay’s deficiencies—especially what Hullot-Kentor describes as the ‘almost corny psychoanalytic musical symptomatology that Adorno adduced almost straight off the page of Otto Fenichel’s *Psychoanalytic*

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<sup>83</sup> Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Things Beyond Resemblance*, p. 282n29.

*Theory of Neurosis*'—Adorno's critique of Stravinsky sets a challenge to the composer working with pre-existing material today. Taking for granted that it is no longer possible to construct musical forms according to the material's implications—because to do so would result in an uncritical pastiche—a critical reanimation must necessarily involve an attempt to make up for the lack of 'immanent demand' which is the inescapable condition of these materials. To a large degree this means that form will inevitably be imposed 'from the outside' as it can no longer emerge organically from properties contained within the material itself, a problem Beckett alluded to in the epigraph at the head of this chapter when he observed that the issue of form 'exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates'. This can be seen as the major challenge facing the contemporary composer working with second-hand materials: the task of finding new structures which, amidst all the fragmentation, manage to achieve some degree of bindingness, inner tension and coherence.

#### V) CONCLUSION

If reconfigured, I would argue that Adorno's theory allows for the idea of using second-hand materials as the basis for a radical and critical music. It has shown that the inconsistencies that arise in his work with regard to this issue have their origin in a number of highly subjective biases towards the Austro-German tradition, to which he himself remained oblivious. When subjected to closer scrutiny these are rendered incompatible with the larger thrust of his work which sees itself as vehemently opposed to all first principles or natural laws. The chapter has also detailed some of the difficulties that arise when using material of this kind, the most important being the need to come up with new ways of achieving coherent forms.

In the last decade of his career, Adorno himself eventually recognised the need to adopt a more flexible approach towards evaluating works that did not conform to the rigid models that he had based his earlier critiques on. In the essay ‘Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait’ of 1962, he revised his interpretation of the composer.<sup>84</sup> While still having concerns about the static nature of Stravinsky’s music he now manages to discern a critical edge in the composer’s ironic handling of worn-out fragments. An even greater change in attitude occurred with the essay ‘Vers une musique informelle’ which may have been prompted by the critiques of Metzger as well as by Adorno’s fear of being seen as old-fashioned.<sup>85</sup> In this essay he relinquishes his earlier insistence on thematic development as the only means of achieving coherent form and acknowledges the need for a more extended musical grammar than he had previously allowed for:

Contemporary music cannot be forced into such apparently universal categories as ‘antecedent’ and ‘consequent’ as if they were unalterable. It is nowhere laid down that modern music must *a priori* contain such elements of the tradition as tension and resolution, continuation, development, contrast and reassertion; all the less since memories of all that are the frequent cause of crude inconsistencies in the new material and the need to correct these is itself a motive force in modern music.<sup>86</sup>

However he follows this with a description of the challenge facing the composer in the absence of these categories:

Of course musical categories are probably indispensable to achieve articulation, even if they have to be wholly transformed, unless we are going to rest content with an undifferentiated jumble of sounds. The problem, however, is not to restore the traditional categories, but to develop equivalents to suit the new materials, so that it will become possible to perform in a transparent manner the tasks which were formerly carried out in an irrational and ultimately inadequate way.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Adorno, ‘Stravinsky: ‘A Dialectical Portrait’, in *Quasi una Fantasia*, p. 145–75.

<sup>85</sup> Marcus Zagorski, “‘Nach dem Waltuntergang”, p. 696.

<sup>86</sup> Adorno, ‘Vers une musique informelle’, p. 282.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, p. 282.

As evinced by this passage, Adorno, right up until the end, insisted on the need for rational binding forms as it is through the formal articulation of material that the subjectivity of the composer manifests itself. It is this preservation of a historically aware and critical subjectivity that differentiates a 'postmodernism of resistance' from a 'postmodernism of reaction'. With this in mind we turn now to an analysis of how the three composers in this study have met this challenge.

## CHAPTER 2: CONFRONTING THE OBJECTIFIED OBJECTIVELY: THE MUSIC OF GERALD BARRY

The important thing is to escape from expectation, from things that are preconceived, from one's conditioning, and that's always a problem. To continually surprise oneself, to search, I suppose, in the cracks in one's imagination which are twilit—that whole world which wasn't part of one's conditioning in the past. There's no point in doing again what has been done by other people. The difficulty always lies in beginning anew.<sup>1</sup>

Although Gerald Barry has steered well clear of the aesthetic politics of postmodernism, the sentiments expressed in the above quotation are those of a composer firmly committed to the modernist ideal of the 'New'. In his pursuit, it would appear that Barry has been more successful than most. Since coming to prominence in the early 1980s he has consistently been praised as one of the most distinctive composers in contemporary music, winning many admirers for the clarity and relentless energy of his music, qualities perceived to stand in stark contrast to the theoretical abstractions of the previous generation. Yet he also has the reputation of being something of a radical with his music being variously described as difficult, abrasive, frenetic and sometimes even shocking. What is especially intriguing in Barry's case is that he has managed to provoke such responses, not by pioneering explorations into new territory, but rather as Thomas Adès has suggested, by 're-animating a deeply traditional language'.<sup>2</sup> The most striking of these re-animations has been his restoration of melody which acts as the basis of most of his music, but one could also mention his keen sensitivity to harmony, his commitment to pulse and his unvarnished approach to orchestration. Much of his music seems to have a

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<sup>1</sup> Barra Ó Séaghdha, 'Breathing Space', *Graph* 6 (1998), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Adès quoted in Michael Dervan, 'Building a Blueprint that Turns to Air', *Irish Times*, 27 Feb 2013.

skeletal quality, fashioned from small pieces extracted from musical history and then reassembled to form radically new constructions.

However despite their close working relationship Barry's approach is in many ways the direct opposite of that pursued by Adès. Whereas Adès has sought to preserve narrative tension through cumulative processes leading to climactic points, these kinds of strategies—which have always been associated with expressive directness in music—are of no concern to Barry. Instead Barry approaches composition in a way that Adorno would have negatively described as 'from the outside' where larger structures are organised through layering, juxtaposition and stratification techniques and pitch materials are often subjected to seemingly mechanical applications of uniform rhythms, dynamics or articulation. Some of these procedures are carried out with a brutality that seems intent on wresting what appear to be fairly banal materials onto a new plane through sheer force. There is no evidence of motivic development or any of the traditional paradigms that stress organic growth. Instead much of the music is boldly structured into blocks which jump unexpectedly from one to the next.

This chapter intends to argue that Barry's music measures up to an objectified musical material by confronting it with a corresponding objectivity of his own, using a number of self-devised techniques which fashion it into structures capable of injecting it with new life. The subjectivity in Barry's music thus emerges indirectly, from behind the veil of uncompromising thoroughness which characterises the way he reworks his material into distinctive textures. This thoroughness radically distances his music from lapsing into the pastiche of a reactionary postmodernism while the underlying coherence tying these textures together avoids the structural arbitrariness characteristic of other strands of this phenomenon.

The chapter will begin with an overview of the main stylistic divisions of his career which aims to give some context to the analyses undertaken later. This is then followed by a paradigm analysis of the early piano piece *Sur les Pointes* (1981), a work which demonstrates many of the characteristic traits which have remained consistent throughout his career. Following on from this will be three sections focusing on specific techniques which feature elsewhere in his work. The first of these sections is entitled ‘Objective Structuring in Texture, Harmony and Orchestration’ and looks at how Barry reanimates material by pursuing a ruthless objectivism which, in its very consistency across all parameters of his music, greatly contributes to the formation of his personal style. While these techniques are applied to give a particular block a certain character, the second section entitled ‘Balancing Extremes’ looks at how Barry organises these blocks and the various fragments which make up his music into coherent forms without having to revert to traditional unifying devices. The third and final section examines Barry’s idiosyncratic style of vocal writing which subverts many of the established operatic conventions and discusses how this strategy relates to his desire to reveal deeper layers beneath the surface of his chosen texts.

#### I) CAREER OVERVIEW

Although Barry’s progress as a composer does not display the seismic shifts that are a feature of both Deane’s and Volans’s career paths, it is still possible to sustain a relatively neat tripartite division of his career to date. The first of these lasts until 1981 and encompasses his student works (all now withdrawn) and his early acknowledged works. In these pieces the basic traits of his music come into view forming a style that is noticeable for its spare and hard-edged refinement of musical



ideas. The second period lasts from 1982 to 1994. The first half of this period is preoccupied with work on his first opera *The Intelligence Park* (1982–8) which expands on the innovations of the early period and displays the beginnings of his explorations into polyphony. After *The Intelligence Park* this polyphonic tendency is further developed with canon then becoming the predominant technique. A common focus amongst the works that Barry has written since the mid-1990s is more difficult to narrow down to a single concern but they generally show a preoccupation with the reclaiming of ‘ordinary’ musical gestures that are intertwined with the theme of memory. Each of these sub-sections will now be examined in more detail.

i) Formative Years and Early Acknowledged Works (up to 1981)

Barry’s childhood and teenage years were spent in an isolated rural community on the west coast of Ireland and so his early development as a composer was considerably less focused than that of either Deane or Volans.<sup>3</sup> By his own account his contacts with music during these years seemed to consist of whatever activities in the immediate locality he happened to chance upon. These came through three main sources: 1) Irish traditional music—household sessions involving local musicians and his uncle, the accomplished concertina player Paddy Murphy, as well as céilí bands, 2) the church—the family regularly attended the local church where hymns were sung and accompanied by a harmonium and 3) the family radio—on which he heard sporadic broadcasts of the classical repertoire including what he described as a ‘revelatory’ experience of hearing one of Handel’s arias aged 11.<sup>4</sup> Later he received

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<sup>3</sup> Barry grew up in Clarecastle, then a small rural village near the town of Ennis in Co. Clare. The village has since been absorbed into a suburb of the town.

<sup>4</sup> Barry’s reflections on his childhood experiences with music can be found in the following interviews: Michael Dervan, ‘Bowers of Bliss, of Blood’, *An Droichead* (Summer 1986), pp. 4–6; Kevin Myers, ‘From Stockhausen to the Petshop Boys’, *Irish Times*, 29 February 1992; Eileen Battersby, ‘Sounds and Silence’, *Irish Times*, 15 June 2000; Michael Dungan, ‘An Interview with

lessons on piano and violin. Although meagre, Barry has always acknowledged these experiences as crucially formative and aspects of his mature style can be traced back in some way to each of these sources. As mentioned above, the theme of memory, particularly of childhood, tends to occupy a particularly important role in his later aesthetic outlook.

The move to Dublin in 1969 to attend UCD undoubtedly broadened his horizons through contact with other young composers and musicians although he had nothing but disdain for the university's music department.<sup>5</sup> The most noticeable feature of the work he composed during these university years was a preoccupation with the relationship between words and music. Of these, the composition *Lessness* (1972), a setting of Samuel Beckett's short prose text for solo voice and orchestra is perhaps the most significant. Here, many of the features of Barry's mature style are anticipated particularly in the plodding crochets, spare texture and syllabic text-setting of the opening. However its cumulative and dramatic climax is un-typical and represents what Vincent Deane described as 'one of the few remaining souvenirs of his youthful hankerings after the fleshpots of Expressionism'.<sup>6</sup> Also in *Lessness* and other works such as *Imitation of Joy* (1972) and *Almost a Madrigal* (1973) the structure is very much subservient to the text.<sup>7</sup> These roles would be dramatically reversed within the short space of a few years.

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Gerald Barry' (<http://www.cmc.ie/articles/article849.html>, 27 February 2012); Arminta Wallace, 'New "Tears" for Your Ears', *Irish Times*, 25 May 2005.

<sup>5</sup> In an interview with Kevin Myers, Barry had the following to say about the music department in UCD: 'I found studying there an extremely arid experience. The place was dead. There was no sense of music being a living thing. It was a real grind. The quickest way to make someone hate music was to send them to such a place. There was no passion about the place'. See Kevin Myers, 'From Stockhausen to the Petshop Boys'.

<sup>6</sup> Vincent Deane, 'The Music of Gerald Barry', *Soundpost 2* (1981), p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> An example of this is the sudden orchestral eruption that occurs in the middle of the work when the soprano sings the line: 'He will curse God again...' This is a rare instance of Barry attempting to directly capture the force of the words by summoning up a gesture of orchestral fury.

After graduating from UCD in 1973, Barry moved to Amsterdam to study composition with the Dutch composer Peter Schat.<sup>8</sup> After this he returned to UCD in order to complete a Masters degree, and then proceeded on to Cologne where he enrolled in Stockhausen's class at the Hochschule für Musik for the period 1975–6. In contrast to both Volans and Deane who were both self-confessed 'worshippers' of Stockhausen's music, Barry was no devotee although he did admire some of his early music.<sup>9</sup> However he soon found that the structural complexity and multiple layers of Stockhausen's music were totally alien to his own approach and described his studies during this time as 'unnatural and forced'.<sup>10</sup> Despite these reservations, he felt that Stockhausen gave him a greater awareness of form, although a direct influence on Barry's music in this area is difficult to discern.<sup>11</sup> A much more tangible influence is evident in the way that both composers generate sizeable amounts of material in the early stages while working on a composition. Here Barry often resorts to the same kind of extreme objectivity in following some self-devised strategy and pursuing it in the most logical fashion until a large amount of material is generated, most of which is then discarded leaving only that which is deemed suitable to be included in the final work. The various stages in such approaches were often the subject of Stockhausen's seminars and it is likely that Barry saw the merits in tailoring certain techniques to fit with his own more intuitive style of working.

After Stockhausen stopped teaching at the Hochschule, Barry began taking lessons from Mauricio Kagel. Kagel detested any kind of musical purism, and since the late 1960s had broken ranks with certain mainstream avant-garde principles by

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<sup>8</sup> Barry credits Schat with instilling in him an acute sensitivity for harmony and the piano work *Aries* which he composed during this time is noticeable for its thorough scrutinising of single chords. See Deane, 'The Music of Gerald Barry'. p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Ó Séaghdha, 'Breathing Space', p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Dervan, 'Bowers of Bliss, of Blood', p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Barry mentions Stockhausen's influence on the issue of form in many interviews but avoids going into any specifics. See for instance Dervan, 'Bowers of Bliss, of Blood', and Ó Séaghdha, 'Breathing Space'.

experimenting with historical referentiality.<sup>12</sup> Barry found Kagel much more amenable to his own temperament than Stockhausen and soon developed an interest in the composer's unique brand of music theatre, a genre which he had previously shown little interest in. Some of his works from this time such as *Beethoven Wo80* of 1976 and the Piano Concerto (1977–8) exhibit traces of the absurdist tendencies associated with his teacher but the overt theatrical devices in these pieces proved to be only a passing phase and most of the works in which such Kagelesque techniques are present have either been withdrawn or else extensively revised.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless Kagel certainly played a key role in awakening Barry's dramatic instincts which he now began to refine, allowing the latent theatricality of his own music to emerge in more oblique and less obvious ways. Given his own discarding of many of the proscriptions on reusing historical content, Kagel may also have had some influence on Barry's concept of musical material which began to be based heavily on reclaimed tonal objects. While Barry's natural inclinations probably lay in this direction anyway, he was not subjected to the same external pressures to write in a particular style as some of his colleagues.

In the music theatre piece *Things That Gain by Being Painted* (1977) for soprano, speaker, piano and cello, both of these developing aspects—a subtle theatricality and a language based on tonal remnants—come together to form the earliest work which Barry now acknowledges. The work is based on passages taken

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<sup>12</sup> For a good overview of this period in Kagel's career see, Björn Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 105–138.

<sup>13</sup> In *Beethoven Wo80* five singers and three pianists perform a set of theatrical cameos based on Beethoven's C minor Variations. The performers are in full costume and the piece is an extravagantly choreographed parody of operatic conventions; at one stage the mezzo-soprano sings her part upside down. This work has since been withdrawn. See Kevin Volans and Hilary Bracefield, 'A Constant State of Surprise: Gerald Barry and *The Intelligence Park*', *Contact* 31 (Autumn 1987), p. 9. Similar theatrics are present in the Piano Concerto (1977, rev. 2000) in which the principle soloist's part is mostly played by a second pianist hidden amongst the orchestra while the soloist is requested to mime his part. This absurdity carries over into the form of the piece where the traditional dialogue between the orchestra and the soloist is largely suppressed. In the revised version the theatrics are dropped.

from the Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon, a lady-in-waiting at the court of the Japanese empress towards the end of the 10th century. Barry's selections make up a series of random observations on a bewildering collection of topics: everything from why parents should not exhort their sons to become priests to the squalid appearance of the insides of a cat's ears. The tone of the text—written from Shōnagon's personal point of view—is frequently snobbish and highly opinionated, a factor which lends further humor to what seem to be a completely unrelated series of observations. However rather than relying on props or elaborate stagecraft to bring out the absurdist qualities of the text as perhaps Kagel might have done, Barry executes a series of deft maneuvers which allow such qualities to surface indirectly. The obvious strategy of attempting to capture the atmosphere of the text through music is jettisoned and a disorientating discrepancy is slowly allowed to emerge between the soprano's hard-edged delivery of Shōnagon's lines and the grace and refinement of the accompanying instrumental music which seems somewhat removed from proceedings. For most of the piece the cello plays a serene melodic line which generally avoids tonal outlines but whose pitches are constantly being harmonized by what Barry terms 'tonal innuendos'—staccato chords played on the piano which are mostly bare triads or seventh chords.<sup>14</sup> As the soprano prattles on seemingly oblivious to anything but her own preoccupations, random high As and Ds begin to be inserted between the words of her spoken lines, breaking the rhythm of her delivery. This unexpected device gives the impression of a woman not fully in control of her senses, an impression which is reinforced when the speaker, mysteriously concealed behind a screen, begins to take greater control of things, at first by announcing the topics on which the soprano is to deliver her disquisitions and

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<sup>14</sup>Deane, 'The Music of Gerald Barry', p. 15.

eventually by taking over her lines altogether while the soprano mimes. In another passage the soprano is forced to sing a sustained note while the speaker reads out a passage attacking Shōnagon written by her rival at court, Lady Murasaki. These devices result in a bizarre kind of humor but they also create an unsettling atmosphere through the mechanical puppet-like treatment of the main protagonist, a treatment which shows more affinities with the disintegrated Subject of late Beckett than the music theatre of Kagel.

*Things That Gain by Being Painted* was the first piece in which the detached objectivism of Barry's approach really began to emerge. It was also the piece where he began to achieve the kind of harmony he desired,<sup>15</sup> and over the next few years he worked at refining this language, paring it down to its essentials in a number of instrumental works. These works include the graphically titled pieces  $\emptyset$  and '\_\_\_' (both 1979) as well as the virtuosic piano pieces *Sur les Pointes* and *Au Milieu* (1981). The materials in each of these pieces are comprised of a range of familiar objects drawn from the language of tonality. The ensemble piece '\_\_\_' furnishes a good example in this regard. Most of the piece is based on ascending chromatic scales which according to Barry were inspired by those moments in Tchaikovsky's orchestral music where sweeping scales lead up to climactic points.<sup>16</sup> In other pieces the materials have their origin in various pre-existing sources which Barry transformed by using one of his self-devised derivational techniques (discussed in more detail later).

In these pieces Barry seemed to be testing the strength of his language by experimenting with ways of creating extended works based on such material, without

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Fitzgerald, 'Gerald Barry', in *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2013), p. 61.

<sup>16</sup> Kevin Volans, *Summer Gardeners: Conversations with Composers, Summer 1984* (Durban: Newer Music Edition, 1985), p. 1.

also having to re-admit the attendant connective tissue. The strategy pursued in *Things That Gain by Being Painted* of allowing the theatrical qualities of the text to emerge obliquely over an extended period of time is now carried over into these purely instrumental works where—like his treatment of Shōnagon’s text—he avoids engaging the material directly. The material is noticeable for its monad-like character where motivic development or indeed any attempt to build extended structures using the resources contained within the materials themselves are avoided. Instead Barry relies on a strategy of obsessive focus, continually recycling the same material until it obtains an ecstatic or eccentric quality. This intense concentration on certain passages—which often carries on for much longer than historical precedents would normally allow—has the uncanny effect of forcing the listener to adopt a different perspective on it. Although this strategy relies heavily on repetition, it differs from the predictable kind of repetition associated with minimalism in two important ways. In Barry’s music when a particular section is repeated it is nearly always changed in some way. In ‘\_\_\_’ for example, the lengths of the repeated scale fragments are constantly altered and usually played by a different combination of instruments on each statement. But more importantly, repetition is used in a very strategic way to set up temporary feelings of continuity within certain materials or with a particular set of parameters which are later undermined. His early music is therefore characterized by lengthy periods of a single texture which is broken by sudden and totally unpredictable shifts, a strategy which results in quite a pronounced sense of disintegratedness as the material never takes on the appearance of developing out of itself.

The obvious precedent for this approach to structure is Stravinsky who frequently resorted to obsessive repetition and block-structures. However the actual

nature of the material in Barry's music differs considerably from that of Stravinsky and would seem to be a reflection of the general disintegration of musical material that has occurred throughout the 20th century. Much of Stravinsky's second-hand material, particularly in his early and neo-classical works amounted to readily identifiable styles. Barry on the other hand, has had to delve much deeper into the actual nuts and bolts of music's vocabulary, resulting in a language which is much more skeletal and transparent than anything encountered in Stravinsky. In this regard, his approach comes closer to that of Beckett who in his late works similarly resorted to a variety of objective methods in order to rescue tired and worn-out fragments from oblivion. This similarity is most apparent in Barry's stage works and it was the medium of opera which was to occupy the next stage in his career.

ii) Second Period (1982–95)

From 1982 onwards Barry devoted his energies to the composition of his opera *The Intelligence Park* which would occupy him until 1988. The opera's libretto, written by Vincent Deane, is a highly artificial text constructed out of borrowings taken from 18th century literary sources.<sup>17</sup> It deals with the relations between 'sexuality, artistic creativity and power'<sup>18</sup> and is set in Dublin in the year 1753 centring on the activities of Robert Paradies, a composer desperately struggling to finish an opera.<sup>19</sup> For Barry, the lengthy gestation period of this major work incorporated a number of stylistic changes and it is possible to see the opera as a midway point between the early

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<sup>17</sup> Adrian Jack, 'Unspeakable Practices,' *Music Ireland* (July/August 1990), p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Fitzgerald quoted in Gerald Barry, 'The Intelligence Park,' *Contemporary Music Review* 5 (1989), p. 229.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Paradies may be named after the Italian composer and teacher Domenico Paradies who emigrated to London in 1746. Like the main protagonist of Barry's opera Paradies hailed from Venice and similarly struggled with operatic composition; his career is marked by a series of failures in this genre. The music he wrote for a setting of Vanneschi's *Fetonte* was described by Charles Burney as 'ill-phrased and lacking in grace'. See Donald C. Sanders, 'Sunday Music: The Sonatas of Domenico Paradies', *The Musical Times* 145/1886 (Spring 2004), pp. 68–74.



acknowledged works and the eruption of polyphonic activity that emerged to be the dominant feature of his work from 1988 to the mid-1990s. The refinement of line he had achieved in the early pieces becomes a major focus of the opera where the attention now turns towards expanding the textures into two-part and four-part polyphony. Many of Barry's lines retain a diatonic or modal character which is undermined by the presence of what Anthony Bye termed 'vagrant chromaticisms', frequently only a single note.<sup>20</sup> These are placed in such a way that they can't be heard as passing notes and have a distinctly disorientating effect.

Some of the opera's pitch material is derived from the music of 17th and 18th century composers such as Arne, Buxtehude, Byrd, Dowland and Handel but the main source is Barry's extraction of passing chords from Bach's chorales.<sup>21</sup> Any borrowed material is extensively modified and re-combined in a variety of different ways to make the original unrecognisable. The doubling of lines in unison or at the octave in both of the graphically titled ensemble pieces,  $\emptyset$  and '\_\_\_' as well as the orchestral work *Diner*, is a marked feature of the opera's orchestration and Barry's preference for a 'rough' or 'unfinished' quality continues to remain a priority.

The gradual move towards a more polyphonic style of writing provided Barry with another means of restructuring second-hand materials. By superimposing layers of melodic material he could create textures of various different densities. In an interview with Kevin Volans he described his unorthodox approach to writing counterpoint while working on his organ piece *Fouetté et Ballon* (now withdrawn)—a piece written while he was composing the opera:

I had this long line written out, in two parts, lasting several minutes, and I simply began at the end and reversed it—I played the retrograde with the

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<sup>20</sup> A term used by Anthony Bye in his article, 'Gay Days Spent in Gladness', *The Musical Times* 134/1807 (September 1993), p. 500.

<sup>21</sup> For a more detailed discussion on how pitch material from the Bach chorales is used in *The Intelligence Park* see Volans and Bracefield, 'A Constant State of Surprise', pp. 14–16.

original and it happened to work well (with modifications), so you do get all these interlocking, polyphonic textures, but that is purely... artificial, and it's forced. I don't think it sounds, forced but it is.<sup>22</sup>

While this is possibly an extreme example, in *The Intelligence Park* lines are combined in a similarly constructivist fashion, another instance of how form is imposed on material from above. While this may strike some as an excessively cavalier approach to composition the end results are consistent with the roughness of finish that Barry aims to achieve. The contours of his lines are often quite angular and this, combined with his complete disregard for the traditional rules of counterpoint, frequently results in a high level of dissonance. Combined with his structuralist approach to dynamics and articulation and his preference for mechanical pulsation, these factors have the effect of compressing material into densely packed concentrations of frenetic activity. This process enlivens melodic material that if subjected to a less thorough treatment would doubtlessly appear quite banal.

In terms of the larger structure, *The Intelligence Park* brought Barry's block form method of construction into sharper relief due to the fast pacing of events. The jump-cut transitions between sections lend the music a fractured quality and the sudden shifts between moments of withdrawn introspection and riotous activity are more extreme than in the early works. His approach can perhaps be compared to the arrangement of objects in a cubist painting where the individual components, while less 'organically' connected than in traditional figurative painting, ultimately come together and coalesce into a recognisable form. Relations between the parts are achieved through non-motivic parameters such as tempo, dynamics, and density of texture in much the same way as gradations of colour and rhythmic proportioning lend an overall coherence to the fragmented surface of a cubist painting. An example of one strand of interconnectedness in *The Intelligence Park* is the very perceptible

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<sup>22</sup> Volans, *Summer Gardeners*, p. 5.

accrual of momentum throughout which culminates in the climactic third act where the pace of the music is relentless. Furthermore the feeling of brokenness which Barry's mode of block structuring induces is closely related to the condition of the characters in the opera itself.

*The Intelligence Park* also introduced Barry's unique style of vocal writing. His lines frequently contradict the phrasing of the words, jump across registers, disregard the natural stresses and even split up words. The pattern of delivery is often mechanistic with an insistent pulse regularly driving the words beyond comprehensibility. This style of writing is once again related to his indirect approach to text-setting which aims to create a world that is several degrees removed from the kind of literal understanding that a surface reading of the text might seem to suggest.

As he related to Barra O Séaghdha:

Sometimes I had music on which I imposed the text—rather ruthlessly, in what some people would consider a rather cavalier fashion. But I never considered it so. I'm not interested in those operas which take what might be stage plays and set them to music, so that the only difference between these plays and opera is that they are sung. I'm looking to inhabit that mysterious world between text and music, which would produce a different, more mysterious offspring.<sup>23</sup>

Like *Things That Gain by Being Painted*, this unconventional approach to text setting opens up the drama to multiple perspectives. On one level, there is an element of humour in the pure artificiality of the way the lines are sung. However the same levelling-out effect that occurs with Barry's musical material also extends to his vocal lines which are, after all, essentially instrumental lines transferred to the voice. The natural rhythm of the words is completely shattered giving the characters a brittle and somewhat dehumanised appearance, a condition which summons feelings of both shock and pity at the barren and dislocated world which they inhabit. In this way, Barry's distinctive style of vocal writing can be interpreted as a systematic

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<sup>23</sup> Ó Séaghdha, 'Breathing Space', pp. 16–17.

critique of the conventional codes that opera has traditionally relied upon to convey the emotional states of its characters.

After *The Intelligence Park*, Barry set about expanding the scope and variety of his polyphonic writing. The work which decisively broke new ground in these searches was the orchestral work *Chevaux-de-frise* (1988) where he used canon in a number of sections to create richer textures. This technique would become the dominant contrapuntal device over the coming years, allowing Barry to generate extended passages of music from a relatively small amount of initial material. The rapid cuts between sections that were such a feature of *The Intelligence Park*, also determine the form of *Chevaux-de-frise* and this trait carries over into Barry's instrumental works from this time onwards. Although *Chevaux-de-frise* maintains the insistent pulse of his early works, the sections interposed to occasionally disrupt this regularity show a more varied approach to rhythm than had previously been the case. In a number of other instrumental works composed after *Chevaux-de-frise*, such as *Bob* (1989) and *Triorchic Blues* (1990) this tendency towards rhythmic complexity becomes even more pronounced.

The culmination of this polyphonic phase in Barry's music was undoubtedly his second opera *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* (1991–2) based on a reworking of Handel's oratorio *The Triumph of Time and Truth* (the 1757 English translation and revision of the Italian oratorio *Il trionfo del tempo e del disinganno* of 1707). In Barry's version the outcome is turned on its head with Pleasure, aided by Deceit, triumphing over Truth and Time and claiming Beauty as the prize. The opera's libretto, written by Meredith Oakes, is a witty parody of some of the stylistic traits in the original English translation. Canonic procedures feature strongly throughout and much of the music attains a level of rhythmic complexity unprecedented in Barry's

music up to this point. Along with the high levels of instrumental virtuosity required, the demands placed on the singers are even more extreme than *The Intelligence Park*. While virtuosity, especially in terms of sheer speed, has already been noted as one of Barry's strategies to transform material, in *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* he also offers the following explanation as to how this relates to the underlying theme of time and its destructive power:

Images of flight from time litter the text. And desire for its destruction. Here, virtuosity magically, is offered as means of suspending time, keeping one safe from it. It's as if protection from its ravages is the reward for the music and singing being brilliant enough. Vocal brilliance therefore, sometimes enfolds the text. The text becomes abstract, foreign, perspective with a single viewpoint momentarily abandoned.<sup>24</sup>

Canonic activity continues to feature in the music Barry composed after *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* in works such as the Sextet (1992–3), *The Chair* (1994) and *The Conquest of Ireland* (1995) but from the mid-1990s onwards there is once again evidence of a further shift in style.

### iii) Third Period (1995–2005)

Up until the mid-1990s, most of Barry's music had been preoccupied with melody and its arrangement into a variety of different textures. Thus a relatively straightforward line of development can be discerned from the spare monodic writing of the early works to the rich polyphony of the later pieces. After *The Conquest of Ireland* however, Barry entered a new phase in his career perhaps prompted by the conclusion that he had exhausted the possibilities of polyphony and needed to search for a new direction. The years 1995–2005 were therefore a period of experimentation, where a diverse range of pieces were produced. Although many of these pieces appear to be quite different from each other they all possess a number of

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<sup>24</sup> Programme note for *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit*, Almeida Opera, London 27 June 2002.

shared concerns that in retrospect can be seen as attempts to respond to changes in Barry's conception of musical material.

This change can perhaps be explained in the following way. Up until *The Conquest of Ireland*, Barry generally tended to construct substantial musical ideas that either occupied the entire piece (as in the early pieces) or else inhabited block-like sections. In both cases, pitch material would be fashioned into a substantial entity with a distinct character: a melody, a homophonic section of chords, a polyphonic section, a canon etc. which would be recycled in various different ways. In this third period however, Barry began to approach the reinterpretation of tonal elements in a new way. It becomes more the case that the individual historical objects themselves—tonal chords, arpeggios, declamatory statements, scraps of popular melody—instead of amounting collectively to a substantial musical idea, are presented for their own sake. The musical surface becomes even more fragmented and there is a gradual move away from an exclusively melodic way of thinking towards what could be described as a more gestural style of writing.

The beginnings of this tendency can be observed in the Piano Quartet No. 2 (1996) where the individual ideas become more compressed but it is with the composition of *The Road* for orchestra in 1998, that it really begins to take hold. Much of the piece contains sections where the texture consists exclusively of short gestural statements juxtaposed alongside each other in a stream of consciousness type manner. He described his approach as follows:

[The Road] is one of the pieces where I was using a familiar musical language rather like ... I think of it often more in a visual way like sculpture than as music—as if I was collecting familiar objects that would be part of everyday life—cutting them up and juxtaposing them to produce a rather strange view of tonality. It is like a visit to a strange tonal past in a way.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Jean Martin, 'Gerald Barry: Conversation with Jean Martin' (<http://www.soundbasis.eu/writing/Barry.html>, 8 October 2013).

In his descriptions of pieces like *The Road*, String Quartet No. 2 ‘1998’ (1998) and *The Eternal Recurrence* (1999), Barry frequently resorts to visual metaphors to explain the nature of the textures he was attempting to create. He describes each of these musical objects as being like the individual dots of paint in a pointillistic painting by an artist like Seurat, where all the points come together to form the picture.<sup>26</sup> Also significant in this period is the role that musical memory—particularly of his childhood—plays in determining his choice of material. Much of the material consists of sounds extracted from passages of the repertoire which hold a certain resonance for him and are in some way connected to his earliest experiences of music.<sup>27</sup>

From a critical perspective, this new approach presents a number of formal problems of the kind that were discussed in chapter 1. The major problem with such an assemblage-like approach to composition is the risk of reducing the material to an indifferent mass of sounds. Objectified materials require a fresh injection of subjectivity to breathe new life into them and since they no longer possess a form-producing capacity of their own it is therefore necessary to create new forms in order to accommodate them. If this formal tension is absent, the music risks descending into a meaningless jumble of sounds. The diversity of approaches in the works at the beginning of this period is perhaps symptomatic of Barry’s attempts to formulate a solution to this problem. One solution employed in both *The Road* and *Before the Road* (1997), was to balance the wild heterogeneity of certain sections with other areas in which a single idea is worked on for a more extended period of time. However this technique resulted in a rather loose, confused structure and his recent withdrawal of *The Road* would perhaps seem to indicate that Barry himself was not

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

convinced by this approach. Another solution was to limit the amount of objects to just a few gestures and work obsessively on them throughout the entire piece so that they eventually obtain the kind of ecstatic quality through repetition and variation that was a feature of the early works. The first example of this is the String Quartet No. 2 '1998' where a small collection of short gestures are continually recycled over the course of the work's twenty minute duration. As this period progressed Barry seemed to develop an instinctive feel for placing different fragments in certain orders which seemed to work better than others; the analysis of the short piano piece *Agnes von Hohenstaufen* (2003) later in this chapter investigates some of the possible structural considerations behind the ordering of these fragments.

Throughout these years the setting of texts in some of the larger-scale pieces also helped provide greater coherence. *The Eternal Recurrence*, a setting of lines from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* for soprano and orchestra, was Barry's most improvisatory-like score to date. Again, the work uses familiar musical gestures which Barry attempted to infuse with the kind of ecstasy he perceived in the extremely vivid renderings of familiar objects in the still-life paintings of Chardin.<sup>28</sup> Although some of the material does recur at certain points—tying in with the philosophical concerns of the text—the overriding impression is of the continual appearance of new material. Alongside this more open approach to musical structure, there is a corresponding change in Barry's style of text setting. While still remaining far from conventional, the setting of the text in *The Eternal Recurrence* is not as blatantly subversive as his earlier work. The non-expressive, pulsating quality that dominated much of his music up until the mid-1990s gives way to a more undulating and changeable musical surface. The delivery of the words is not as mechanistic and

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



there isn't the same degree of fragmentation inflicted. Indeed at times, the music often appears responsive to some of the ideas contained within the text, even if this response is never direct in a literal sense. For example, many of the soprano's lines in *The Eternal Recurrence* are immediately followed by suggestive orchestral statements which although not illustrative in any concrete fashion, are conspicuous enough to prompt the listener to speculate on their intended meaning.

As with the two previous periods when Barry's style underwent a considerable stylistic shift, the period as a whole culminated in the composition of an opera. *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (2002–5) based on the play and film by the German film director Rainer Werner Fassbinder, differs quite markedly from either *The Intelligence Park* or *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit*. The opera discards the artificiality of the earlier works in favour of a more realistic scenario involving Petra von Kant, a famous fashion designer who has a disastrous love affair with a younger woman named Karin whom she has recently taken on as a model. According to Barry the opera 'deals with her obsession, her rejection by Karin, and her disintegration'.<sup>29</sup> Unusually, he decided to set Fassbinder's text—which has a more conventional speech-like quality than the earlier librettos—in its entirety. The style of vocal writing pioneered in *The Eternal Recurrence* is injected with a rapid *parlando* which is primarily designed to navigate the sheer size of the libretto, but also gives the opera a feverish, accelerated quality. In discussing the relationship of the music to the text, Barry commented:

The music isn't illustrative in the conventional way, but it mirrors the complex way people speak. For instance, the two of us could be talking now but we might be thinking about all sorts of other things; there could be a whole kaleidoscope of emotion running through our heads.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Programme note for *Petra von Kant*, Dublin 27 May 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Charlotte Higgins, 'Gerald Barry on His Opera *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*', *The Guardian*, 9 Sep 2005.

In this way the fragmented, gestural nature of Barry's music forms a parallel narrative of unspoken thoughts which shadow the text. This strategy is particularly effective given the personalities of the main characters whose trivial utterances often seem to conceal more complicated underlying emotions and desires.

Having surveyed the main stylistic divisions in Barry's career and his unique approach to reworking historical materials it is now time to analyse in detail how these compositional strategies operate in the actual music itself. In all of the following analyses the goal is twofold. First, the intention will be to show how Barry justifies the re-inclusion of familiar materials in a contemporary context by subjecting them to some level of critique; while the second aim will be to uncover some of the ways in which he manages to create extended forms from such material without having to resort to traditional methods. Both of these issues are obviously closely intertwined. The analyses will begin with Barry's 1981 piano piece, *Sur les Pointes* which illustrates some of the fundamental workings of his approach in a clear and concise form while lending some context to the sections which follow it.

## II) PARADIGM ANALYSIS: OBJECTIVITY AND BRUTALITY IN *SUR LES POINTES*

*Sur les Pointes* is a particularly apposite work to be the subject of a paradigm analysis as it neatly encapsulates what has repeatedly been referred to up to this point as the 'objectivity' of Barry's approach, a concept which will now be further clarified. What is meant by Barry's 'objectivity' is the almost mechanical way in which a range of procedures are applied to large swathes of material at virtually every stage of the compositional process. In *Sur les Pointes* this can be observed right from the outset where melodic pitch material is derived from the Irish tune 'Bonny Kate' using a simple rules-based procedure. This objectivity is further

evident in the way that the material is then subject to blanket applications of a single rhythm, dynamic or mode of articulation rather than transformation taking place at the micro-structural level. As this analysis hopes to show these decisions are carried out in a decidedly impersonal manner, almost as if Barry simply flicks a set of switches and the texture instantly changes to a new mode of presentation.

*Sur les Pointes* is also perhaps the most representative work of Barry's early attempts to write music which would be independent of tone-colour. It exists in numerous scorings and its genesis is intertwined with several other works. The melodic pitch material first appears in  $\emptyset$  for two pianos which Barry had composed in 1979. Later that same year, he inserted chords underneath a section of the melody and used it as part of the score for *Unkrautgarten*, a ballet commissioned by the choreographer Reinhild Hoffmann.<sup>31</sup> In 1981 he expanded this material into what eventually became *Sur les Pointes* named after the ballet term which describes the elevation of the body onto the tips of the toes.

Essentially the piece can be divided into two sections: the first part consists of a lengthy exposition of chords while the second contains three manic variations on this material which push the virtuosity of the performer to an extreme. The first part may be performed on any keyboard instrument with the appropriate range and versions of it also exist for various chamber ensembles, choir and orchestra. The full work however, due to the technical requirements of the second section, is suitable only for piano and it is this version that is the subject of the following analysis.

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<sup>31</sup> Adrian Jack, 'Introducing Gerald Barry', *The Musical Times* 129/1746 (August 1988), p. 390.

i) From ‘Bonny Kate’ to *Sur les Pointes*

The borrowing of pitch materials from pre-existing musical sources is a feature of nearly all of Barry’s works in one way or another. It is also a part of his approach which is frequently misunderstood and discussions of these sources often receive a disproportionate amount of attention in commentaries on his music than they actually deserve. The important thing to note about Barry’s use of pre-existing musical sources is that they are nearly always transformed beyond recognition through some invented system which renders a knowledge of the original pitch source irrelevant to the experience of actually hearing the music itself.<sup>32</sup> Indeed it is not just pre-existing musical materials which Barry limits himself to, any source—letters, sequences of numbers or charts—can conceivably be used if they happen to generate the right material.<sup>33</sup> Barry regards his ear as the final arbiter and reserves the right to break with the system at any point in order to achieve the desired result.

To analyse the melodic material of *Sur les Pointes*, it will be necessary to briefly refer to  $\emptyset$ , where the melody first appears. To derive this melody, Barry took the Irish folk tune ‘Bonny Kate’ and inserted two pitches—one a tone above and the other a tone below—on either side of each note from the original tune (see example 2.1). Regarding the exact placement of these notes he generally followed the contour of the original folk tune so that when the melody descends he places the note which precedes the ‘Bonny Kate’ note above and the note which follows it below. The opposite occurs when the line ascends. The exception to this procedure occurs in the case of the note E heard twice at the midpoint of each successive statement of ‘Bonny Kate’, where Barry places two more E’s on either side of the ‘Bonny Kate’ note. This variant of the procedure endows the note E, which previously had been the

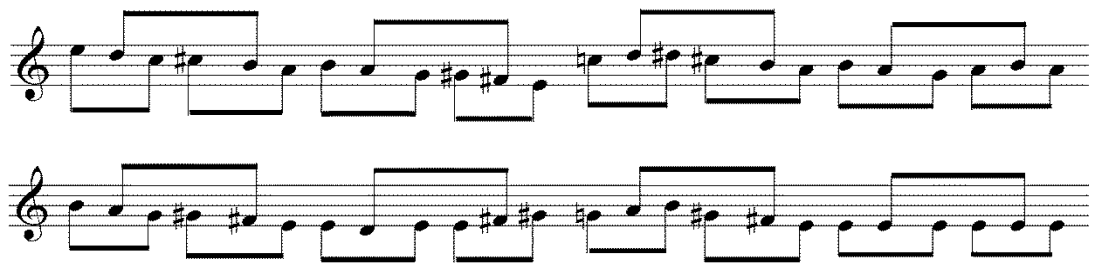
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<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of this technique in relation to *The Intelligence Park* see, Volans and Bracefield, ‘A Constant State of Surprise’, pp. 14–16.

<sup>33</sup> Deane, ‘The Music of Gerald Barry’, pp. 16–17.

supertonic in ‘Bonny Kate’, with a certain hierarchical significance as a constant point of reference. Although the technique is applied quite systematically, there are numerous points where Barry breaks the rules. For example, the note inserted after the D—the fifth note in the ‘Bonny Kate’ tune—is a semi-tone higher rather than the usual tone. Kevin Volans remarked that this may have been due to Barry’s wish to avoid introducing the important note E too early in the melodic line.<sup>34</sup>

**Example 2.1** ‘Bonny Kate’ and Derivation of Pitch Material in  $\emptyset$



In the end the procedure yields a melodic line characterised by a mostly stepwise meandering movement. There is nothing obviously radical or innovative about this line and in certain respects it appears quite ordinary. Although it doesn’t fit neatly into any particular key, certain features allow tonal residues to filter through. As well as the aforementioned hierarchical significance accorded to the note E, other intervallic sequences reminiscent of tonality can be detected for example in the way that the approach to the important E note is made consistently via the 3-2-1 degrees of an E major scale, the common cadential approach in tonal music. While these glances towards the tonal past are an important part of the line’s character, more noteworthy are those aspects of it which are distinctly un-traditional and help create a sense of distance. One of the ways Barry achieves this is through the complete suppression of what are usually considered to be the conventional bearers of subjective expression, namely phrasing and rhythm. There are no phrase marks or

<sup>34</sup> Volans and Bracefield, ‘A Constant State of Surprise’, p. 10.

internal divisions within the line and any rhythmic interest is decisively neutralised by the consistent stream of plodding crotchets. Both of these features give the line a detached and automated quality which is compounded at the beginning of  $\emptyset$  by the insertion of a period of silence between the opening two notes and the rest of the piece that lasts for over 30 seconds.

## ii) Harmony and the Distribution of Pitch Material in the First Section

Like the ‘Bonny Kate’ derived melody, the harmony in *Sur les Pointes* is a typical example of Barry’s use of traditional components reassembled in untraditional ways. Many of the chords have a triadic component although their employment is always strictly non-functional. The opening ten chords aptly demonstrate this aspect of his music.

### Example 2.2 Barry: *Sur les Pointes*, Opening

The musical score for the opening of 'Sur les Pointes' by Barry is presented in a piano (p) and staccatissimo style. It features a sequence of 13 chords, numbered 1 through 13, in G major. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 76. The chords are primarily triadic in structure, with some dyads and dyads with a common tone. The notation is staccatissimo, with notes marked with a staccatissimo symbol.

While this sequence of chords is not in itself particularly unusual—as many of Barry’s contemporaries often make similar uses of such material—what distinguishes Barry is the extreme lengths he goes to in order to go beyond its ordinariness. In the first section the material is subjected to a strategy of obsessive focus with Barry constructing a succession of 335 such chords which take up just over nine minutes of the work’s thirteen minute duration. This prolonged sequence of chords (referred to by number as there are no barlines) contains a number of large-scale ‘cut-and-paste’ repetitions. Chords 1–175 form one self-contained sequence with only minor internal

repetitions. Chords 176–221 are a repeat of chords 1–131 with several large sections excluded. Chord 222 is a stand-alone chord which is not repeated anywhere else in the section and marks the end of the version for harpsichord and organ. Chords 224–307 are a repeat of Chords 1–85 and the final section (chords 308–335) repeat chords 141–168. While on one hand the intense concentration on this sequence is designed to bring the material into sharper focus, a far more important purpose of the section's length is to induce a feeling of prolonged sameness in order to magnify the shock effect of the second section where Barry's brutalisation strategy is unleashed.

### iii) Subversion of Regularity and Articulation

Although the understated banality of this first section is a calculated dramatic ploy, a passage lasting nine minutes of nothing but chords articulated in crotchets would undoubtedly be boring if this were all that was to it and Barry is thus compelled to do something to keep the music alive. A precedent for his approach can be found in the indirect theatricality of his music theatre piece *Things That Gain by Being Painted* where the precise details of the text were largely ignored and instead a disorienting sense of humour is introduced through the insertion of sung high As and Ds between the words of the soprano's spoken delivery. In *Sur les Pointes* a similar tactic is pursued. The harmonic and thematic content of the materials are left undeveloped and instead Barry focuses on undermining the section's regular pulse by inserting rests at irregular intervals between the chords, interrupting the section's predominantly crotchet rhythm. This begins very subtly with the insertion of an extra quaver rest between chords 19 and 20 (example 2.3a) and again between chords 67 and 68 which momentarily suspends the arrival of the next chord. This gap is widened considerably after chord 86 where the usual dotted quaver rest between

chords is augmented by an extra three and a half crotchets leading to the sudden appearance of a tri-tone (B, F) (example 2.3b). This tritone is sustained, the first chord to do so in the piece, but ultimately it amounts to nothing and the staccato chords resume. These silences, both long and short, as well as the tritone intrusions, act as diversionary strategies, appearing to introduce the possibility of new material which never arrives. They also add a latent sense of instability to a texture which on the whole is very much notable for its regularity.

**Example 2.3 (a+b)** Barry: *Sur les Pointes*, Subversion of Rhythmic Regularity

The other variation strategy—mentioned in the introduction as a measure of Barry’s objective treatment of material—involves changing the tempo, articulation and dynamic directions in large uniform blocks. Chords 1–118 for instance are all staccatissimo with a dynamic of *p* and a tempo marking of 76. The following section (chords 119–139) is legato, *pp* and is to be played *poco piú mosso*. A further variation on the staccatissimo occurs between chords 176 and 222 where each chord has at least one of its notes sustained for the full crotchet beat. In the last section (chords 223–335) there is a very gradual build-up in intensity. The light



staccatissimo is replaced by a more weighty legato while the tempo and dynamic levels are increased. From chord 307 to 334 the right hand is moved up one octave adding to the sense that the music is coming to some sort of climax. Characteristically however, this is merely another diversionary tactic as the tritone dyad intervenes and the music fades to silence.

#### iv) Objective Process and Brutalisation

Arriving out of nowhere, the shock impact of the second section is a prime example of Barry's predilection for suddenly shifting between extremes. The music erupts into a manic outburst of activity and dramatically shifts to the polar opposite in several parameters: extreme regularity is supplanted by extreme irregularity, the pedestrian pace of the opening is replaced by passages of immense speed, and the music is played as loud as possible in contrast to the much softer dynamic of the chordal sequence. The new section can be divided into three distinct subsections each characterised by the application of a ruthlessly objective procedure to pitch material carried over from earlier in the piece. From an analytical point of view, as striking as the impact of the music, is the apparent simplicity and transparency of these procedures. In the first sub-section marked 'martellato e rubato', Barry simply arpeggiates chords 9–175 in octaves and semi-quavers at the speed of crotchet=112 (example 2.4). On one level, this systematic mapping of pitch materials is once again an indication of the objective way in which Barry recycles material. However it also reveals the degree to which subjective choice is always the final arbiter. The subsection omits chords 31, 80, 94–97, 142, 166–173 for no particular reason other than, to Barry's ears, they didn't suit the final result he had in mind.

**Example 2.4** Barry: *Sur les Pointes*, ‘martellato e rubato’

The musical score for Example 2.4 is a piano piece. It begins with the instruction 'martellato e rubato' and a tempo marking of a quarter note equal to 112. The music is written for piano with a treble and bass clef. The first measure (measure 9) starts with a fortissimo (*fff*) dynamic. The score shows a series of chords, each with notes arpeggiated in uniform semiquavers. Pedal markings ('ped.') are present under measures 9, 10, and 11. A 'sim.' (sustained) marking is under measure 12. Measure numbers 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 are indicated below the staff.

As the amount of notes in each of the original chords ranged from two to eight, Barry’s manner of arpeggiating each note in uniform semiquavers produces all sorts of irregular rhythmic groupings. This can be seen in example 2.5 which shows the original chords 51–60 and their arpeggiations in the first subsection. The groupings vary between two to five semi-quavers. Significantly this passage comes after the arpeggiations of chords 44–51 which are all four-note chords containing the same pitches (E, F sharp, G sharp, E) thus producing a regular pattern. There is also a further contrast in that the arpeggiations of chords 44–51 are played without pedal while the rest of the chords in the subsection are pedaled. Again, this is another instance of the interplay between regularity and irregularity, this time internally within a single block.

**Example 2.5** Barry: *Sur les Pointes*, Arpeggiation of chords 51–60

The musical score for Example 2.5 shows the arpeggiation of chords 51 through 60. The music is written for piano with a treble and bass clef. The chords are arpeggiated in uniform semiquavers. A marking '8va-1' is present above measure 55. Measure numbers 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, and 60 are indicated below the staff.

Towards the end of the sub-section Barry introduces more rhythmic variations in the form of polyrhythmic contrasts between both hands. The arpeggiations of chords

158–161 (example 2.6) have triplets and quintuplet groupings in the right hand over semi-quaver groupings of four in the left-hand. The appearance of vertical sonorities (also derived from the original chords) in the right hand adds to the chaotic frenzy.

**Example 2.6** Barry: *Sur les Pointes*, Polyrhythmic contrast

The musical score for Example 2.6 spans measures 158 to 164. The right hand (treble clef) contains several rhythmic groupings: measures 158, 159, and 160 each feature a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 161 contains a quintuplet of eighth notes. Measures 162 and 163 feature a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand (bass clef) consists of a continuous stream of eighth notes, grouped in fours. Vertical sonorities are indicated by brackets in the right hand, showing chords that align with the eighth-note groups in the left hand.

The second and final subsections—which are prefaced with the direction ‘Like a mad pianola’ and ‘sempre furibondo’—take this objectivity even further. In the second, the original chords underneath the melody are uniformly replaced by a major triad in the right hand and a major third in the left hand mostly in groupings of two quavers each (example 2.7). In the final subsection the chords are changed to minor triads in both hands that form eleventh chords when combined with the melody. With a tempo marking of  $\text{minim}=120$  and  $112$  respectively, the demands made on the performer here are ferocious and the dynamic level of triple forte is increased to quadruple forte for the final ‘sempre furibondo’ subsection.

**Example 2.7** Barry: *Sur les Pointes*, First chords of the final two subsections

The musical score for Example 2.7 shows the first chords of the final two subsections. Above the staff, the tempo marking is  $\text{♩} = 120$  with the instruction ‘Like a mad pianola’. The score consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. Both hands feature vertical sonorities, which are chords that appear simultaneously in both hands. The chords are primarily triads and dyads, as described in the text.

Again however, despite the overall thoroughness of the process applied, Barry still leaves room to insert anomalies which disrupt the purity of the system. Examples of these in the ‘Like a mad pianola’ subsection include the presence of a single solitary accent on the 24th chord (example 2.8a); the insertion of a group of three quavers to disrupt the predominant grouping in twos (example 2.8b); and the fleeting appearance of part of the melody in octaves compressed between an aperture in the chordal texture (example 2.8c).

**Example 2.8 (a, b+c)** Barry: *Sur les Pointes*, Anomalies

The image displays three staves of musical notation, each representing a different anomaly in the 'Like a mad pianola' subsection. The first staff (a) shows a sequence of chords with a single accent mark above the 24th chord. The second staff (b) shows a sequence of chords with a group of three quavers inserted. The third staff (c) shows a sequence of chords with a fleeting appearance of part of the melody in octaves compressed between an aperture in the chordal texture.

Even by avant-garde standards, the sheer force of the music in this section leaves a powerful impact. However its radicalism differs markedly from that of previous generations of avant-garde composers whose claims in this regard were usually based on the discovery of new material. Here the constitution of the material itself—constructed as it is from everyday, familiar elements—contains nothing particularly unusual. Instead, the radicalism of the passage lies in the formal procedures applied

to such ordinary language and the extremes of tempo and loudness which are brought to bear on it, transforming it into something new. From this perspective, Barry's insistence on absolute accuracy in performance is more readily understandable as the music's very success depends on the tempo specifications being met exactly with virtuosity being an integral part of the structural process.<sup>35</sup>

Barry's music is defined by its extremes and *Sur les Pointes* was the first work in which the outer boundaries of his style were so starkly brought to the fore. Although these extremes are juxtaposed side by side in hard-edged blocks, it is clear that their arrangement within the context of the overall form is far from arbitrary. The length of the first section is carefully proportioned so as to increase the impact of the second and its numerous interruptions and diversions are finely calculated to rupture an underlying continuity, which itself is a further illusion brought on by a melody which purposefully sets about going nowhere. Within the second section too there is a further contrast between the flamboyant octave arpeggiations at the beginning and the much more mechanical pulverisation of material that occurs in the final two subsections. Oppositions can therefore be seen to operate at numerous different levels between blocks and even within the individual blocks themselves. The relative impact of the sudden changes which occur are always dependant on their relation to other areas in which the opposite texture, dynamic or mode of articulation is present. Through the skilful arrangement of these parameters Barry's music maintains a binding tension and brings into being a way re-hearing the familiar and the banal in a radically new light.

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<sup>35</sup> *Sur les Pointes* was due to be performed at the International Society of Contemporary Music's World Music Days in Budapest in 1986. However Barry personally intervened to block the performance as he was unhappy with the scheduled pianist's playing and insisted that a recording of the work played by Kevin Volans be substituted. The report of the incident in *Music Ireland* also notes that 'Barry, who believes that his *Au Milieu* suffered from a weak performance at last year's WMD's in Amsterdam, spoke out at the last meeting of the general assembly in Budapest about "the generally poor standard of ISCM performances" and the "wretchedness of most of the music performed"'. See *Music Ireland* (May 1986), p. 7.

### III) OBJECTIVE STRUCTURING IN TEXTURE, HARMONY AND ORCHESTRATION

As the analysis of *Sur les Pointes* has demonstrated, Barry's manipulation of material makes for a stark contrast with more organic approaches to composition. Although the simplicity of the procedures themselves might at first appear limited in scope, they extend to many parameters of his music and are an integral part of the underlying consistency which forms the basis of his personal style. This next section examines the extension of these techniques to other areas of his music from *The Intelligence Park* onwards. The first part looks at the way in which Barry builds structures by superimposing layers of melodic material while the second part examines how he achieves different harmonic and instrumental textures through the technique of stratification.

#### i) The Superimposition of Material

Before *The Intelligence Park* Barry's music had been almost exclusively monodic or homophonic. With the gradual move towards a more polyphonic style of writing he found that by superimposing two or more lines on top of each other he could create a greater variety of textures ranging from the poignantly withdrawn to the manically frenzied depending on the number of instrumental doublings and the type of tempo, dynamics and articulation specified.

Example 2.9 shows an excerpt from the central section in *From the Intelligence Park* (1986)—a satellite work for chamber orchestra featuring material that would later appear in the opera—where the writing is in two-parts.<sup>36</sup> The example is typical in that the melodic lines are constructed from pitch collections which show evidence of residual tonal or modal characteristics. In the upper line

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<sup>36</sup> The work was formerly called *Of Queen's Gardens*.

most of the melody is constructed from pitches which make up the white-notes of the piano. There are however a number of ‘vagrant chromaticisms’ (B flat, D sharp and F sharp) which obscure the modal purity of the collection. A similar arrangement can be observed in the lower line which is freely counterpointed against it.

**Example 2.9** Barry: *From the Intelligence Park*, Bars 199–206

Piccolo/Oboe/Clarinet/Marimba/Violin

Viola/Trumpet

Double Bass/Piano/Trombone/Bassoon

Piano

The character of these lines also reveals many of the classic features of Barry’s melodic writing: an angular and unpredictable contour, an absence of any kind of ‘expressive’ dynamics, and a mechanistic rhythm of quavers tripped up by the insertion of crotchets at random intervals. The combination of these factors helps erode any remaining hierarchies in the material, giving it a brittle and neutralised quality. However it is when these lines are combined at speed that they produce something quite new in Barry’s music. The anarchic manner in which they are layered—riding roughshod over the traditional rules of counterpoint—results in a highly abrasive and dissonant texture leaving the impression of material being compressed into a highly focused yet internally chaotic torrent of activity. The

multiple doubling of the lines also helps to increase their presence and further thickens the texture.

Example 2.10 shows an excerpt from Act 2 Scene 1 of the opera itself where the magistrate Cramer is expounding upon the ‘malevolence of time’ and the need to accelerate preparations for the wedding between Paradies and Jerusha. Here the treatment of material is even more objectively organised than the previous example and is indicative of the kind of crude structuring that Barry alluded to in the interview with Kevin Volans quoted earlier. The writing is again in two-parts with unison doublings but this time instead of free counterpoint the lines are simply superimposed with their mirror inversion. The pitch content of the lower line can be interpreted as a collection drawn from the F major scale with the pitches G flat and E flat functioning as ‘vagrant chromaticisms’. Once again, the uniform quavers, the fast tempo, the unpredictable phrasing and the flat dynamics give the material an impersonal quality although a certain harmonic colour is preserved by the continual circling around the note F and the quasi-diatonic nature of the pitch collections used.

**Example 2.10** Barry: *The Intelligence Park*, Act 2 Scene 1, Bars 208–214

The musical score for Example 2.10 consists of three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in bass clef, 3/4 time, with lyrics: "The taw - ny Nas - sau sun burns through the in - -". The middle and bottom staves are piano accompaniment, also in bass clef and 3/4 time. The piano part features unison doublings of the vocal line, with dynamic markings of *ff* and *stacc.* (staccato). The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into four measures by vertical bar lines.



Balancing the extreme rhythmic uniformity of the examples cited above are sections of the opera where multiple melodic lines with different rhythmic profiles are superimposed. Example 2.11 shows the beginning of the short Interlude before Scene 3 in Act 1. The texture here alternates between three and four-part writing with the familiar unison and octave doublings. The rhythmic construction of each line is quite intricate with tied-notes interspersed amongst short frenetic bursts of demi-semi-quavers. This variegated approach to rhythm produces a very different representation of chaos to the passages where the rhythm is solely composed of uniform quavers. The resultant texture appears loose and fragmented as opposed to the mechanistic focus of the pulsating passages discussed previously.

**Example 2.11** Barry: *The Intelligence Park*, Interlude, Bars 980–983



After *The Intelligence Park* canon became the dominant technical device. Barry found that he could create extended passages from relatively small amounts of material and create multiple variations by starting each new canon at different points in the original sequence so that new combinations of pitches arose with each successive superimposition. Practically no development occurs in the materials themselves which are treated very much as self-contained blocks that are reconfigured in various different ways. Another feature of the canonic passages in Barry's music is that the trailing lines tend to enter almost immediately after the initial line, usually leaving only a quaver or a crotchet's distance between successive entries. This diminishes much of the aural characteristic of traditional canonic writing although Barry's canons tend to have a peculiar sound-world all of their own distinguished by the rapid-fire repetition of melodic phrases.

The first piece to exploit canonic procedures on a large scale was the orchestral piece *Chevaux-de-frise*.<sup>37</sup> Example 2.12 shows the work's opening which is constructed from a set of 17 dyads which mainly emphasise the dissonant intervals of a second, tritone, seventh and ninth. The second voice—another set of the same dyads—enters a crotchet beat later. Due to the close proximity of the entries and the

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<sup>37</sup> The first appearance of a canon in Barry's work occurs in *The Intelligence Park* Act 1 Scene 4 Bars 1344–1352.

fact that the texture is in uniform crotchets, the texture is not clearly perceivable as a canon. It is extended throughout the section by a simple permutation technique which involves displacing the original correlation so that a new combination results.<sup>38</sup> This is clearly seen in the example where the dyads are numbered. The focus on a limited amount of mostly dissonant intervals is an example of Barry’s stratification of harmony (discussed in more detail in the following section) and again it can be observed how a centric feel is created by focusing on a limited number of pitches. This is illustrated by an analysis of the pitch content in each sequence of dyads.

**Example 2.12** Barry: *Chevaux-de-frise*, Bars 1–10 and Analysis of Pitch Frequency

The image shows two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with 16 bars. Above the first staff, dyads are numbered 1 through 16. Below the second staff, dyads are numbered 1 through 16. The second system also consists of two staves with 11 bars. Above the first staff, dyads are numbered 6 through 17. Below the second staff, dyads are numbered 4 through 15, then 1 through 4, and finally 5 through 8.

Pitch	C	C#	D	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B
Frequency	7	8	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	7

Example 2.13 shows an excerpt of Pleasure’s aria ‘All day and all night’ in Act 1 of *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit*. This example demonstrates how Barry uses canonic techniques to create intense polyrhythmic textures and also the way he often

<sup>38</sup> Mark Fitzgerald, ‘‘On Constructing a Sonic Gangbang: System and Subversion in Gerald Barry’s *Chevaux-de-frise*’, in *Irish Musical Studies 11*, Julian Horton and Gareth Cox (eds.), (Dublin: Four Courts Press, Forthcoming).

increases the music's intensity in terraced stages using objective methods. This excerpt is preceded by twelve bars of Pleasure singing the same line unaccompanied at the slower tempo of crotchet=104 (not shown in the example below). There are two structures intertwined here; a rhythmic one and one involving pitch. In the accompaniment there is a twelve bar sequence of durations in 3/4 time with the last five bars mirroring the rhythm of the vocal line exactly. After these twelve bars the rhythmic sequence repeats itself exactly. Inserted into this durational sequence is a succession of ordered dyads which range in number from 33 to 36. However because the quantity of dyads is less than the number of individual durational units, they repeat their sequence before the rhythmic one has been completed, thus producing a built in permutation device. This process plays itself out until bar 398 where Pleasure's vocal part ends. Barry then begins the sequence again as a three part canon at a quaver's distance creating a much denser polyphonic texture characterised by the rapid-fire echoing of the second and third voices (example 2.14 which follows). At bar 425 and bar 451, the sequence again restarts with the addition of another part producing four-part and five-part canons respectively, the latter with the addition of a trumpet descant of Pleasure's vocal line on the second repeat.

**Example 2.13** Barry: *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit*, Act 1, Bars 372–385, 'All day and all night'

♩ = 144

All day and all night through dark and through light ple - a -

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

sure comes see-king and fall - ing - you-are my de- light. My day-light my de-light and I'll

ro - le you nine times be-fo - re mor ning You are my de- light, my de - light, my de- light, and I'll

Repeat of Rhythmic Series

**Example 2.14** Barry: *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit*, Act 1, Interlude, Bars 399–401

*mp* 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

*mp* 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21

*mp* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19

Alongside his employment of canonic devices, Barry also experimented with the superimposition of polymetric textures. The first instance of this occurs between bars 550–597 of the ensemble piece *Bob* (example 2.15). The texture is in four parts and the polymetric relationship occurs between the second clarinet which plays in 6/8 time and all the other parts which begin in 2/4 time. Once again, some of the objective ways in which Barry generates material are present here. If we observe the

two lines in uniform quavers—the upper played by the violin, marimba and the right hand of the piano and the lower played by the cello and left hand of the piano—it is clear that Barry derived one from the other simply by reversing pairs of pitches. This permutation device also produces an additional rhythmic irregularity. In bar 555, instead of switching notes in pairs, Barry reverses a group of three notes resulting in an irregular 5/8 bar which is also mirrored in the first clarinet part in the high register. These rhythmic irregularities are inserted at frequent intervals and along with the placing of accents at random, are another example of the pockets of irrationality which lie in the cracks of his music.

**Example 2.15** Barry: *Bob*, Bars 550–556

Swaggering (Accented/Detached)

$\text{♩} = 120$

The musical score consists of six staves. The top staff is for Clarinet I (I Cls.), the second for Clarinet II (II (Bass)), the third for Violin (Vn.), the fourth for Viola (Vc.), the fifth for Marimba (Mar.), and the sixth for Piano (Pno.). The tempo is marked as  $\text{♩} = 120$ . The score shows a complex rhythmic texture with various note values and rests, including a notable 5/8 bar in bar 555. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

ii) The Stratification of Harmony and Orchestration

The constructivist way in which Barry goes about assembling textures also extends to many other aspects of his music. In each of the examples cited above the high levels of dissonance can be attributed to the clashing of independent lines but in

other areas of Barry's music dissonance is used in a much more focused way. One strategy is the stratification of intervallic content which, in the absence of functional harmony, is used to give certain passages a distinctive harmonic colour but can also be used to brutalise material particularly when the content is restricted to the most dissonant intervals.

The most straightforward way in which Barry stratifies harmony is simply by doubling a line at a fixed interval. This was already observed in *Sur les Pointes* where Barry doubled the line with major and minor triads but his work contains numerous examples that admit a wide variety of fixed-interval doublings. Of the consonant intervals the fifth is the most frequently used. Example 2.16 shows bars 418–422 of *Bob* where a two-part texture (an inversion and transposition of material which first appears in bars 82–166) is exclusively doubled in parallel fifths.

**Example 2.16** Barry: *Bob*, Bars 418–422

Allegro. (Bouncing.) Detache ♩ = 184

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for Violin (Vln.) in treble clef, the middle for Viola (Vc.) in bass clef, and the bottom for Maracas (Mar.) in bass clef. The music is in 8/8 time and features a two-part texture of parallel fifths. The tempo is marked 'Allegro. (Bouncing.) Detache' with a quarter note equal to 184 beats per minute. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

More common however is the restriction of content to the most dissonant intervals of the second, seventh and ninth. Example 2.17 and 2.18 contain two instances of this technique. The first excerpt shows part of the orchestral interlude at the end of Act 1 in *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* where each of the lines in a two-part texture is doubled at the interval of a minor second. The second excerpt is taken from *Chevaux-de-frise* and shows a line doubled in ninths.

**Example 2.17** Barry: *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit*, Orchestral Interlude, Bars 1307–1310

♩ = 138

**Example 2.18** Barry: *Chevaux-de-frise*, Bars 494–496

♩ = 144

Sometimes more flexible methods are used which focus on a particular interval and its inversion. Example 2.19 shows an excerpt from the beginning of Act II of *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* where Time is reflecting on the apparent death of Deceit. Here, the upper line of the accompanying music doubles the vocal line at the octave while the lower line harmonises with a mixture of sevenths and ninths.

**Example 2.19** Barry: *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit*, Act II Bars 7–10

♩ = 112

Here lies De - ceit, in death to lie no more,

*mp*

*p*

As dissonant as these passages are, the most extreme and brutal textures in Barry's music result from his use of clusters, which are an integral part of many of his works.



His use of this particular gesture is especially noteworthy as the cluster has by now become perhaps the most dated avant-garde cliché and a good example of how any material, no matter how radical it once was, can become relativised and objectified over time. Louis Andriessen's account of a performance he attended as far back as the early 1980s neatly demonstrates this point:

When, in the winter of 1981, at a concert of new Dutch music in Amsterdam, a piano work was performed in which a cluster appeared, giggles broke out in the audience; not because the cluster was so modern and daring, but because it was so *old-fashioned* [his italics].<sup>39</sup>

In Barry's hands however the cluster is not used as an isolated expression of modernist angst as perhaps it was in Andriessen's recollection, but instead is employed structurally; taking its place alongside other forms of focused dissonance on a spectrum which can be deployed as the situation requires. Like the other doublings it is often applied to an entire block of material where it becomes an integrated part of the section's identity. Example 2.20 shows the first few bars of the Piano Quartet No. 2 where Barry transforms Chopin's Waltz in A flat major Op. 69 No. 1 into a ferocious opening assault by replacing the original notes with clusters and increasing the tempo and dynamics.

**Example 2.20** Barry: Piano Quartet No. 2, Bars 1–3

The musical score for Example 2.20 consists of two staves, Treble and Bass clef, in 3/4 time. The key signature has one flat (A-flat major). The tempo is marked 'Wild' with a quarter note equal to 184. The dynamics are 'fff clusters'. The score shows three bars of music. The first bar has a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a single eighth note in the left hand. The second bar has a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a single eighth note in the left hand. The third bar has a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a single eighth note in the left hand. There are various cluster markings (vertical lines with dots) above and below the notes. The instruction 'No pedal' is written below the first bar.

<sup>39</sup> Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schönberger, *The Apollonian Clockwork: On Stravinsky*, Jeff Hamburg (trans.), (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 6.

This stratified approach to harmony also carries over into Barry's style of orchestration. Since the beginning of his career he has favoured a very hard-edged and transparent style. The avant-garde's fascination with extended techniques has had little impact on his music which owes more to the influence of early music groups such as the Cologne-based *Musica Antiqua Köln* whose clarity and precise musicianship greatly impressed him.<sup>40</sup>

A notable feature of many of the examples already cited is the extent to which layers of the texture are subjected to unison and octave doublings. Like many of the other conventional components in his music such as tonal triads, Barry's doublings lose the hierarchical significance they would traditionally have had.<sup>41</sup> His training as an organist where octave doublings are frequently employed undoubtedly influenced this aspect of his music but it can also be traced back to his childhood experiences of Irish traditional music and particularly of céilí bands:

I loved céilí bands [...]. I know some people frown on them but I love the accretions some of them have [...]. A lot of my music is played in unison [...], everyone playing exactly the same thing. A lot of musicians hate that because it's extremely difficult to do. Any problems of intonation are shown up. Céilí bands are concerned with nothing but that—playing the notes in this garish, rather wonderful way.<sup>42</sup>

Aside from these influences perhaps the most likely explanation to account for the prevalence of doublings in Barry's music is the skeletal nature of the material itself—much of it consisting of extended passages of monody or two-part textures. By doubling lines at the unison or the octave, the presence of these lines is greatly increased and the texture can be thickened to whatever degree is deemed necessary with the minimum of material.

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<sup>40</sup> Fitzgerald, 'Gerald Barry', p. 61.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>42</sup> Ó Séaghdha, 'Breathing Space', p. 18.

Like his approach to harmony in certain places, Barry's method of orchestration also makes use of stratification techniques though this does not take the form of a rigid segregation of the various instrumental families. What generally occurs is that certain instrumental combinations will be used for a number of bars before changes are introduced. These changes can range in scale from the minimal—where only one instrument changes while all others remain constant—to the substantial where the entire texture converts to a completely different instrumental combination. Generally the former type functions as a variation technique used internally within a specific block of material while the latter occurs when there is a change from one block of material to another. In this way, his conception of the orchestra resembles that of an organ with the various instrumental families functioning as stops which can be switched on and off depending on the type of texture desired.<sup>43</sup>

The work which best demonstrates the full range of Barry's orchestration technique is *Chevaux-de-frise*. Example 2.21 shows the opening canon in full score where the exchange of instrumental combinations functions as a variation technique. This section is typical in that most of the instruments are kept constant while others are interchanged. Also noticeable is the way in which some lines are thickened or thinned by the addition or subtraction of unison doublings.

Example 2.22 demonstrates a more substantial change in orchestration which occurs at a juncture between two very different blocks of material. Here the texture changes from a two-part texture in uniform quavers orchestrated in Barry's 'organ' style to a more rhythmically irregular texture where the style of orchestration is

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<sup>43</sup> Michael Blake, 'Gerald Barry' in *Contemporary Composers*, Brian Morton and Pamela Collins (eds.), (Chicago and London: St James Press, 1992), p. 54.

Example 2.21 Barry: *Chevaux-de-frise*, Bars 1–6

$\text{♩} = 92$

The musical score is arranged in a system of staves. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Ob.** (Oboe): Treble clef, 4/4 time, starting with a quarter rest, then playing a melodic line.
- CA.** (Corno Alto): Treble clef, 4/4 time, starting with a quarter rest, then playing a melodic line.
- Cls. I & II** (Clarinets): Treble clef, 4/4 time, playing a rhythmic accompaniment.
- Bn. I & II** (Bassoons): Bass clef, 4/4 time, playing a rhythmic accompaniment.
- Hns. I & II** (Horns): Treble clef, 4/4 time, playing a rhythmic accompaniment.
- Tpts. I & II** (Trumpets): Treble clef, 4/4 time, playing a rhythmic accompaniment.
- Trbs. I & II** (Trumpets): Bass clef, 4/4 time, playing a rhythmic accompaniment.
- Trb. (Bass)** (Trombone): Bass clef, 4/4 time, playing a rhythmic accompaniment.
- Tuba**: Bass clef, 4/4 time, playing a rhythmic accompaniment.
- Pno.** (Piano): Grand staff (treble and bass clefs), 4/4 time, playing a complex rhythmic accompaniment.
- Vc.** (Violoncello): Bass clef, 4/4 time, playing a rhythmic accompaniment.
- Db.** (Double Bass): Bass clef, 4/4 time, playing a rhythmic accompaniment.

The score includes dynamic markings of *ff* (fortissimo) and articulation markings of *a 2* (accents) on the Horns and Trumpets parts.

Example 2.22 Barry: *Chevaux-de-frise*, Bars 329–332

The musical score is arranged in systems. The first system includes Flutes I/II, Oboe, Clarinet in A, Clarinet in Bb I/II, and Bassoon I/II. The second system includes Horns I/III, Horns II/IV, Trumpets I/II, Trombone III, and Tuba. The third system includes Piano. The fourth system includes Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The score features a key signature of one flat and a time signature of 2/4. A tempo marking of quarter note = 72 is present. Dynamics include *f* (forte) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). Performance instructions include *al* (allegro), *solo*, and *1st desk*. Musical markings include triplets and accents.

correspondingly less stratified. This example once again demonstrates a general feature of Barry's music where one extreme is counterbalanced by its opposite.

#### IV) BALANCING EXTREMES: TWO CONTRASTING APPROACHES TO FORM IN *CHEVAUX-DE-FRISE* AND *AGNES VON HOHENSTAUFEN*

Having examined the various methods which Barry has devised in order to give shape to his material, the question now turns to how these textures are organised into coherent formal structures. The issue of form has already been discussed in the analysis of *Sur les Pointes* but in the context of Barry's output as a whole, this work is relatively straightforward in structural terms. After *The Intelligence Park* his music became much more sectionalised and rather than focusing on a single idea for the whole work, the music tends to shift rapidly between different textures. While this 'block-form' technique obviously combines high levels of opposition and discontinuity, these characteristics are usually balanced by some underlying elements of continuity that exist over the large-scale structure. The ways in which Barry manages to achieve this delicate balance between continuity and discontinuity while using this technique will be examined through an analysis of *Chevaux-de-frise*.

Although the majority of his pieces are structured in blocks, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, Barry produced a number of pieces which employ a more experimental method of construction. This coincided with the change in the nature of Barry's material described in the overview where individual ideas became much more compressed and there was a deliberate attempt to reincorporate what he termed 'the ordinary grammar of music'. Many of these pieces often seem more 'intuitively' structured than those which employ the 'block-form' technique. Yet when they are examined in detail, it can be demonstrated that a considerable amount of decision has

been exercised regarding the precise placement of these figures. This approach will be examined through an analysis of the short piano piece *Agnes von Hohenstaufen*.

i) *Chevaux-de-frise*

*Chevaux-de-frise* was the first major instrumental work Barry composed after *The Intelligence Park* and it incorporated many of the stratification techniques that were developed in the opera. The table in example 2.23 shows the organisation of blocks in the work. The sections labelled A, B, C and so on are categorised according to similarities in pitch content and melodic ideas. There are eight such sections, most of which recur at several points throughout the work. Although the table reveals a high frequency of jumping between textures, when viewed solely in terms of pitch relations there appears to be an overall symmetry to the form. The opening section is based on blocks A, B and C and these blocks return towards the end of the piece framing the middle sections of the work where the intervallic and rhythmic profile is more variegated. On the basis of this analysis then, the structure of the piece seems quite straightforward, appearing to resemble the rough outlines of a ternary form.

**Example 2.23** *Chevaux-de-frise*, Distribution and Profile of Pitch Material

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Material	Bar	Tempo	Intervallic Content	Rhythm
A	1	♩ = 92	7ths, 9ths' tritone	♩
B	44	♩ = 168	7ths, 9ths	♩♯
A	100	"	7ths, 9ths, tritone	"
C	149	"	7ths, 9ths	varied (regular)
A	182	♩ = 80	7ths, 9ths, tritone	♩

A	192	♩ = 116	"	♪
D	213	"	varied	"
B	247	"	7th, 9th	"
E	272	"	7th, 9ths, 10ths	"
F	331	♩ = 72 → 88 at b343	5ths, 6ths	varied (irregular)
G	351	♩ = 96 at b350 → 80 at b398	5ths	varied (irregular)
F	404	♩ = 80 → 88 at b416	5ths, 6ths	varied (irregular)
G	423	♩ = 160	5ths	♪
H	430	"	varied	♪
G	441	"	5ths	♪.
H	447	"	varied	♪.
G	452	♩ = 126	5ths	♪ + ♪
A	485	♩ = 126	7ths, 9ths tritone	♪
C	494	♩ = 144	9ths	♪
A	514	meno mosso	2nds, 7ths, tritone	♪
C	532	♩ = 144	9ths	♪
C	545	♩ = 184	varied	varied (regular)
C	676	♩ = 132	cluster	varied (regular)
B	732	♩ = 184	cluster	♪.

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However this symmetry which appears to exist in the pitch sector is contradicted by the experience of actually listening to the work which goes against this reading and highlights the inadequacy of prioritising pitch relations in Barry's music as a way to



analyse the overall structure. This inadequacy can be easily demonstrated by comparing block A which opens the work with the reappearance of the same pitch material at bars 485 and 514. Block A first appears as the canon made up of seventeen dyads that was discussed in detail in the previous section (see examples 2.12 and 2.21). It is in uniform crotchets at a tempo of crotchet=92 and lasts a total of 43 bars which amounts to approximately 1 minute and 45 seconds in performance. When this pitch material returns at bar 485 it begins with the original sequence of dyads in retrograde (example 2.24). At 514, Barry deploys a variation on this process by first taking every second dyad of the retrograde (17, 15, 13, 11) and then every second dyad of the original sequence (2, 4, 6, 8) and placing them back to back (example 2.25). Both sections are in quavers with a faster tempo marking of dotted crotchet=126 and 144. They are also much shorter lasting 9 bars in the first instance and 18 bars in the second which amounts to approximately 12 seconds and 18 seconds respectively in performance. The combination of these transformations results in a completely different listening experience and makes the connection between the opening pitch material and its reappearance later on extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the listener to discern.

**Example 2.24** Barry: *Chevaux-de-frise*, Bars 485–487

♩ = 126

The musical score consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in 8/8 time. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 126. The notes are labeled with numbers 17 through 2, indicating a retrograde sequence. The notes are: 17, 16, 15, 14, 13, 12, 11, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2. The notes are written in a sequence of eighth notes and rests, with a final quarter note at the end of the sequence.

**Example 2.25** Barry: *Chevaux-de-frise*, Bars 514–516

♩ = 144

17 15 13 11 9 7      5 3 1 2 4 6      8 10 12 14 16 17

This comparison highlights the relative lack of importance ascribed to the traditional relations of pitch in his work. Since this is the case, attention must be devoted to other ways in which Barry articulates the formal structure. One of the most remarked-upon features of *Chevaux-de-frise* is the way the piece builds towards a climax at the end. The critic Anthony Bye called this a climax of ‘militaristic ferocity’ while Adrian Jack, in his programme notes for the work’s premiere at the 1988 Proms, described the piece as a ‘belligerent toccata’ which maintains ‘an unbroken momentum from a steady march at the beginning to a frenzied charge at the end’. Given Barry’s avoidance of traditional developmental techniques, an analysis of *Chevaux-de-frise* might begin by investigating how Barry builds this momentum and climax.

### Structural Continuities and Momentum

The generation of momentum in any music involves a certain level of continuity as well as rising intensities across several parameters. At first glance, the high degree of fluctuation in the pitch, tempo and intervallic profiles of the various blocks would appear detrimental to the generation of any continuous momentum. However numerous continuities can be shown to exist in other parameters. Perhaps the most important of these occurs in the rhythmic domain. The vast majority of the piece maintains an insistent pulse, a factor largely responsible for its driving energy with

many of the sections consisting exclusively of a single rhythmic figure. In sections where multiple rhythmic units are used these can be divided into two categories; those which emphasise a regular beat and those where the beat is often obscured by the frequency of triplet and quintuplet rhythmic groupings. As can be seen from the table, the most rhythmically variegated area occurs in the middle of the piece from bars 331–422. This is the only section of the work which deviates significantly from the underlying pulsation which governs the vast majority of the work.

Another structural continuity which runs through the piece is its consistently loud dynamic level which rarely drops below fortissimo. The only section which drops below *f* is section A between bars 182–191. On the whole, expressive markings are used sparingly with Barry usually specifying just a single dynamic indication for each section. The performance directions at the head of the later sections are even more emphatic—‘Violently’ at bar 545 and ‘Savagely’ at bar 732—instructing the musicians to play as loudly and as aggressively as possible, a factor which contributes significantly to the accumulation of momentum towards the work’s end.

As already noted, the wild fluctuations in tempo between blocks would appear to be perhaps the biggest obstacle to the generation of any kind of momentum. However when considered over the course of the whole work, it can be observed that the faster tempos are to be found in the latter half of the piece. Although the ultimate speed of the music is naturally dependent upon the predominant rhythmic units which make-up the section, even when this is taken into account, the average speed of the music increases substantially towards the work’s end.<sup>44</sup> Instead of a smooth gradient therefore, Barry develops the work towards its climax by staggering the tempo increases so that the intensity builds through a series

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<sup>44</sup> For instance, the speed of the actual music resulting from the fastest tempo indication of minim=132 at bar 676 is not as fast as the dotted crotchet=116 indication at bar 192 due to the former section being composed mostly of crotchets while the latter consisting solely of quavers.

of uneven stages that, when taken together, conform to an overall rise. The blocks which deviate from this underlying tendency are usually accompanied by significant changes in other parameters and form a crucial part of the work's balance between integration and disintegration.

In the final sections of the piece, the music reaches its point of greatest intensity by adjustments in two additional parameters; orchestration and the introduction of clusters. Section C beginning at bar 545 is the largest homogenous block in the work and it is also the one with the fullest orchestration.<sup>45</sup> When it begins, the only instruments not playing are the double basses. These enter in bar 570 whereupon the piccolos and glockenspiel drop out. However they both re-enter at bar 622 and continue until bar 731 forming the longest uninterrupted orchestral tutti in the piece. At bar 676 Barry introduces clusters which continue until the end. The orchestration is thinned in the final two sections beginning at bar 732 but this does not necessarily reduce the intensity as it is offset by the increase in speed and the use of even thicker clusters.

### Structural Disjuncture

Adrian Jack's description of *Chevaux-de-frise* as a 'belligerent toccata' that maintains 'an unbroken momentum from a steady march at the beginning to a

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<sup>45</sup> The pitch content of this section is derived from the Elizabethan tune 'Like as the Day' by Patrick Mando which is reworked in typical Barry fashion so as to make it unrecognisable. He had the following to say about how he treated this particular source: 'It's a very melancholy tune, very beautiful. It has that feeling that a lot of Elizabethan songs have that deal with death. It has an extraordinary cool melancholy. I could not have outdone that. I went to the other extreme, I made it extremely brutal. It is literally smashed, hit on the head with a giant sledgehammer. Of course I tried to create a brutality that would have a certain pathos. It's not ugly for the sake of being ugly. It's so ugly that it becomes something else. When I took that tune I made the decision that I could not leave it in the same world it inhabited. I must wrench it into a new world. I mustn't also be disloyal to it. If you borrow material you have a responsibility to the material [...] I would hate if it remained recognisable. I would feel that it would be a cop-out, a betrayal of the material.' Dervan, 'Music written with lots of sweat', *Irish Times*, 15 August 1988. For a detailed discussion of how this tune is reworked see Fitzgerald, 'On Constructing a Sonic Gangbang: System and Subversion in Gerald Barry's *Chevaux-de-frise*'.

frenzied charge at the end' is accurate except for one point; the assertion that the momentum is 'unbroken'. Despite the significant levels of continuity that were found to exist in the parameters analysed above, each contained at least one point where there was a substantial deviation. However the extent to which a break between textures affects the underlying momentum is dependent upon the number of parameters involved as well as the scale of these changes. A break with adjustments to only one parameter while all others are kept constant may have little disruptive impact. On the other hand if several parameters change at once the disruptive impact may be quite substantial.

The transition from block A (192–213) to block D (213–246) (example 2.26) for example is quite subtle. The changes are confined to pitch<sup>46</sup> and more noticeably, to orchestration where Barry switches from his customary stratified 'organ' style to a variation of this technique where the pitches descend and ascend in register through the various instrumental families. There is no change to the tempo, the dynamic level or to the rhythm which consists exclusively of quavers for both sections, ensuring a relatively smooth transition. The degree of disruption is therefore quite minimal at a local level but also at a macro level where it reinforces the dominant dynamic and rhythmic characteristics of the work as a whole.

By contrast the transition from block E (272–330) to block F (331–349) (see example 2.22) is highly disruptive and involves changes in virtually every parameter; tempo, dynamic level, rhythm, intervallic content and orchestration. The tempo drops sharply from dotted crotchet=116 to crotchet=72 and the dynamic level falls from

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<sup>46</sup> In the pitch sector, the melodic profile changes from one where the intervals are mostly confined to seconds and tritones to one which incorporates a much broader range of intervals. As Barry's method of deriving a second line in this two-part texture involves a system of inversions, the D section has a much wider range of intervallic content than block A which was mainly confined to sevenths, ninths and tritones.

Example 2.26 Barry: *Chevaux-de-frise*, Bars 212–216

The musical score is arranged in a system with the following parts and staves:

- Fl. (Flute)
- Ob. (Oboe)
- CA. (Clarinet in A)
- Cls. I/II (Clarinets in Bb and B)
- Bns. I/II (Bassoons)
- I/III Hns. (Horns in F and C)
- II/IV (Horns in F and C)
- Tpts. I/II (Trumpets in F and C)
- Tuba
- Pno. (Piano)
- I Vlns. (Violins)
- II Vlns. (Violins)
- Vlas. (Viola)
- Vc. (Violoncello)
- Db. (Double Bass)

The score spans five measures (bars 212–216). The key signature has one sharp (F#). The flute and oboe parts play a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The clarinet and bassoon parts provide harmonic support with eighth and sixteenth notes. The horn and trumpet parts play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The piano part is mostly silent, with some chords in the final measure. The violin and viola parts play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The cello and double bass parts play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

fortissimo to forte. The rhythmic profile changes from a block composed entirely of quavers to one where triplet groupings predominate, a factor which displaces the hitherto ubiquitous pulse. The intervallic content changes from sevenths, ninths and tenths to a section emphasising the intervals of a fifth and sixth and finally the orchestration also changes, moving quite drastically from a texture employing Barry's 'organ stop' technique to a much sparser and pointillistic orchestral texture. This combination of changes obviously results in a massive break from the preceding block but it also deviates considerably from the underlying macro-structural continuities identified in the previous section of the analysis. It marks the beginning of a larger and more rhythmically variegated section where the driving pulse that dominates so much of the work is displaced. The positioning of this block at this particular juncture forms an important dramatic function and reveals something about the nature of Barry's sense of timing. It occurs just far enough into the work to break the rhythmic, intervallic and textural patterns that are set in motion in the earlier blocks. The blocks which follow act as a sort of modulation back to the established paradigms before they are eventually intensified at the work's conclusion.

As this analysis has shown, modifications in the pitch sector of *Chevaux-de-frise* play the least role out of all the parameters in articulating the formal structure. Although the piece is entirely based on melody, none of these are developed in a way which is intended to be audible; instead they are repeated, rotated, chopped up or recycled according to systemic methods that remain imperceptible. This ability to derive a range of different textures from a limited amount of pitch material demonstrates the effectiveness of Barry's unorthodox techniques. However what *Chevaux-de-frise* also demonstrates is Barry's ability to make the individual blocks

which arise out of these procedures bind together as a coherent composition. All of the various sections are integrated into a coordinated curve of rising momentum which is broken at certain points for dramatic effect. By relating the sections together using the non-pitch parameters of rhythm, dynamics and tempo Barry is able to preserve the vestiges of a narrative structure; preserving an underlying continuity which makes the moments of disjuncture all the more effective.

ii) Agnes von Hohenstaufen

Barry's works from his experimental period in the late 1990s and early 2000s present a serious challenge to the analyst, the main one being the lack of any obvious connective tissue between successive ideas. The brevity of the individual gestures often makes it extremely difficult to discern the kind of large-scale inter-relations that could be perceived in an earlier block-form piece like *Chevaux-de-frise*. Yet when listening to these pieces there is rarely the sense that they are simply ad-hoc assemblages thrown together without any consideration of the larger form. The ideas seem to be placed in a manner that accords with some underlying logic and the following analysis of *Agnes von Hohenstaufen* (example 2.27) attempts to demonstrate some of the considerations that may have informed his ordering of material.

*Agnes von Hohenstaufen* is the shortest piece in Barry's entire output. It was composed in 2003 while he was at work on *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* and is a concise example of his use of ordinary musical gestures that became a preoccupation throughout these years. Some of these, he claimed, are connected with the theme of childhood and consist of isolated sounds he remembers from his earliest musical experiences. Whatever the origin of the gestures themselves, they certainly



fit the description of ‘ordinary’ or even ‘banal’, consisting of common-place, tonally derived, musical figures. At its most basic, *Agnes von Hohenstaufen* is composed of seven such fragments separated by silences which range from two to four crotchet beats in length. It is only eleven bars long which the performer is instructed to play three times. These eleven bars can be split into three sections for the purposes of this analysis.

**Example 2.27** Barry: *Agnes von Hohenstaufen*, Complete

Hushed ♩ = 104

*mp*

*no Ped.*

5

8

play three times

*sub*

*Section 1*: Bars 1–3. The piece begins with a fanfare-like gesture in the upper-middle register of the piano. The four chords are marked staccato and collectively contain the pitches G, B, C, D; the first two being unadorned G major triads. This is significant because these two chords are the only instance where all the notes of a full triad are sounded simultaneously until the concluding gesture of the piece. In a

landscape populated by ambiguous tonal fragments, their assertive presentation at the start of the piece exerts a strong resonance that continues to echo throughout while the declamatory nature of the gesture also gives the sense that it is announcing the beginning of something. There is therefore a number of convincing reasons why out of the seven fragments, this one should be placed first. The second phrase, coming after a 3/4 bar of silence is a compressed working out of the pitches contained within the last chord of the opening gesture. It presents them in a more linear fashion and introduces the first instance of legato articulation in the left hand. Through these contrasting characteristics it functions as a kind of answer phrase to the first gesture so again there are good musical reasons for its placement here.

*Section 2:* Bars 4–6. Despite the obvious connections between the two gestures in the opening three bars, the manner in which the second gesture concludes—with the C in the left hand prominently poised between the second and third beats—seems to demand a continuation. This is provided by the third gesture in bar 4 which functions both as a continuation but also as a transition passage. The pitches on the first and second crotchet beats are still taken from the [G, B, C, D] collection which featured in the opening three bars. However the dyads on the third and fourth crotchet beats introduce new pitches; G sharp on the third beat and C sharp and A sharp on the fourth beat. These three pitches are all semi-tonal neighbouring pitches to the triad of G major and result in a significant increase in tension as they clash with the lingering resonance of that chord from the opening bar. Furthermore, after the B in the left hand on the first beat, the intervals of the following dyads become progressively wider; major third, tritone, major sixth, as if they are building towards something.

The fourth gesture can be regarded as the apex of the piece. It is the only idea that achieves a sense of completeness with its arch-like shape and smooth-voice leading in the right hand. It is also the only phrase that is played completely legato which connects it with the left hand part of the second gesture. However the factor that marks it out as the apex of the movement is that it performs an important harmonic transition from major to minor. The concluding two dyads of the gesture together make up an E minor triad and just as the opening contained suggestions of G major, for the remainder of the piece the fragments suggest minor triad formations.

This tendency is borne out immediately in the fifth gesture which is constructed from the same pitch collection as the opening except that the B is changed to a B flat. It is also an extension of the second gesture except that this time the staccato/legato articulation is exchanged between the hands and the addition of the B flat outlines a G minor triad in the right hand. Compared to the previous fragment however it suggests a winding down; its melodic movement is repetitive and its total pitch content is reduced to four.

*Section 3: Bars 7–11.* The following gesture in bar 9 confirms this tendency, reducing the pitch content to a single F sharp in the low register of the piano. Both the fifth and the sixth fragments have the same rhythmic profile as the fourth fragment—six quavers—but as the number of pitches declines they feel like a gradual emptying out of content. The silences between the gestures also become slightly longer; increasing from two and a half crotchets in bar 6 to three crotchets in bar 8 and four crotchets in bar 10. This slows down the momentum and prepares the listener for the conclusion to the piece in bar 11. When it arrives the final gesture seems to deliver quite a definitive ending to the piece and several factors combine to give it this cadential quality. It echoes the staccato quavers of the opening but it also

acts as a culmination of some of the developments that have taken place throughout. It is a B flat minor chord so it reflects the transition from major to minor triad configurations that occurred in the second half of the piece. It also happens to be in first inversion which results in a neat symmetry with the opening chord which was also a first inversion triad. Finally it is by far the most widely spaced chord in the piece which makes it a fitting conclusion to the gradual expansion in register that has taken place since the first bar where all the material was contained within the span of an octave.

*Agnes von Hohenstaufen* is typical of Barry's work from this period in that it seems to have been written more or less intuitively and therefore remains even more unsuited to traditional forms of analysis than usual. The aim of the above analysis has not been to show how the piece achieves anything like a unity in the conventional thematic or harmonic sense, as clearly it makes no attempt to do so. Fragmentation is an integral part of its structure and any attempt to gloss over this fact would be a misunderstanding of the task Barry has set himself. The intention is rather to show how the structure avoids slipping into randomness, and how traces of subjective decision-making determine the precise ordering of events rather than the fragments simply being abandoned to the anarchy of chance. Through an analysis of the character of these gestures I think it can be shown how a coherent vision of the piece as a whole was the guiding factor that ultimately determined their placement.

#### V) BARRY'S VOCAL STYLE

While some sort of radical element can be found in most areas of Barry's music, it is his style of vocal writing which stands out as perhaps its single most radical feature. Barry's output has been dominated by works based on text; the list includes five

operas as well as several large-scale vocal works such as *The Conquest of Ireland*, *The Eternal Recurrence* and *Beethoven*. One of the reasons why Barry's music sounds so unique in this respect is that when setting a text, composers have tended to rely on certain codes and stock devices to a far greater degree than in purely instrumental music. Certain rules regarding the natural stresses of the words or the expression of certain emotions are still influenced by long-standing principles of what is felt to constitute good text-setting. Barry ignores these principles, resulting in a style of vocal writing that many have found bewildering. The first part of this section will examine Barry's rationale for adopting such an approach, linking it to his concern to explore hidden layers of the chosen text. Following this, the section will then proceed to analyse examples extracted from *The Intelligence Park*, *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* and *The Conquest of Ireland*.

i) Barry, Beckett and Text-Setting

When one considers that Barry tends to avoid talking directly about his own music, it is interesting to note that the only substantial article he has written which deals with his own music in any kind of detail has to do with the issue of text-setting in *The Intelligence Park*.<sup>47</sup> The article was published before the premiere so it seems likely that Barry wished to explain his approach in anticipation of some of the possible criticisms that his unusual style might provoke. His main concern in the article was to explain how and why his approach deviates from well-entrenched operatic conventions. He begins with the choice of text:

I do not like texts which are literal and bound by logic or plot. Qualities which attract me are coolness and a bizarre artificiality which allow extreme careering at tangents. Vincent Deane's libretto for *The Intelligence Park* welcomed subversion and had no interest in being gratefully set. I could not

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<sup>47</sup> Barry, 'The Intelligence Park', pp. 229–237.

have responded to a text which might just as well be spoken as sung. It had to have a fantastic quality which would be as unnatural as its setting.<sup>48</sup>

A preference for such texts was already a feature of early works such as *Lessness* and *Things That Gain by Being Painted* but the difference in treatment between the texts in both of these works was highly significant. The latter work pursued the absurdist qualities of the text indirectly, allowing, as Barry wrote; ‘music and text to inhabit separate worlds; they run in parallel but mostly ignore each other’.<sup>49</sup> This separation allowed both elements to bounce off each other without interacting directly in any literal sense, resulting in an ambiguity which hinted at deeper layers concealed beneath the surface.

In *The Intelligence Park* however, the text would have to be sung and so this kind of separation which had worked so successfully with the spoken text in *Things That Gain by Being Painted* was made more complicated. Barry’s solution for much of the opera was to impose the text on the music in a rather ruthless fashion. This approach often seemed to prioritise the music over the text and indeed according to Barry himself, many sections of the music were composed first while he waited for parts of the libretto to arrive; when they did arrive he simply added the text to the pre-composed music. The result was a near complete disregard for the usual conventions of text-setting with some areas of the text made incomprehensible. Barry gave the following explanation for this:

For me, one of the most important things in opera is that elusive third element which springs from the wedding of music and text. It does not disturb me if, in the pursuit of this, my setting renders some of the text incomprehensible: it is only so superficially. It may well be that when the characters sing, they are actually thinking, and therefore codes become irrelevant. Grasping the core of a text is not always best achieved by writing music which flows in the same direction. Going against it may be more illuminating. I like to see a text thrown off balance, its core shifted even. Anyway interrogating is much more fun than duplicating.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 229.

<sup>49</sup> Barry, programme note for *Thing That Gain by Being Painted*.

<sup>50</sup> Barry, ‘The Intelligence Park’, p. 230.

Instead of reproducing the associative meanings supplied by convention, Barry prefers to deconstruct the text by forcing it into a confrontation with music that yields a fresh and often quite witty perspective on it. The resultant fragmentation produces a world where the characteristically direct mode of expression associated with opera is deflected and the location of a stable meaning is impossible to pin down.

While this approach often creates difficulties for the listener, there is a consistency which ties in with the broader tenets of his style. In his instrumental music, it was observed that Barry's objective treatment of material had a kind of levelling-out effect that neutralised many of the traditional hierarchies that could have remained residually in the material if it were subjected to less extreme treatments. Many of these hierarchies were responsible for traditional notions of musical expression and in their absence, the material takes on a mechanical, impersonal quality which is redeemed only by Barry's uncompromising methods of structuring. When this same approach is carried over into the realm of text-setting, the results are similar. Barry sets his texts with a seeming indifference to hierarchy; stresses may indeed fall on an important syllable but they may just as easily fall on an unimportant one; breaks in a line may occur mid-sentence or even in the middle of a word and the nuanced rhythms of conventional song are supplanted by a relentless pulse frequently tripped up by rhythmic irregularities.

The impact of his style of vocal writing is most deeply felt in the effect that it has on the characters which populate Barry's operas. On one hand the results can be quite humorous. The delivery of the lines is often so wild and bizarre that the initial impact is distinctly comical. However, this humour tends to act as a foil for more disturbing undercurrents. With their words subservient to the unpredictable whims of

the music, Barry's characters resemble hollow, dehumanised forms. Relieved of any semblance of self-consciousness, they are pulled about, stretched and subjected to severe distortion, a condition which is elegantly described by Paul Griffiths:

Barry's characters stand before us in a condition of nakedness that evokes not only shock and bewilderment but also pity. They are no longer in control. The ground on which they might have stood has gone from beneath their feet: the ground of rhythm and phrasing and, most crucially, of harmony. They live in a musical world whose tonality is cracked, besmirched, degraded, ambiguous—a world that is open, therefore, to the expression of uncertainty and irresolution.<sup>51</sup>

Griffith's description of the fragility and brittleness of Barry's characters is strikingly reminiscent of Adorno's interpretation of Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* which he described as 'music built out of ruins in which nothing survives of the individual [S]ubject but his truncated stumps and the tormented awareness that it will never end'.<sup>52</sup> As discussed in chapter 1, Adorno took a very negative view in *Philosophy of New Music* of what he perceived to be Stravinsky's deceptive manipulation of second-hand material, which he contrasted with the more authentic approach of Schoenberg. However in the last decade of his career Adorno eventually revised his opinion of Stravinsky's music, even managing to concede a progressive dimension in the composer's ironic handling of worn-out fragments. The interesting thing here is the factor which prompted him to revise his earlier judgement as it could provide another possible way of approaching Barry. More recently, Max Paddison has convincingly argued that it was Adorno's reading of the work of Samuel Beckett in the 1950s and particularly Beckett's play *Endgame* that provided the crucial stimulus in this regard.<sup>53</sup> Thus in the late assessment of Stravinsky which followed, Adorno

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<sup>51</sup> Paul Griffiths, 'An Unsettling Diagonal: Gerald Barry and Opera', programme note for *The Importance of Being Earnest* (<https://www.barbican.org.uk/media/events/11858geraldbarryforweb.pdf>, 17 October 2013).

<sup>52</sup> Adorno, 'Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait', in *Quasi una Fantasia*, p. 173.

<sup>53</sup> See Paddison, 'Stravinsky as Devil: Adorno's Three Critiques', *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, Jonathan Cross (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 192-202;



was able to describe his work in terms which, as Paddison observes, could equally be applied to Beckett's *Endgame*.

Just as Adorno found a way into Stravinsky's music through *Endgame*, it is possible that another of Beckett's works, *Play*, could perhaps provide a way into Barry's. In this work, three characters, one man and two women, whose heads protrude from identical grey urns, tell the story of a love triangle, narrating its bitter history and their respective roles in it. The substance of the plot is unremarkable and the text itself is peppered with clichés, but this seems to be a deliberate ploy. What redeems the text is the fact that the words are spoken at a breakneck speed, stripped of any emphasis or inflection. By forcing lines to be delivered with such artificiality, somehow the ordinary everyday banality of the text is transcended. The effect produced is an uncanny friction between an unsettling kind of humour and the tragic spectacle of characters seemingly no longer able to exercise control or self-awareness. What both Beckett's late works and Barry's operas have in common is the attempt to give form to a devalued language in their respective mediums. They each approach their material from the outside, employing a range of objective techniques which are imposed upon it to give it shape and tension and in doing so both artists have to resort to a degree of brutality.

## ii) Analysis: Demonstrative Examples of Barry's Text-Setting

Since Barry's style of vocal writing is essentially the same as his instrumental writing there is no major musical differences in the nature of the lines themselves and the way the words are set to them frequently displays many of the same characteristics. For instance there is often a tendency to resort to an extreme

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Adorno, 'Trying to Understand Endgame', in *New German Critique* 26, Michael T. Jones (trans.), (1982), pp. 119–150.

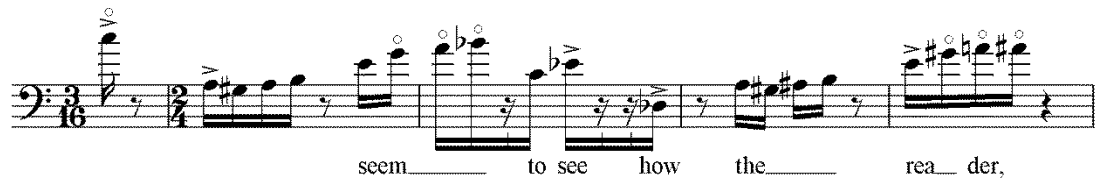
uniformity. Take for instance the choice between choosing to set the words melodically or syllabically. Most composers would generally use a mixture of both but one of Barry's trademarks is to take an either/or approach opting for an exclusively melismatic setting which stretches the words of the text to an absurd degree or an exclusively syllabic approach which subordinates the words to the wild gyrations of the music.

Both of these extremes can be observed in the opening two sections of *The Conquest of Ireland*, a setting of a text written by Giraldus Cambrensis (1146–1223) a cleric who accompanied invading armies to Ireland in the 12th century. Example 2.28 shows the first 16 bars where the opening 'I' receives thirteen bars of broken scale fragments while most of the other syllables in the passage receive between two and six notes. The extreme nature of the passage is augmented by the 'Frenetic' tempo marking of crotchet=144 and the placement of many of the notes in the high register, forcing the bass to use falsetto. While the outrageous artificiality of the passage produces a highly comic effect this is soon broken at bar 48 where the music shifts to the opposite extreme. Here, Barry changes to a completely syllabic setting of the same words beginning in the lower registers of the bass's range (example 2.29). This form of delivery has a more brooding character with a more moderate tempo marking of crotchet=100 and a rhythm consisting predominantly of quavers.

**Example 2.28** Barry: *The Conquest of Ireland*, Bars 1–16

♩ = 144 Frenetic

The musical score consists of two staves of music in bass clef. The first staff begins with a dynamic marking of *f* and a fermata over the letter 'I'. The music is characterized by rapid, broken scale fragments. The time signatures change frequently: 2/4, 6/16, 2/4, 3/4, 3/16, and 3/4. The second staff continues this style with time signatures of 3/4, 3/16, 2/4, 3/16, 2/4, and 3/16. The tempo marking '♩ = 144 Frenetic' is positioned above the first staff.



**Example 2.29** Barry: *The Conquest of Ireland*, Bars 48–53

$\text{♩} = 100$

*f* I seem to see how the rea-der, de-spi-sing my book, wrin-kles his nose to  
show his dis-gust, pouts and, view-ing it with dis-dain, puts it from him since he finds eve-ry -

In each case there is no attempt to set the text with the correct stresses. The melismatic setting has the effect of pulling the text apart while the syllabic version is more compressed, levelling out the words into a succession of mechanical utterances. Placed side by side they produce a radical shift in perspective, capturing what Barry described as the text's 'continual narcissistic engaging of the reader in a pattern of advancing and withdrawing'.<sup>54</sup> Most of the text is concerned with detached anatomical descriptions of the leading soldiers in the invasion but behind the matter-of-fact descriptions there is all the underlying condescension of an invading conqueror:

I have thought it not superfluous to say a few things about the nature of this people. They are a barbarous people, literally barbarous. All their habits are the habits of barbarians.<sup>55</sup>

Barry has a penchant for oppressive characters who combine an unrestrained arrogance with a tendency to carry their condescension to farcical extremes. There is usually some element of this at work in most of the texts he chooses to set. However by employing a subversive form of text-setting with such exaggerated mannerisms,

<sup>54</sup> Barry, programme note for *The Conquest of Ireland*, London, 10 January 1996.

<sup>55</sup> Barry, *The Conquest of Ireland* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995).

this arrogance is undercut and presented as a kind schizophrenic madness with erratic shifts in mood dissipating any sense of reason.

Examples 2.30 and 2.31 from *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* take a much more varied approach to rhythm than the previous examples from *The Conquest of Ireland*. Consequently, the fragmentation of the text is even more extreme. Like the work which it is based on—Handel’s *The Triumph of Truth and Time*—the libretto, devised by Meredith Oakes, primarily consists of rhyming couplets. Barry might therefore have been expected to pay some heed to this but instead he mostly ignores it. This is clearly shown in the first excerpt of the opera’s opening bars where the combination of a syllabic setting tied to a highly irregular rhythm ensures that both the natural stresses and the rhyming scheme are completely undermined. Adding to the distortion is the speed of delivery required and the angularity of the lines which makes frequent use of wide intervallic leaps.

**Example 2.30** Barry: *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit*, Act 1, Bars 1–8

$\text{♩} = 104$

*f* Bea - uty chanced to look up - on his glass Re -  
flec - ting how all mor - tal things must pass All power snuffed out from  
charms that once had shone And eyes ex - tinct that once drew lo - vers on.

The opposite melismatic extreme can be found in Pleasure’s virtuosic aria ‘I was addicted to venery from my youth’. The music here originated as a solo piano piece called *Triorchic Blues* which was commissioned as a test piece for the Dublin Piano

Competition in 1991. At the beginning the aria combines a mixture of syllabic and melismatic setting but when it comes to the word ‘forms’, the countertenor embarks on a prolonged melisma which lasts from the end of bar 767 to bar 788 in one unbroken stretch.

**Example 2.31** Barry: *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit*, Act 1, Bars 767–788

The musical score for Example 2.31 consists of five staves of music. The first staff begins with a tempo marking of ♩ = 100 and the instruction 'accel. e cres.'. The lyrics 'all its forms, fo' are written below the first staff. The second staff includes dynamics markings of *mf* and *f*. The third staff has a tempo marking of ♩ = 200 and features several triplet markings. The fourth and fifth staves continue the melismatic passage with further triplet markings. The score concludes with the marking 'ms.'.

As well as these extremes concerning rhythmic stress and the treatment of syllables, Barry has also devised a number of additional devices to drive the text even further into alien territory. Sometimes this involves splitting the text mid-sentence or between syllables by inserting silences or disruptive musical elements. An example of this occurs in Act 1 Scene 1 (example 2.32) of *The Intelligence Park* where the composer Robert Paradies is trying, without much success, to write his opera with the help of a mechanical toy theatre. This is one of the sections of the opera where Barry ‘ruthlessly imposed’ the text on music which had already been composed. The setting is syllabic and in uniform quavers but there are not enough notes in each

repeated pattern to accommodate all the syllables. Barry however sets the text regardless, sticking to one syllable per note so that prolonged silences break up not only the sentences and but also individual words. As to the effect created by this technique Barry writes:

New stresses and splintering of words result, creating the effect of cranking and lurching, mirroring the stage machinery operated by Paradies—the third element, perhaps'.<sup>56</sup>

**Example 2.32** Barry: *The Intelligence Park*, Bars 28–43

*f* Act One, Scene One:(The cur-tain ri - ses) A thick-ly woo-ded grove be-neath  
 a cres-cent moon, an al-tar. Cho-rus:'Chaste Que-en rich on-ly in  
 ex - - - pec - ten - cy...No! no! Can - cel it! So can-celed all,  
 and all ex - pec - ten - - - cy. And all ex - pec - ten - cy...What

♩ = 63  
 Più mosso

In *The Intelligence Park*, Barry also felt that he should not be confined to the range of any one singer's voice and thus devised a technique which he termed 'operatic job-sharing'.<sup>57</sup> When the music moves out of a particular singer's range the notes are taken by another singer who is able to reach it even though the spotlight remains with the character in question. A straightforward example of this occurs at the beginning of Scene 4 in Act 1 (example 2.33) where Paradies is returning to work on his opera just before the moment when Serafino and Jerusha appear as Wattle and Daub. Here

<sup>56</sup> Barry, 'The Intelligence Park', p. 230.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 231.

the last syllable of the word 'Lasciarmi' sung by Paradies (countertenor) is finished off with a low C by Cramer (bass). According to Barry, these interventions are extensions of the characters thoughts and in this instance it is possible to see Cramer's lingering presence as reflective of the bind Paradies is caught up in, being obliged to marry Cramer's unappealing daughter Jerusha if he wants to inherit his father's fortune.

**Example 2.33** Barry: *The Intelligence Park*, Act 1, Bars 1232–1238

The musical score for Example 2.33 consists of three systems. The first system features Paradies (bass clef) with lyrics: "Be - gin: 'Daub's Bower' 'Daub with Wat - tle". The tempo is marked as quarter note = 63. The second system continues with Paradies: "in her arms' 'La - sciar - -". The third system shows Cramer (bass clef) with the lyric: "- mi!". The piano accompaniment (Vc. + Db.) is shown in bass clef across all systems, with a large slur under the first two systems and a smaller slur under the third system.

The most exaggerated lines in Barry's music are reserved for those characters discussed earlier with the most grotesque personalities, those who combine authoritarianism with a sense of the ridiculous. Example 2.34 is an excerpt taken from Act 1 Scene 2 where the colonial Cramer is expounding upon the descent of the country into barbarism at the hands of the native Irish. The melodic line careers wildly across a wide register moving between a low D and finishing with a G more

than three octaves higher. Similarly the music given to the frivolous Jerusha during her aria ‘The smiling dawn of happy days’ (example 2.35) races almost uncontrollably round in circles, illustrating Barry’s observation that her tunes emanate from ‘a cracked skull’.<sup>58</sup>

**Example 2.34** Barry: *The Intelligence Park*, Act 1, Bars 455–467

♩ = 104 ♩ = 112

*p* But you must for - give me, *mf* you must for-give me Sirs: \_\_\_\_\_ a

heart opp-ressed with shame \_\_\_\_\_ for my coun-try's ru \_\_\_\_\_ in. New

blood is nee - ded fresh young blood: so \_\_\_ from this foun-tain head re - plen-ish the old stock.

**Example 2.35** Barry: *The Intelligence Park*, Bars 614–634

♩ = 184 Feverishly  
*mf staccato*

The \_\_\_\_\_ smi - ling Dawn \_\_\_\_\_ of ha - ppy Days \_\_\_\_\_ Pre - sents a

Pro - spect clear, And plea - sing Hope's all \_\_\_\_\_

bright - ning Rays \_\_\_\_\_ Di - spell each gloo - ming Fear, While ev - ery

Charm \_\_\_\_\_ Pre - sents a Pro-spect clear, And plea-sing Hope's all \_\_\_\_\_ Dis-

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p. 232.



In a certain way however, all of the characters in Barry's operas have 'cracked skulls'; the music is firmly in charge, playing the role of a puppet-master which directs them about and it is this lack of autonomy that behind all the humour and farce reveals a darker side to Barry's theatre works.

## VI) CONCLUSION

While the vocal writing in Barry's operas is perhaps the most immediately striking example of his unique style, his music as a whole bears the imprint of a highly individual approach to composition. Much of his work's distinctive character lies in his ability to radically recycle the familiar worn-out fragments that populate his scores and whatever degree of shock his music possesses can be attributed to his frequent brutalisation of such familiar material, carried out with a characteristically reckless abandon. However this brutality only derives a meaning when set against the delicate poignancy of other passages and I would argue that it is this constant movement back and forth between these extremes which holds his music together, making it possible to perceive multiple layers beneath what can, at first, seem a very hard surface.

The instant recognisability of Barry's music is largely a product of the thoroughness with which the kind of objective techniques discussed in this chapter are applied to every aspect of his music. Although these procedures often seem crude and unsophisticated, they are validated by the quality of the music which arises out of them and it is Barry's ability to separate out the sounds that work from those that don't which functions as the final arbiter. The straightforward application of these techniques gives his music a consistency which directly contradicts the postmodern notion that the cultivation of a unique style is a thing of the past.

Although his work generally militates against any kind of straightforward narrative structure, Barry's music nevertheless maintains a deep concern with form, demanding a critical, engaged type of listening to relate the various sections into a coherent whole. The individual blocks and fragments coalesce into an overall shape through a balancing of different parameters; setting extremes against each other like the individual particles of a Cubist or pointillistic painting. It is these extremes which are the defining feature of his music and make it a fitting example of a postmodernism of resistance. As the critic Anthony Bye wrote these 'extremes of juxtaposition: tenderness and savagery, beauty and ugliness, the comic and the serious are all equally at home within the Barry universe'.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Anthony Bye, 'Gay Days Spent in Gladness', p. 500.

## CHAPTER 3: FROM AFRICA TO ABSTRACTION: THE MUSIC OF KEVIN VOLANS.

In the sense that modernism is not a style, but a tenet—nothing is given and there is no received language—I consider myself a committed modernist.<sup>1</sup>

Of the three composers examined in this study, Kevin Volans was the one most directly caught up in the maelstrom of conflicting ideologies that characterised the breakdown of mainstream modernism in the 1970s. As a student of both Kagel and Stockhausen, Volans eventually rose to become the latter's assistant, working closely with the composer on large-scale projects such as *Inori*.<sup>2</sup> During the mid-1970s however, Volans, like many of his colleagues, came to the conclusion that New Music had stagnated into a mannerist style which no longer fulfilled the modernist ideals of exploring new territory. This realisation led him to consider the possibility of reinterpreting material from outside the Western tradition to overcome this stylistic impasse.

As a solution to the New Music crisis, Volans's engagement with indigenous African music makes for a fascinating contrast with the approaches of both Deane and Barry. The complex identity politics intertwined with folk music have made it a site fraught with interpretative complexities while the category as a whole has long since been the target of various commercial appropriations by the culture industry. Yet from a critical standpoint, the progressive or regressive merits of folk music are always dependent upon the context and manner in which it is used. Adorno's positive assessment of folk music in Bartók and Janáček on one hand and his dismissal of Kodály's 'falsification' of authentic folklore on the other are examples of such a

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Volans, 'Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments etc.', sleeve notes for compact disc Chandos CHAN 9563, 1999, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Christine Lucia, 'Celebrating Composer Kevin Charles Volans, b. 1949', *Musicus* 37/1 (2009), p. 5.

perspective and these views are, I believe, still relevant to some of the issues raised in this chapter.<sup>3</sup> Through his researches Volans became fascinated with some of the formal aspects of African music which he felt could be merged with his own language in a productive synthesis. Although he hoped this endeavour would be successful on a purely musical level, on another his stated desire to enact a ‘reconciliation’ of African and European aesthetics was also a clear political statement.<sup>4</sup> The circumstances of a South Africa still in the throes of apartheid provided a highly complicated backdrop for an encounter between European art music and African indigenous music, one which could all too easily be viewed as an act of cultural imperialism if carried out insensitively.

This dual context provides the backdrop for the discussion of Volans’s African project in this chapter. Although the focus of this study is obviously more orientated towards issues of musical form and structure, I feel that it would be naive to simply gloss over the political implications of the series as if they were unimportant, especially since confronting some sort of political or social content is an integral part of working with pre-existing materials anyway. In this chapter I argue that while the African Paraphrase series—which lasted from 1980 to 1986—was successful as a political statement its success as a pathway towards obtaining a new musical language for Volans did not become apparent until much later. This is not to say that the series was a failure; many of the pieces Volans composed during the African project constitute a compelling cross-fertilisation of African and European elements. It is more the case that the series did not immediately lead to a language capable of sustaining itself without recourse to overt quotation or

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<sup>3</sup> See Adorno, ‘On the Social Situation of Music’, pp. 405–6; and *Philosophy of New Music*, p. 176n.4.

<sup>4</sup> Volans, ‘White Man Sleeps: Composer’s Statement’ (no date) (<http://www.kevinvolans.com/index.php?id=18> 4 July 2011).

paraphrase and many of the pieces Volans composed in the years directly after the series reveal a level of structural arbitrariness symptomatic of a composer struggling to find a clear direction. I argue that it is not until *Cicada* (1994) for two pianos that elements from the African series are fully assimilated to form a truly consistent language. In this work an African sense of pattern and time is combined with ideas drawn from the visual arts which aim to relocate the centre of musical interest to areas generally considered peripheral such as tone, instrumental colour and timbre.

Given the unusual trajectory of Volans's career, this chapter will take a slightly different form to the previous chapter on Barry. In essence it can be divided into two halves mirroring the general outline of Volans's career. The first half will begin with an overview of his Cologne experiences which led him to search for a new aesthetic direction through African music. Following a discussion of Adorno's insights into the potential for using folk music as source material in progressive musical composition, the chapter will then proceed to an analysis and assessment of his African Paraphrase series from both a political and aesthetic viewpoint. This assessment leads directly into the second half of the chapter where Volans's influences from the visual arts are introduced before proceeding to examine the translation of these ideas into music through an analysis of *Cicada*. The chapter then concludes with a brief discussion of subsequent post-*Cicada* works such as the String Quartet No. 6 (2000) and the Concerto for Double Orchestra (2002) where these ideas are developed further.

## D) CAREER OVERVIEW

Volans's initial outlook was marked by an enthusiasm for the music of the post-war avant-garde but significantly, even at this early stage, his introduction to this music was received through the medium of visual art.<sup>5</sup> As a painter in his early teens, he came under the influence of a progressive art teacher at high school who instilled in him an abiding love for the work of the New York Abstract Expressionists.<sup>6</sup> These early encounters with abstract art formed a natural progression into the world of modernist musical composition with the squiggles and drops of Jackson Pollock's drip technique providing a visual analogue to the pointillistic textures of Boulez and Stockhausen.<sup>7</sup> Volans moved to Cologne in 1975 where he became one of only five students admitted to Stockhausen's composition class.<sup>8</sup> He became intimately acquainted with Stockhausen's extensions of serial technique and progressed rapidly eventually becoming his teaching assistant in 1975 replacing Richard Toop.<sup>9</sup> He also took lessons in music theatre from Kagel, studied piano with Aloys Kontarsky and electronic music with Hans-Ulrich Humpert.<sup>10</sup>

Despite his obvious enthusiasm for serial technique, it is somewhat revealing that during this time he composed almost no music, serial or otherwise.<sup>11</sup> While it was undoubtedly a time of rapid absorption, this fact alone would seem to suggest that Volans was already questioning the viability of this particular style of composition. In any case he was surrounded by initiatives which seemed to offer alternative possibilities. The most prominent of these was the Feedback Studio, set up in 1970 by Johannes Fritsch who had previously been a member of Stockhausen's

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Grimes, 'Interview with Kevin Volans' (<http://www.cmc.ie/articles/interviews/volans/index.html>, 27 June 2011).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Lucia, 'Celebrating Composer', p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Interview with the composer by the author conducted on 27 March 2009.

ensemble.<sup>12</sup> It was here that Volans first met other like-minded composers, among them, Walter Zimmerman and Michael von Biel.<sup>13</sup> The studio's *Hinterhausmusik* concerts were dedicated to the development of new instruments and electronic music as well as an eclectic mix of free jazz, pop, folk music, street music and visual art.<sup>14</sup> Fritsch also founded the first German composer's collective press and edited a journal called the *Feedback Papers*.<sup>15</sup> The city was also a centre for research into the performance practice of early music, spearheaded by groups such as Reinhardt Goebel's *Musica Antiqua Köln* (founded in 1973) who were based in the city during these years.<sup>16</sup> The presence of these groups contributed to a heightened awareness of the colouristic possibilities inherent in hand-crafted instruments, something which would later influence Volans's work with African music.<sup>17</sup>

Many of these initiatives were set up in reaction to what a growing number of young composers felt was the stagnation of New Music in Cologne. In their view the legacy of post-war serialism continued to occupy the mainstream of compositional practice dominating both the composition seminar and the concert hall. The most significant dissenter amongst the young composers in Cologne was Walter Zimmermann whose influence on Volans's development appears to have been considerable. Zimmermann's experiences at the 1972 Pro Musica Nova festival in Bremen—where he heard the music of the American experimentalists John Cage, David Tudor and Steve Reich—convinced him to look beyond Cologne for inspiration.<sup>18</sup> He subsequently undertook a trip across North America interviewing

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<sup>12</sup> For an account of Fritsch and the activities of the Feedback Studio see Gerhard R. Koch, Johannes Fritsch, Winrich Hopp, *Feedback Studio* (Cologne: DuMont, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Walter Zimmermann conducted on 28 April 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Koch, Fritsch and Hopp, *Feedback Studio*, pp. 38–69.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75–80.

<sup>16</sup> Volans, 'Composers Statement'.

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

<sup>18</sup> Amy Beal, *New Music, New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), p. 219.

23 American composers which he later published as *Desert Plants*, a landmark work in consolidating the reception of American experimental music in both Europe and America.<sup>19</sup> For Zimmermann, American music seemed to be characterised by a staunch non-conformity with composers subsisting on little else but their own imaginations, whereas by contrast, the young European composer seemed content to form ideological alliances and imitate the stylistic norms bequeathed to them by their elders.<sup>20</sup>

The earliest documented indications of Volans's aesthetic development arose in direct response to the reception accorded to one of Zimmermann's works, the piano piece *Beginner's Mind*.<sup>21</sup> Inspired by the example of Erik Satie, Zimmermann employed a deliberately naive language based on white note modality, metric regularity and repetition. The piece's transparent style made for a striking contrast with the high levels of complexity that typically featured in much work from this period and predictably much of the reaction towards it after the premiere was negative. The most direct response to the piece came from Clytus Gottswald, a producer at South German Radio. When Zimmermann sent him a copy of the score, Gottswald replied with a letter dismissing the work and comparing Zimmermann's use of C major to that of a 'simple child from the country', ignoring the fact that 'C

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<sup>19</sup> Walter Zimmermann, *Desert Plants* (Vancouver: Aesthetic Research Centre Publications, 1976). For more on the reception of *Desert Plants* see Beal, *New Music, New Allies*, pp. 218–224.

<sup>20</sup> Volans, 'Conversation with Walter Zimmermann', in *Feedback Papers Reprint 1–16, 1971–1978*, Johannes Fritsch (ed.), (Cologne: Feedback Studio, no date), pp. 338–341.

<sup>21</sup> This piece took its title from Shunryu Suzuki's book *Zen Mind, Beginner's mind* which divides the path towards attaining a new consciousness into three phases, 'Leave the old', 'Clean the Mind' and 'Change your Consciousness.' The structure of the piece follows the three outlines of Suzuki's book preceded by a prologue entitled 'Five Moments in the Life of Franz Schubert' containing short extracts transcribed from Zimmermann's own piano improvisations and representing five versions of the old mind which are to be transformed. See Christopher Fox, 'Walter Zimmermann, the Piano Music', sleeve note for compact disc Metier MSVCD92057 (a+b), 2003, p. 3 and Richard Toop, 'Walter Zimmermann: A Portrait' (<http://home.snafu.de/walterz/toopwz.html>, 17 November 2011)



major is not just a collection of notes but also a compendium of their history’—phrases which clearly show the influence of Adorno’s theory of musical material.<sup>22</sup>

After being sent a copy of the letter by Zimmermann, Volans replied to Gottwald’s criticism with a seven-page response written in a passionate and committed tone which offers a glimpse of his developing conceptions of musical material. Not surprisingly Volans located the crux of the New Music problem in the increasing ‘institutionalisation of the modernist practice’ which in his opinion had descended into a ‘system of classification [...] standards and formulas’ resulting in an endless regurgitation of surface clichés.<sup>23</sup> He then proceeded to give his own definition of New Music:

New Music demanded listening without preconception. It challenged, as all important music has done throughout the history of western music, ideas of what is beautiful, what is acceptable as musical material or form, what constitutes a ‘musical’ event. The emancipation of all sound as legal musical tender, the abundance of forms, techniques and musical grammars demanded above all that the listener approach each work on its own terms, and evaluate it within its own defined framework—in short, that the listener be free from dogmatism.<sup>24</sup>

The letter articulated three main positions. The first was the conclusion that the current style of New Music being written was a cul-de-sac. The second was that in order to go beyond this impasse, a new conception of material was required which was liberated from the confines of a specific historical period or place. And third was the idea that such music would be ‘a-historical’ and not conceived as operating within a single linear conception of music history.<sup>25</sup> Such sentiments appear very much in step with the cultural shift towards postmodernism in the mid-1970s. A reaction against high modernist abstraction, the idea of an ‘a-historical’ relation to material and a rejection of meta-narratives have all been well-theorised features of

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Christopher Fox, ‘Where the River Bends: the Cologne School in Retrospect’, *The Musical Times* 148/1901 (Winter 2007), p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p. 32.

postmodernism and if this is so, Volans's position at this point would seem hard to square with his conception of himself as a 'committed modernist' stated in the epigraph at the head of this chapter. However in view of the subsequent path his career has taken, these statements have to be seen in the context of their time. What composers such as Volans and Zimmermann were advocating seems less an anti-modernist protest than a protest at what they felt modernism had become; a stagnant style propped up by theories attempting to legitimate what had long since descended into a succession of mannerisms. His comments, in an article published in the *Feedback Papers*, clearly capture the prevailing mood of the time:

How often one seems to come across works that are nothing more than an exposition of their technique, or composers who refuse to recognise that their carefully worked out and philosophically well-grounded systems result in rather unattractive collections of long and short notes.<sup>26</sup>

Viewed in this light Volans's call for a music which would be a-historical did not imply a denial of history or a desire to return to a past style. Instead it seems more directed at the kind of criticism—epitomised by Gottwald's letter—which placed proscriptions on the use of historical materials and refused to concede that there were perhaps ways in which such material could be critically and imaginatively reworked into new forms. The presence of a single unified conception of music history culminating in the experimentation of the post-war avant-garde was still very much present in Cologne at the time and was frequently invoked as a justification for exclusionary attitudes to material. As Volans recalled even octaves were seen as problematic because 'they created an unwanted emphasis on one pitch over another and thereby gave the impression of a tonal centre'.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Volans, 'Understanding Stockhausen', in *Feedback Papers Reprint*, p. 409.

<sup>27</sup> Bob Gilmore, 'Wild Air: The Music of Kevin Volans', *The Journal of Music in Ireland* 6/6 (2006), p. 25.

Volans's works from this period began to put into practice some of the ideas contained in the Zimmermann letter particularly those relating to the reinterpretation of historical materials. His virtuoso piano piece *Monkey Music* was based on the idea of 'Lisztian paraphrase' and contained two short quotations of Liszt as well as 'free-references' to Scriabin and Stockhausen. Particularly notable in the work's programme note was Volans's insistence on the creation of a sense of 'distance' between the new work and the original sources in a way which suggests both an awareness of history and a desire to view it from the perspective of the present:

The paraphrase [...] permits the simultaneous as well as the successive comparison of the original [...] with an interpretation or elaboration of the original. A foreground and background are set up, and the art of paraphrase lies in the exploration of the lines of perspective in this virtual space. The 'perspective' in paraphrased music is, however, a perspective in time. The original music takes on the quality of memory: it becomes a remembered event from a virtual past, [...] and we find ourselves thus in a virtual present.<sup>28</sup>

Like Zimmermann's *Beginner's Mind*, and later Gerald Barry's *Things That Gain by Being Painted*, the title of Volans's piece came from a non-western source, the legendary Chinese figure Monkey, whose exploits are chronicled in Wu Ch'eng-en's 16th century novel.<sup>29</sup> Although this title had no connection with the actual content of the piece which was still very much conceived in the European tradition, it is indicative of a growing awareness of non-western cultures that would culminate a few years later in the African Paraphrase series. In terms of a practical engagement with non-Western music it was once again Zimmermann who took the lead with his ensemble piece *Die Spanische Reise des Oswald von Wolkenstein* (The Spanish trip of Oswald von Wolkenstein) (1976) which used traditional Arabic instruments to realise transcriptions of Tunisian folk music.<sup>30</sup> From this encounter the concept of

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<sup>28</sup> Volans, 'Monkey Music 2: Paraphrase', in *Feedback Papers Reprint*, p. 355.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 354.

<sup>30</sup> Zimmermann, 'Sternwanderung' (<http://home.snafu.de/walterz/07.html>, 10 Nov 2011).

*Lokale Musik* emerged. As well as being conceived as a reaction to the narrow historicism of certain New Music circles and a celebration of non-Western cultures, the project hoped to stimulate alternative compositional approaches through the interaction between the composer and his chosen folk music. Inspired by the cultural assimilation he had discovered in Tunisian music (which itself had undergone a process of cultural cross-fertilisation between East and West—being based on Andalusian music from the 15th century<sup>31</sup>), Zimmermann began an extended *Lokale Musik* project (1977–1981) which consisted of four cycles, each using a different technique to transform folk music from his native Franconia.<sup>32</sup>

At this point Volans joined with two other Cologne based composers, the Indian Clarence Barlow and the Australian Moya Henderson, to begin a *Lokale Musik* project which would see them return to their native homelands to carry out research into the music of the indigenous peoples.<sup>33</sup> Initially, it was decided that the project would begin with the recording of soundscapes investigating the relationship between folk music and the natural sound environment. Barlow returned to India to study the street music of Calcutta and Henderson studied indigenous aboriginal music.<sup>34</sup> Having been impressed by a survey of street music undertaken in Cologne by the Feedback studios, Volans put together a document on South African music for *Westdeutscher Rundfunk* (WDR).<sup>35</sup> He was subsequently commissioned by the station to make a series of documentary style radio programmes about African music and musicians which were broadcast on German and Belgian radio.<sup>36</sup> The project involved four field recording trips to rural Natal and Lesotho undertaken between

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Fox, 'The Cologne School', p. 33.

<sup>33</sup> Lucia, 'Celebrating Composer', p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

1976 and 1979.<sup>37</sup> Out of these recordings came three tape pieces which drew directly on the material he collected.<sup>38</sup> The first, *KwaZulu Summer Landscapes* (1979) is a seventy minute tape of six soundscapes distilled from recordings he made in Kwazulu-Natal.<sup>39</sup> Another tape piece, *Cover him with Grass* (1979), is based on recordings of the people of Lesotho going about their everyday business.<sup>40</sup> In both of these works, the natural sound environments act as raw material existing practically unchanged except for some slight cutting and editing. *Studies in Zulu History* (1977–1979), on the other hand, is a step beyond the object trouvé approach of the earlier tape pieces. In this work, natural sounds exist alongside the electronic material with the latter being composed in the studio in an attempt to directly ‘paraphrase’ the former.<sup>41</sup>

Volans became intimately acquainted with African music on these field trips and his recordings covered a wide spectrum of indigenous music ranging from Zulu guitar music and singing to the music of the San, Venda and Basotho tribes.<sup>42</sup> He also participated in music making; he bought an *mbira* and learned how to play it and attended a workshop on the *Nyanga* panpipe dance.<sup>43</sup> He located transcriptions and academic articles on African music by scholars such as Andrew Tracey, John Blacking and Christopher Ballantine and wrote an article ‘Weltmusik: Bemerkungen zur Musik im Südlichen Afrika’, on the differences between African and European aesthetics for a special volume on world music published by the Feedback Studio.<sup>44</sup> Following the example of Zimmermann’s *Lokale Musik* cycle, Volans decided to

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Penny Clough, ‘A Survey of the Younger Generation of South African Composers,’ in *Composers in South Africa Today*, Peter Klatzow (ed.), (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 220.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with the composer.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Volans, ‘Weltmusik: Bemerkungen zur Musik im südlichen Afrika’, in *Weltmusik*, Peter Ausländer and Johannes Fritsch (eds.), (Cologne: Feedback Studio Verlag, 1981), pp. 66–77.

embark on his own project which he hoped would lead to ‘a reconciliation of African and European aesthetics.’<sup>45</sup>

## II) ADORNO ON FOLK MUSIC

Adorno’s views on folk music require the same kind of critical treatment that was undertaken in Chapter 1 to separate out those aspects which may prove insightful from those which are contradictory or outdated. As Max Paddison has noted, one of the major issues with Adorno’s views in this area is the lack of differentiation.<sup>46</sup> Folk music tended to occupy a peripheral status in his larger cultural theory, something which has to be seen as another instance of his predominantly Eurocentric cultural outlook. It is often lumped together with jazz and ‘light’ music as just another form of ‘vulgar’ popular music. However where folk music is treated as a distinct category of its own, Adorno can be quite perceptive and his chief concern is with the role it occupies in the modern industrialised societies of the west.

For Adorno, folk music was synonymous with the pre-industrial community where it forms part of the mythic bonds that hold the community together. When society becomes industrialised these bonds are broken and shown to be illusory. In the midst of the turmoil and alienation caused by the process of modernisation, folkloric art can function as a kind of social glue, binding people together under a shared ethnic or national identity and simulating a return to a utopian pre-capitalist condition, a development which, in his view, only affirmed the status quo:

The artistic products of a highly rationalised society can no more be made to revert to natural ones than the society itself can. [...] That such reversion must remain dubious in its truth content, that the return to peasant and folk art in a country that is in the midst of the industrialisation process leads to

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<sup>45</sup> Volans, ‘White Man Sleeps’.

<sup>46</sup> Paddison, ‘The Critique Criticised: Adorno and Popular Music’, p. 208.

costumings and concealments of all kinds, but never to compelling production, is self-evident.<sup>47</sup>

But despite appearances, Adorno's theory is not completely resistant to the use of folk music for progressive ends. His admiration for Bartók is clear evidence of this but only because Bartok's music satisfied two important conditions. First of all there was the particular nature of the material which featured in his music. Because Bartók's folk material was collected from regions in South-Eastern Europe and North Africa which remained untouched by the forces of modern industrialisation, Adorno argued that such folk music possessed a range of distinctive characteristics which were in a certain sense 'alien' to western audiences:

The legitimation of such music from the periphery in every case depends on its having developed a coherent and selective technical canon. [...] Truly extraterritorial music—whose material, while common in itself, is organised in a totally different way from occidental music—has a power of alienation that associates it with the avant-garde and not with nationalistic reaction.<sup>48</sup>

Adorno's point here appears relatively uncontroversial. It seems obvious that folk music from regions which have not yet experienced industrialisation have a greater chance of possessing untapped and idiosyncratic features that could be used as the basis for progressive musical structures. On the other hand, the distinctive characteristics of folk music from industrialised countries have already been thoroughly assimilated and as such, there is a much higher risk of the composer simply reproducing worn-out clichés. However, while Adorno's attention to the cultural context of the folk music is important, the viability of material based on the extent of commercial appropriation is perhaps more a matter of degree than of outright judgement. It seems impractical to suggest that *only* those regions which have not experienced industrialisation can provide a viable source of material. If this were the case there would be few if any regions in the world left today that would be

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<sup>47</sup> Adorno, 'Why Is the New Art So Hard to Understand', in *Essays on Music*, p. 129.

<sup>48</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p. 176n4.

eligible for this category. It would also preclude works such as Zimmermann's *Lokale Musik* project or Barry's Piano Quartet No. 1 out of hand, without any proper consideration of how the source material (which in both cases originates from modern industrialised societies) is transformed, an exclusion which seems unreasonable.<sup>49</sup>

It therefore appears that although Adorno's stress on cultural context is insightful, ultimately it is secondary to the other criterion which he laid out in order for such music to qualify as 'authentic'. This was his insistence that there is a genuine attempt to merge the radical features of the chosen folk music with the corresponding radicalism of the composer's own subjectivity. It was because of his perceived failure to do this that Adorno rejected the music of Bartók's colleague Kodály, who worked with the same Hungarian folk material. Adorno contrasted Bartók's radical 'dissolution' of his folk material—which he described as 'amazingly similar to the practices of the Schoenberg School'—with Kodály's attempt to marry folk material to a late-romantic idiom.<sup>50</sup> According to this interpretation, by adopting a conservative musical language instead of engaging with the radical elements of the folk music, Kodály 'falsified authentic folklore as a romantic dream image of a unified folkish life'.<sup>51</sup> A similar criticism was levelled at Stravinsky in *Philosophy of New Music*, although in this case it was Adorno's inability to comprehend the structural methods of the composer which led to a rather forced dismissal.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> The beginning and the ending of Barry's Piano Quartet No. 1 uses the Irish tunes *Sí Bheag Sí Mhór* and 'Lord Mayo's Delight'. In both cases the tunes are superimposed as canons.

<sup>50</sup> Adorno, 'On the Social Situation of Music', p. 406.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, in light of the contradictions highlighted in chapter 1 between Adorno's interpretation of Stravinsky in *Philosophy of New Music* and this earlier essay 'On the Social Situation of Music', in the very next sentence after discussing Kodály's music Adorno writes: 'Stravinsky's games of masks are protected from demasking of this type [referring to Kodály's regressive use of folk music] by his highly precise and cautious artistic understanding. [...] [His music] maintains a position of continual hovering between game and seriousness and between styles as well, which makes it impossible to call it by name and within which irony hinders any comprehension of the objectivist ideology'. p. 406.



In summary then, Adorno's writings draw attention to two considerations: 1) the cultural context of the source material—the degree of appropriation already inflicted on it by the culture industry and a consideration of its distinctive characteristics and 2) the transformative strategies of the composer—to what extent they contribute to a genuinely new synthesis of the folk music's idiosyncratic features and the composer's own radical language. In the discussion of the African Paraphrase series which follows, both of Adorno's criteria will be used as framing devices to assess the viability of Volans's project.

### III) THE AFRICAN PARAPHRASE SERIES

Given the political turmoil of apartheid South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, indigenous music in the country resided within a highly complex cultural environment. Although South Africa was in certain respects a modern industrialised nation, this development was confined exclusively to the white minority with blacks and other ethnic groups being subject to severe discrimination and disadvantage. Like all black forms of culture in the apartheid state, African music was subjected to a policy of rigid segregation by the official cultural policy. The government had invested heavily in promoting western forms of culture, building an impressive musical infrastructure of concert halls, symphony orchestras and opera houses in a bid to sustain its ideological orientations.<sup>53</sup> Within the art music tradition, the only folk music promoted by such institutions were Afrikaans folksongs which featured in the compositions of white, establishment composers such as Arnold van Wyk (1916—83) and Hubert du Plessis (1922—2011).<sup>54</sup> Music education was heavily

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<sup>53</sup> Martin Scherzinger, 'Art Music in a Cross-Cultural Context: The Case of Africa', in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (eds.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004), p. 608.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

slanted towards European forms of pedagogy and interest in indigenous African music was confined to a relatively small group of dedicated ethnomusicologists.<sup>55</sup>

Volans recalled that throughout his childhood and teenage years, the only time he heard African music was on his way home from school where he would pass by black people playing Zulu guitar and singing and dancing in the streets.<sup>56</sup>

Although bypassed by the official channels, elements of African music had inevitably found their way into the various forms of popular music. This ranged from various jazz fusions—the most famous being *mbaqanga*, a hybrid style originating in the 1960s which was played to a ‘jive’ beat on brass, electric guitars and drums—to the so-called ‘bubble-gum’ genre, an explicitly commercial form of disco music propelled by an urban ‘township’ beat that often incorporated synthesised elements of folk music such as call-and-response patterns and electronic drumming.<sup>57</sup> A more sophisticated popular music of protest had been active since the 1960s when a re-evaluation of African traditions took place as part of the growing resistance movement against apartheid.<sup>58</sup> This movement made a more genuine effort to integrate aspects of the local traditions but on the whole these elements were firmly assimilated into Western genres such as jazz, rock and pop.<sup>59</sup> According to Martin Scherzinger: ‘South African music associated with political liberation tended to turn less towards indigenous musical idioms and more towards defiant genre-bending’.<sup>60</sup>

In the West, African music was beginning to feature prominently as part of the

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<sup>55</sup> In an article published in *The Natal Witness*, Volans is quoted: ‘Do you know that when I was at Wits studying music—Western music, of course—we dealt briefly with Chinese and Japanese music in the syllabus. But not African music’. David Robbins, ‘The Culture of Silence’, *The Natal Witness*, 26 March 1986.

<sup>56</sup> Bruce Chatwin, ‘Kevin Volans’, in *What Am I Doing Here?* (London: Picador, 1990), p. 67.

<sup>57</sup> For an overview of the development of South African popular music see Angela Impey, ‘Popular Music in Africa’, in *Africa: The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, Ruth Stone (ed.), (London/New York: Garland, 1998), pp. 428–437 and David Coplan, ‘South Africa: Popular Styles and Cultural Fusion’ ([www.oxfordmusiconline.com](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com), 12 July 2012).

<sup>58</sup> Coplan, ‘South Africa: Popular Styles and Cultural Fusion’.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

emerging World Music phenomenon, the most famous manifestation of this being Paul Simon's *Graceland* album released in 1986. Again however, so-called 'African' elements in cross-cultural projects such as Simon's functioned more as surface flavourings within a Western pop music format than as evidence of a profound engagement with indigenous idioms on any kind of technical or aesthetic level.

Due to the vested interests of both official and commercial forms of musical dissemination, many of the indigenous forms of African music lay well outside the mainstream culture not only of white South Africans but even many urban blacks as well, a situation which Volans expressed a number of concerns about. Speaking of the Westernisation of the South African popular music industry Volans stated:

This music isn't at all in the nature of any African music I've come across. It's Western pop music...in the sense that it has to be three minutes long, it has to have a lively introduction and then you get into the main beat and you have a few lyrics and then you end it. Western culture is overtaking black culture in this very subtle form of presenting black culture as a very fake or sanitized version of itself. In fact, it's a parody of black culture.<sup>61</sup>

Given this unique climate of neglect occasioned by the existence of the apartheid regime, it is possible to view the indigenous music of South Africa as representing a comparatively unexplored source of musical material at this particular historical moment which could function as the basis for a progressive art music. In the introduction I suggested that any discussion of the 'radicalism' of Volans's involvement with this music needed to be considered on two intersecting levels: on one hand as a transitional stage in the development of his own musical language and on another as a direct political statement.

Beginning with the former, Volans, through his researches on a wide variety of indigenous music, discovered a range of idiomatic features not commonly found in Western music including interlocking patterns, inherent rhythms and polyrhythmic

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<sup>61</sup> Vit Wagner, 'South African Composer Can't Go Home to Fake Fusion', *Toronto Star*, 23 February 1990.

structures. The precise nature of these features and Volans's employment of them will be discussed in the following analytical sections but for the moment two general aspects of African aesthetics are worth discussing briefly here as they can be seen to have exerted an influence throughout the series as well as on his music as a whole.

The first of these was what Volans termed the 'non-conceptual' way the African musician approached music which contrasted sharply with the systematic rationalism that he had learnt in Cologne.<sup>62</sup> As a student of Stockhausen, Volans had approached musical form in what he described as an architectural fashion; devising a series of techniques to generate material in accordance with a particular over-arching concept.<sup>63</sup> But as his writings indicated, he soon began to feel that this strategy divorced the composer from his material and led to a situation where the concept itself was held up as sufficient justification for a particular set of techniques rather than the actual sounding result.<sup>64</sup> During his encounters with African music, Volans began to approach musical form from the reverse direction, beginning with the choice of materials or a basic idea and then proceeding forward intuitively from this point.<sup>65</sup> An integral part of this non-conceptualism was the African approach to time. Because African music is conceived as a succession of patterns which stretch out in an unbroken continuum, there is no conception of time as teleological and there is no development.<sup>66</sup> Instead it is the ability to create multiple variations on these patterns which is the most prized attribute of the African musician. As the ethnomusicologist Gilbert Rouget remarked: 'There are indeed musics which find in repetition or in

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<sup>62</sup> This idea of returning to the material first and foremost and getting away from post-serial formulas is articulated in detail in the essay 'Dancing in the Dark'. (<http://www.kevinvolans.com/index.php?id=19>, 24 October 2011) first given as a paper at the *Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik*, Darmstadt 1986 and published in *New Observations* (New York: May 1989).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Simha Arom, *African Polyphony & Polyrhythm: Musical Structure and Methodology*, Martin Thom, Barbara Tuckett and Raymond Boyd (trans.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1991), pp. 206–212.

variation—and consequently in non-development—their very accomplishment’.<sup>67</sup> In view of the lack of immanent demand in second-hand materials discussed in chapter 1, the sophistication of these variation devices provided Volans with several techniques which could be used to extend and reanimate familiar materials without having to regress to outmoded European developmental models. This ability to generate a continually shifting perspective on a small quantity of simple materials would prove to be one of the distinctive formal features of his mature music and its source can, in part, be traced back to his involvement with African indigenous forms.

The other feature of African music which affected Volans on an aesthetic level was the instrumental colour of African instrumentation.<sup>68</sup> During his years in Cologne he had listened to a lot of historically informed performances on hand-crafted instruments by early music groups such as *Musica Antiqua Köln* and developed a sensitivity to the issue of colour and its relation to notions of time and place. With African instruments he now began to discern a similar emphasis, noticing how the construction of instruments and their tuning systems differed considerably from one tribe to the next giving each performer a sound unique to his own region. This again made for a striking contrast between what Volans perceived as the increasing standardisation of European performance practices where ‘the ideal is an objectified [...] reified sound, which transcends, even negates the material source from which it springs’.<sup>69</sup> Rediscovering the timbral idiosyncrasies of hand-made instruments would prove to be one of the major considerations of the

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17.

<sup>68</sup> For Volans’s observation on the colouristic properties of African instruments see ‘White Man Sleeps’, ‘Of White Africans and White Elephants’ (1986) (<http://www.kevinvolans.com/index.php?id=17>, 16 July 2011) and ‘Weltmusik: Bemerkungen zur Musik im südlichen Afrika’.

<sup>69</sup> Volans, ‘Of Africans and White Elephants’. As one of his examples Volans mentioned the Berlin Philharmonic under von Karajan: ‘What characterises their sound? Smoothness, breathiness. No “attack”—that delicate, yes, grainy moment when an instrument just begins to speak—the delight of connoisseurs. Von Karajan has banished catgut, horsehair and reed from his orchestra. [...] For “individuality”, “trade mark” has been substituted’.

Paraphrase series where the choice of instrumentation, tunings, register and performance practice play a major role in successfully bringing indigenous African music into a Western art music context. After the series, such considerations form an integral part of his later music where the interplay between different timbres, registers and forms of articulation are as important to a work's unfolding as changes in the parameters of pitch or rhythm.

As a political statement, Volans, as a white South African, felt that the series might lend some sort of contribution to the struggle against apartheid. The timing of the series coincided with a particularly severe period of state-sanctioned oppression where the national government, under considerable international pressure, was desperately seeking to hold on to power. In this climate, the simple choice to engage with musicians across the racial divide was an act of political defiance. By attempting to enact 'a reconciliation of African and European aesthetics', Volans stated that he hoped (perhaps naively) to in some way contribute to social change:

I actually did quite consciously want to elevate the status of street music and African music in South Africa. And I was convinced that the best way of doing that was to gain international recognition for it, because people there are impressed by something that has made it overseas. So I thought if I went there and promoted African music overseas, it would raise the consciousness of South Africans, particularly the White population, the people in political power.<sup>70</sup>

Despite these noble intentions, Volans was also aware of the potential pitfalls of his attempted reproachment. Given the unequal power relations inherent in the Western/African binary, there was the ever-present danger that his project could all too easily be viewed as an imperialistic enterprise if the African material was perceived to be dominated by Western art music. Volans was therefore keen to avoid the 'genre-bending' type of encounter, where a number of token 'exoticised'

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<sup>70</sup> Volans quoted in Timothy D. Taylor, 'When We Think about Music and Politics: The Case of Kevin Volans', *Perspectives of New Music* 33 (1995), p. 514.

elements of African music are incorporated into an otherwise Western art-form as decoration.<sup>71</sup> Yet at the same time he realised that some transformation of the source material would obviously be necessary if the project was to have any aesthetic merit in its own right as well as possibly contribute towards the development of a personal style.

Volans's solution to both of these dilemmas was to plan the project as a series of graded stages. At the start of the series the source material would be quite literal but as it progressed Volans would gradually exercise more and more subjective intervention into it so that by the end of the series it was envisaged that no overt trace of the original African music would be perceptible. In attempting to do this, Volans declared that his aim was not to dominate the African material but to learn from it so that even though the literal presence of the source material would have receded, something of its underlying 'essence' would still remain:

I planned a series of pieces which were graded (as a learning curve) from pure transcription (in the manner of Bach) through paraphrase (as in Liszt), quotation as *objet trouvé* (Charles Ives) assimilation (in the tradition of Stravinsky and Bartók) to what was then called an 'invented folklore'—what I thought of as a new music of southern Africa, or music for a new South Africa. Thus the series began with *Mbira* (1981) (now withdrawn) which involved traditional patterns, some newly composed patterns and a non-traditional coda, *Matepe* (1982), which is largely non-traditional in style, and where the music is expanded to encompass the wider range of the harpsichord, through to *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket* (1985) in which only the title is African.<sup>72</sup>

This strategy effectively guaranteed that some degree of subjective engagement with the technical and aesthetic features of indigenous music would have to take place while the policy of literal transcription and paraphrase at the beginning of the series seemed to guard against the accusation that Volans was merely exoticising the material or interacting with it on a superficial level.

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<sup>71</sup> In 'Of White Africans and White Elephants' Volans wrote: '[...] clearly reconciliation must involve modification on both sides. I have not dealt with acculturated forms, like those of black urban culture, because in nearly all cases African culture has been adapted to meet Western demands'.

<sup>72</sup> Volans, 'White Man Sleeps'.

The following analyses will attempt to map the progress of the series from the initial reliance on transcription through to the emergence of something much more personal by its conclusion. In doing so, I have loosely taken the stages described by Volans in the above quotation as a guide, beginning with transcription and paraphrase in *Matepe* (1980), *objet trouvé* in *White Man Sleeps* (1982), assimilation in *Walking Song* (1984), *Kneeling Dance* (1984) and *Leaping Dance* (1984), and finally ‘invented folklore’ in *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket* (1985–86).

i) Stage 1: Transcription and Paraphrase in *Matepe*

The opening two instalments of the series were based on mbira music, an instrument most readily associated with the Shona peoples of Zimbabwe.<sup>73</sup> The instrument consists of a wooden board to which metal keys are attached. The musician produces sound by plucking the keys and the vibrations are amplified by the use of a resonator. The *matepe* is a particular type of mbira most commonly found in the Mt. Darwin, Bindura and Mtoko districts of north eastern Zimbabwe. Like most African music, it consists of repeated patterns with variations. However its most distinctive feature is a phenomenon known as ‘inherent rhythms’.<sup>74</sup> These are melodic and rhythmic patterns which are not directly played by the performer but which emerge out of the total complex of the music. Because mbira music contains large intervallic leaps, the ear tends to pick out pitches of a similar level and group them into separate phrases. The result is a stratification of the melodic lines. This can clearly be observed in the following version of the traditional tune *Aroyima Mwana*, which Volans’s piece is

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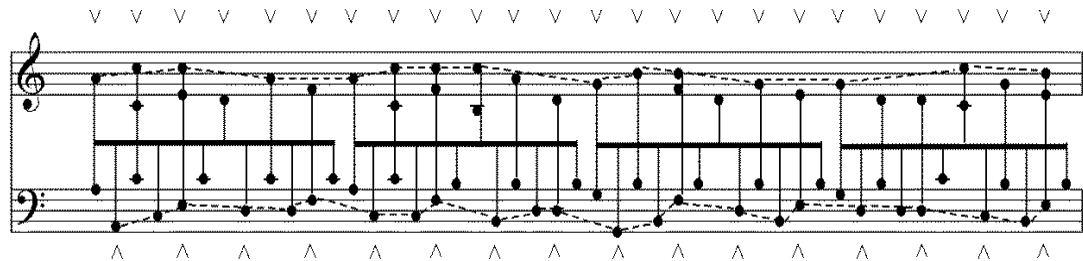
<sup>73</sup> All of the technical information on mbira and matepe music is taken from the following sources: Paul F. Berliner, *The Soul of Mbira: Music and Traditions of the Shona People of Zimbabwe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) and Andrew Tracey, ‘The Matepe Mbira Music of Rhodesia’, *African Music Society Journal*, 4/4 (1970), pp. 37–61.

<sup>74</sup> For more on the subject of ‘Inherent Rhythms’ see Berliner, *The Soul of Mbira*, p. 88–106.



based on. Volans discovered a transcription of the tune in Andrew Tracey's article 'The Matepe Mbira Music of Rhodesia' (see example 3.1).

**Example 3.1** *Aroyima Mwana* and Inherent Rhythms



The tune is based on the common mbira 48 pulse pattern which can be divided into four major internal phrases of twelve pulses each. The left hand plays on most pulses while the right hand plays on every second pulse. The notes in the lower register of the left hand break away to form a bassline in threes while the higher register notes in the right hand form a melody in twos, thus giving a basic polyrhythm of 3:2—one of the foundational ratios of African rhythm. In addition to these melodies, both the higher notes in the left hand and the lower notes in the right hand combine to form a third melody in the middle register whose rhythmic groupings are not as clear-cut.

In most traditional mbira music a performance usually consists of two or more players whose parts interlock. The first part, known as the *Kushara*, contains the most prominent melodic material while the second, the *Kutsinhira*, provides a contrasting interlocking rhythmic part. When these patterns are combined the resulting textures can be extremely complex, much more so than if a single player was performing. The players are usually kept in time by an accompanying rattle pattern which plays a downbeat on every third pulse. This is called the *hoshō* and is usually made from a dried-out gourd filled with seeds.

Volans's first decision when approaching this material concerned the correct choice of instrumentation. He wanted an instrument that could in some way capture

the ‘local’ colour of the music but wished to avoid introducing exotic instruments into the project.<sup>75</sup> Viewing the piano as ‘too bland, too inflexibly Western’, Volans looked to the example of the early music movement and eventually settled on the harpsichord, an instrument capable of capturing the dry, brittle timbres of African handmade instruments.<sup>76</sup> This was then ‘Africanised’ by being re-tuned to the traditional African mbira tuning of ‘roughly seven equal steps to the octave’.<sup>77</sup> He also set up his ensemble to mirror the performance practice of traditional mbira music in which two or more players interlock with each other by using two harpsichords. The players are kept in time by an accompanying rattle pattern which plays a downbeat on every third pulse, assuming the function of the hoshho. By this choice of instrumentation alone, Volans felt he had moved one step away from the source material while still managing to preserve some of its characteristic qualities:

It was obvious to me, that by re-casting the source material onto new instruments, it stripped it of its original significance, and gave it a new one. (However accurately transcribed, a folk tune played by a symphony orchestra is no longer a folk tune). This does not imply, however, that one is free to do anything. What would be the point of working with original source material, if one did not wish to translate some of the values implicit in it.<sup>78</sup>

The score of *Matepe* provides three main patterns for each player numbered I, II and III and an extensive coda section. Each of these patterns has between two and three ‘modes’ marked A, B and C as well as a number of suggested variations. Two of these patterns are directly mapped from Tracey’s transcription shown above. Pattern IIA (Player 1) is the same as the example discussed while pattern IIIA (Player 2) is a variation of this pattern. For his own ‘paraphrased’ patterns, he undertook a simple

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<sup>75</sup> Volans, ‘White Man Sleeps’.

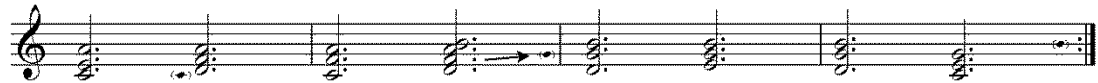
<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Volans, *White Man Sleeps: Special Order Edition* (London: Chester Music).

<sup>78</sup> Volans, ‘White Man Sleeps’.

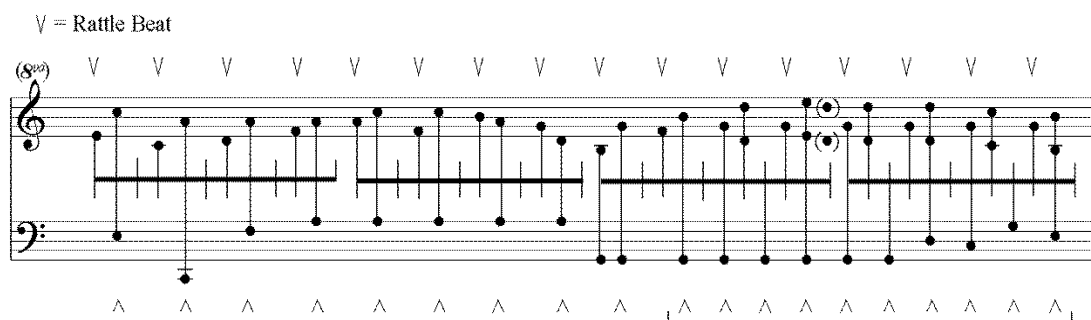
harmonic analysis of the tune to come up with an underlying sequence of chords which would serve as the basis for variations (see example 3.2).<sup>79</sup>

**Example 3.2** *Aroyima Mwana*, Underlying Chord Progression



He then proceeded to create new structures by moving some of the notes up or down to another harmonic pitch within the chords while also experimenting with some of the polyrhythmic features of mbira music. Many of Volans's paraphrased patterns remain true to the style of mbira music but others exaggerate the distinctive polyrhythmic features to a degree not normally found in traditional playing styles, making use of sudden shifts in emphasis. Example 3.3 shows one of the suggested variations in the first group of patterns for player 1. The first half of both the right hand part and the left hand part are in rhythmic groups of three, however at pulse 29 they abruptly shift to groupings of two creating a sudden polyrhythm of two against three. Throughout the piece Volans experimented with similar African techniques of variation where essentially the same material can be heard in many different ways.

**Example 3.3** Volans: *Matepe*, Player 1, Pattern 1 Variation 1



On the whole, the patterns 'composed' in *Matepe* still reside very much within the stylistic framework of traditional mbira music and show only slight deviations away

<sup>79</sup> Volans, *Matepe* (Durban: Newer Music Edition, 1985).

from traditional patterns. This of course was very much in keeping with the original intentions of the series where the balance in the initial stages was to be more tilted towards the African than the European. However with the next stage of the series Volans began to exert a greater degree of intervention in his handling of the source material.

ii) Stage 2: *Object Trouvé* in *White Man Sleeps*

For *White Man Sleeps* Volans expanded the ensemble by adding the viola da gamba whose moveable frets could adjust to the mbira tunings. Over the course of the work's five movements, he drew on a much wider spectrum of African music. The opening dance is a transcription of six Venda panpipe pieces recorded and transcribed by Christopher Ballantine in the article 'The polyrhythmic foundation of Tswana pipe melody'.<sup>80</sup> The second dance begins with a rendition of three San hunting bow renditions of animal gaits played on viola da gamba followed by a re-working of a *lesiba* piece which Volans recorded in Lesotho.<sup>81</sup> The fourth dance was inspired by the rhythms of San hunting bow patterns.<sup>82</sup> In the third and fifth dances however, Volans began to approach something more personal.

The third dance lies somewhere between the objet trouvé and assimilation stages of the series that were mentioned earlier in Volans's quotation. The 'found' material in this case is a transcription of *Nyugwe* panpipe music played by Makina Chirenje and his panpipe group from the Nsava, Tete Valley, Mozambique. Volans discovered the music in an article by Andrew Tracey entitled 'The *Nyanga* Panpipe

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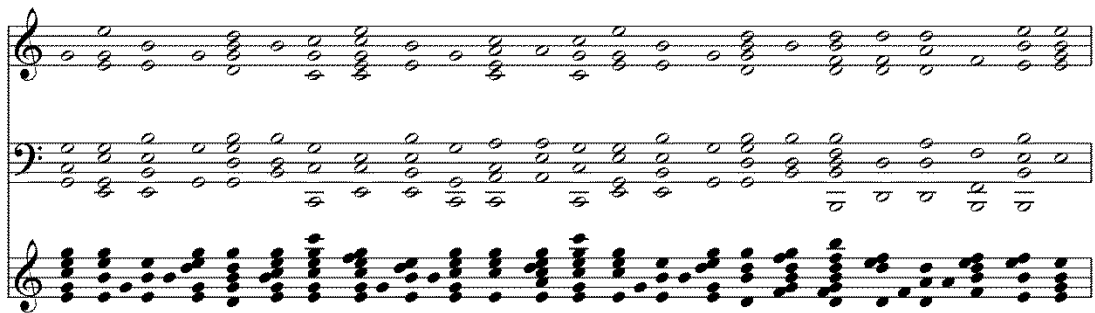
<sup>80</sup> Christopher Ballantine, 'The Polyrhythmic Foundation of Tswana Pipe Melody', *African Music Society Journal* 3/4 (1965), pp. 52–67.

<sup>81</sup> Volans, 'White Man Sleeps'.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

Dance' (see example 3.4).<sup>83</sup> The dance is 24 pulses long and is performed by an ensemble of musicians who sing and play panpipes made from bamboo or river reed.<sup>84</sup> Each musician plays only a limited number of pitches at regular intervals of two or three pulses, but these combine to form a full interlocking pattern which is continually repeated.<sup>85</sup>

**Example 3.4** The Nyanga Panpipe Dance [Transcribed by Andrew Tracey]



For his own piece *Volans* created a total of six patterns which he labelled A to F. These were grouped into three sections separated by a number of cycles in which only the rattle sounds. Of these, Pattern A is the only pure transcription; Volans simply mapped the notes from Tracey's transcription directly on to the ensemble, distributing them between the two harpsichords and the viola da gamba to form an interlocking pattern as shown in example 3.5. The rattle patterns are also a direct mapping of Tracy's transcription of the dance steps which the players perform while simultaneously playing the Nyanga dance.

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<sup>83</sup> Andrew Tracey, 'The Nyanga Panpipe Dance', *African Music Society Journal*, 5/1 (1971), pp. 73–89.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78–80

**Example 3.5** Volans: *White Man Sleeps*, Third Dance, Pattern A

The musical score for Example 3.5 consists of four staves. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 132. The first two staves are for Player 1 and Player 2, each with a treble and bass clef. The third staff is for Viola da Gamba, with a bass clef. The fourth staff is for Rattles, with a bass clef. The Rattles part includes a 'dead' beat, indicated by an 'x' on a note. The score is in 4/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern with many rests.

For the rest of the patterns Volans exercised some creative intervention into the material. By using a technique of filtering down the notes from the original transcription Volans was able to isolate patterns hidden amongst the total complex of the music. He was aided in this by Tracey's article which also included transcriptions of all the individual parts, each of which has its own traditional name.<sup>86</sup> Volans was therefore able to select the lines he wanted and recombine them to form new structures. To derive Pattern D for example, he simply selected the *Dadada*, *Nyabzviruzi*, *Siyarena nkuru*, *Gogoda*, *Kwarira mvuu nkuru* and *Papa* panpipes which are shown in example 3.6. For player 1's part he combined the *Gogoda* line with the *Dadada* line and for player 2's part he combined the *Papa* bassline with the *Nyabzviruzi* melody (example 3.7). The viola da gamba part is a combination of the *Siyarena nkuru* and the *Kwarira mvuu nkuru* lines and the rattle part is taken directly from one of the transcriptions of the dance steps.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 83–89.

**Example 3.6** Nyanga Panpipe Dance [Isolated Parts]

5. Dadada

7. Nyabzviruzi

18. Siyarena nkuru

22. Gogoda

26. Kwarira mvuu nkuru

27. Papa

Dance Steps

The score consists of seven staves. The first six staves are musical staves with various clefs (treble and bass). The seventh staff is a rhythmic staff with two lines and vertical stems. The music is written in a single system with a common time signature.

**Example 3.7** Volans: *White Man Sleeps*, Third Dance, Pattern D

Player 1

Player 2

Viola de Gamba

Rattles

The score consists of four staves. The first two staves are for Player 1 and Player 2, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The third staff is for Viola de Gamba (bass clef). The fourth staff is for Rattles (two lines). The music is written in a single system with a common time signature.

Although all of the pitch material has its origins in Tracey's transcription, the 'filtered' pattern sounds so different from the source material that they essentially form new compositions in their own right. Structurally, the original African material was completely non-hierarchical but now there is a distinct split into background and foreground with player 1, the viola da gamba and the rattles providing an accompaniment, and player 2's right hand playing the melodic part. With these adjustments the derived patterns shed some of their local African feel and become more Western. Some of them, such as pattern D above, almost sound like an excerpt from a Baroque dance suite. Ultimately however the music never entirely settles definitively in either the European or the African category; it hovers between both traditions and makes their combined presence indispensable to the final result.

With the fifth dance of *White Man Sleeps Volans* ventured even further.<sup>87</sup> Here the 'found' material is just two chords which according to Volans 'seemed to form the basis of all Basotho concertina music'.<sup>88</sup> For most of the movement, these chords are split between the harpsichords and cast into an interlocking pattern with a 13/4 time signature. In the original Basotho concertina music, the chords simply formed an alternating in/out pattern so Volans's re-composition of them in a 13/4 pattern is completely of his own invention (see example 3.8).<sup>89</sup> Player 1's part consists of a chord notated as a stack of open fifths (D, A) with an optional variation in the left hand where the A moves to a G. Player 2's part is notated as a first inversion C major chord in both hands. Over the first eighteen pulses of the pattern, player 1's chords fall on every third beat while player 2's chords fall on every second

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<sup>87</sup> For an excellent analysis of the cross-fertilisation of European and African elements in this movement see Elaina Solon, 'Kevin Volans and African Aesthetics: Cultural Representation through Music', *The Musicology Review*, 4 (2008), pp. 1–15. I am indebted to Elaina for kindly agreeing to send me her essay at an early stage of my research.

<sup>88</sup> Volans, 'White Man Sleeps'.

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



or fourth pulse. The result is a polyrhythm of three beats against two. The last seven pulses of the pattern depart from this rhythm and it concludes with an arpeggiated figure (C, G, E, D) in player 1's part giving the overall pattern a slightly irregular feel.

**Example 3.8** Volans: *White Man Sleeps*, Fifth Dance, Pattern A

This pattern demonstrates how a number of techniques from both traditions are blended together. The alternating harmony, the interlocking pattern technique and the 3:2 polyrhythms are all distinctly African features. However the concept of measured time is European since African music is conceived as a continuum of repeated patterns without metric stresses. Such patterns are usually symmetric so an irregular 13/4 pattern would be a rhythmic construction not generally found in African music.

During the opening section the pattern undergoes several adjustments which show further evidence of Volans's assimilation of African style of non-developmental variation. The following examination of the subsequent patterns B and C clearly demonstrate this (example 3.9). The fundamental content remains largely static and instead variation takes place by re-arranging the internal components to create a series of rhythmic variants. As can be observed, in pattern B the arpeggiated figure is dropped and the 3:2 polyrhythm shifts to duple groupings

over the final eight pulses. In pattern C, the final eight pulses are the same as pattern A but the groupings over the first eighteen pulses are highly irregular.

**Example 3.9** Volans: *White Man Sleeps*, Fifth Dance, Patterns B and C

The image displays two musical patterns, B and C, for two players. Each pattern is written for Player 1 and Player 2, with treble and bass staves. Above the staves are rhythmic groupings indicated by numbers and accents.

**Pattern B (Top):** Player 1's part consists of ten chords. The first six are triplets (3), and the last four are pairs (2). Accents (>) are placed over the second and fourth notes of the final two pairs. Player 2's part consists of ten chords, each a pair (2). The groupings below the staff are: 2, 4, 2, 4, 2, 3, 4, 5.

**Pattern C (Bottom):** Player 1's part consists of ten chords. The first two are triplets (3), the third is a pair (2), the fourth is a triplet (3), the fifth and sixth are pairs (2), and the seventh is a pair (2). The eighth chord is a six-note chord (6). Accents (>) are placed over the second and fourth notes of the third and fifth chords. Player 2's part consists of ten chords, each a pair (2). The groupings below the staff are: 2, 2, 3, 3, 2, 3, 4, 7.

With both of these dances from *White Man Sleeps* Volans advanced the series further by taking a more active role in modifying the source material to arrive at new hybrid forms. Out of the five dance movements which make up *White Man Sleeps*, the fifth movement is undoubtedly the one which occupies the furthest distance from Africa. The order of the movements thus mark a progression from the literal transcription of

the Venda panpipe pieces at the beginning, right through to the more European orientation of the conclusion.<sup>90</sup>

Stage 3: Assimilation in *Walking Song*, *Kneeling Dance* and *Leaping Dance*,

With the trio of chamber pieces he composed in 1984, Volans made the transition back to traditional European equal temperament tuning. By this move alone, he had taken another step in his journey to ‘compose [his] way back to Europe’.<sup>91</sup> Without the African tunings the material shed the overt sense of locality which had remained a palpable presence in *White Man Sleeps* and definitively entered the domain of Western art music. In terms of the actual content, Volans carried further the direction indicated in the last movement of *White Man Sleeps* where African elements are assimilated into his personal language rather than directly referenced. Throughout the three pieces there are only two literal appearances of African music: *Kneeling Dance* makes use once again of the 24 chord pattern of the Nyanga panpipe dance and in the final section of *Leaping Dance* the music is derived from a traditional tune sung by two Xhosa girls which Volans transcribed from memory (he had lost the original source when he wrote the piece).<sup>92</sup> The rest of the music can largely be considered Volans’s own creation although certain sections show a greater degree of indebtedness to traditional sources than others.

*Walking Song* for instance adapts the hoquet technique of the *Ba-benzélé Pygmies* in which the performer creates interlocking patterns by alternately singing and blowing notes from a single panpipe made from the hollow stem of a papaya

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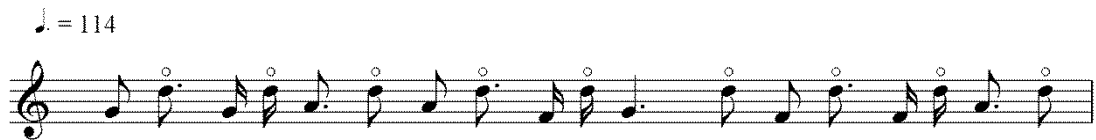
<sup>90</sup> In the 1986 arrangement of *White Man Sleeps* for the Kronos quartet, Volans introduced modifications to several of the movements. He dropped the first movement based on Venda panpipe music altogether and placed the last movement of the original *White Man Sleeps* first in the string quartet version. He also composed a new movement based on material from *Kneeling Dance* which he placed fourth. This version has since become his best known work.

<sup>91</sup> Volans quoted in Taylor, ‘When We Think about Music and Politics’, p. 511.

<sup>92</sup> Volans, programme note to *Leaping Dance* (<http://www.musicsalesclassical.com/composer/work/1651/11917>, 15 October 2013)

leaf.<sup>93</sup> Example 3.10 shows an excerpt of the song *hindewhu* transcribed from the recording *The Music of the Ba-benzélé Pygmies* made by the ethnomusicologists Simha Arom and Geneviève Taurelle.<sup>94</sup> The recurring blown note acts as a fulcrum around which the sung notes form melodic patterns. These patterns are continually adjusting, forming a stream of new figurations which do not conform to any predictable sequence. The sung notes between the blown notes are characterised by alternating leaps which emphasise the 4th, 5th and 6th intervals using notes from a pentatonic scale.

**Example: 3.10: *Hindewhu***



Example 3.11 shows the opening of Volans’s piece which is scored for harpsichord, flute and two handclappers.<sup>95</sup> The pitches, which are similarly drawn from a pentatonic scale, are split between the flute and harpsichord to form an interlocking hocket pattern. In the pattern shown, the E flat and D flat are mostly confined to the flute and the B flat and A flat are played by the harpsichord while the F is shared between both instruments. The alternation of fixed pitches between instruments in non-metric patterns mirrors the alternations of the sung and blown notes in Ba-benzélé music while the conspicuous high F on the flute recalls the distinctive role of the blown panpipe. Melodically Volans’s patterns also emphasise the intervals of a 4th, 5th and 6th.

<sup>93</sup> Volans, ‘Leaping Dance’, sleeve notes for compact disc Chandos CHAN 9563, 1999, p. 6.

<sup>94</sup> *Music of the Ba-benzélé Pygmies*, Bärenreiter Musicaphon, BM 30 L 2303, 1966. Reissued as Rounder CD 5107. A transcription of this tune famously appears at the start of Herbie Hancock’s ‘Watermelon Man’ on the album *Headhunters*, Columbia/Sony CK 47478, 1973/1992.

<sup>95</sup> Although the piece is in equal-temperament, Volans prefaces the piece with instructions for the flautist to bend certain notes slightly by using certain specified fingerings.

**Example 3.11** Volans: *Walking Song*, Bars 1–12

Vivace ♩ = 152

Fl. *p* sempre senza vibrato

Hpd. *p*

*pp* *p*

However Volans makes several significant adjustments to assimilate the technique to his own style. If he wished to directly imitate the Ba-benzélé technique, he would perhaps have confined the flute to playing a single note but in *Walking Song* the notes are evenly split between both instruments. The pitch which comes closest to imitating the blown panpipe note—the high F—is rhythmically more unpredictable than it would be in a Ba-benzélé tune and the most significant factor of all is that Volans’s patterns are even more irregular than they would be in traditional music. There are no exact repetitions while patterns which are distinctly non-traditional such as the arpeggiated figure in bar 10 are inserted at random intervals.

In *Kneeling Dance* for two pianos, the opening section of the piece is a relatively straightforward transcription of the sung notes of the Nyanga panpipe dance—the chords being split between both players to form an interlocking pattern.

However this material alternates with a much quieter section where the African presence is literally ‘filtered’ out. The pitch material is still based on the Nyanga chord progression but Volans reduces the texture down to a single line, distributing the notes between both pianos to form an overlapping octave pattern. Here, the music becomes very definitely European. The main feature of the line is its frequent dissonances which resolve to octave unisons, giving a characteristically Western form of emotional expression. This material was later used in the fourth movement of the string quartet version of *White Man Sleeps* (see footnote 106) where the rescoring of it for strings brought out these qualities to an even greater extent.

**Example 3.12** Volans: *Kneeling Dance*, Bars 126–137

In *Leaping Dance* Volans again experimented with interlocking patterns. Some of these explore hocketing techniques while others display some of the idiomatic features of mbira music played at extremely fast tempos. Particularly noteworthy however is the assimilation of a structural trait which, although present in African music, is more associated with African textiles. This is the momentary disruption of the prevailing pattern by the insertion of a single unrelated pattern.<sup>96</sup> Volans noticed

<sup>96</sup> For more on this feature of African textiles see Monni Adams, ‘Beyond Symmetry in Middle African Design’, *African Art* 23/1 (November 1989), pp. 34–43+102–103 and Eli Leon, *Accidentally on*

that this device was a common feature in African textiles where a surface dominated by symmetrical repeated patterns is often thrown off by the sudden intrusion of a contrasting pattern which differs in proportion or direction. Appendix 1 shows a cloth from the Kasai region of the Former Belgian Congo. The similarities in shape and direction are offset by multiple variations within individual units while the continuity of the diagonal ordering is broken by an intrusion of rectangular bands in the lower half of the cloth. This type of formal asymmetry is viewed as an African expression of spontaneity and joy. Example 3.13 shows bars 3–4 in the first section of *Leaping Dance* where the prevailing hocket pattern with a 3:2 polyrhythm is disrupted by the sudden intrusion of a fleeting semi-quaver pattern solely constructed in rhythmic groupings of two. These momentary disruptions reveal the extent to which irregularity set against an underlying regularity has an important expressive function in African textiles.

**Example 3.13** Volans: *Leaping Dance*, Bars 3–4

The musical score consists of two systems, each for a piano (Pno. 1 and Pno. 2). Each system has a treble clef and a bass clef. The right-hand part (treble clef) plays a hocket pattern with a 3:2 polyrhythm. The left-hand part (bass clef) plays a semi-quaver pattern in rhythmic groupings of two. The score is written for two pianos, with the parts for each piano grouped together by a brace.

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*Purpose: The Aesthetic Mismanagement of Irregularities in African and African-American Quilts* (Iowa: Figge Art Museum, 2006).

The image shows a musical score for two pianos, labeled 'Pno. 1' and 'Pno. 2'. Each piano part consists of a treble and a bass staff. Pno. 1's treble staff features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the bass staff provides a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and eighth notes. Pno. 2's treble staff has a melodic line with eighth notes, and the bass staff has a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and eighth notes. The score concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign, followed by the instruction '5x'.

#### Stage 4: 'Invented Folklore' in *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket*

With the virtuoso percussion piece *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket* (hereafter referred to as *She Who Sleeps*) the African Paraphrase series comes to its conclusion. By this stage all quotations from African music should have disappeared and all African techniques should now be firmly assimilated into Volans's own personal style. In some ways it seems unusual that Volans should have decided to end the series with a piece written for the family of instruments most associated with Africa but according to the composer the only overt African influence is to be found in the title which means 'she who sleeps alone' or 'without a lover'.<sup>97</sup> The work is scored for two pairs of bongos (1 large, 1 small), conga, tumba (large conga), 1 bass drum (20"—22") with foot pedal, and marimba and Volans writes that he conceived the work as 'a composition study for myself, by limiting the instrumentation to drums only, with a brief coda on marimba. I explored several different kinds of patterning, the principal one being cross-rhythms in triplets played with two sticks'.<sup>98</sup>

The use of pattern techniques is certainly one aspect of the piece where Africa remains a presence. However by this stage there are several features of Volans's patterns that mark them out as distinctly his own. One factor, building on

<sup>97</sup> Volans, *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket* (London: Chester Music Limited, 1986)

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*



the innovations of the previous stage in works like *Walking Song*, is the pursuit of asymmetry and unpredictability to a degree which far exceeds the levels of irregularity in African music. The opening section (bars 1–23) is constructed from the continual reordering of seven rhythmic motives and their variants. The dominant motive, as Volans noted, is the triplet figure which receives 17 different variations throughout these bars using different combinations of drums (see example 3.14). These motives are grouped into patterns which are constantly changing and because each pattern differs from the previous one and the use of exact repetition is limited, the music is experienced as if new material is continually being introduced. This is substantially different from the African technique of patterning just discussed in *Leaping Dance* where irregularity is set against an underlying regularity. If the section as a whole is compared to the symmetrical patterns that featured in the earlier pieces such as *Matepe* or the third dance of *White Man Sleeps* this difference is clear.

**Example 3.14** Volans: *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket*, Bars 1–6

Another Volans trait is the very European style mediation that occurs further on in the opening section between areas of stasis and sections where the rhythms are more fluid. The constant fluctuations which exist in *She Who Sleeps* are a considerable departure from African aesthetics where music is conceived as an unbroken continuum and are more reminiscent of the serial technique of mediating between

extremes that Volans would have learned as a student of Stockhausen. Within the first section (up to bar 62) the contrast between areas of stasis and areas of fluctuation is quite pronounced. Bar 61 for instance contains just two crotchet strikes on the bass drum and tumba and is repeated 30 times (example 3.15). The bars on either side of it however contain various different quintuplet motives. In each of these bars no single figure is repeated; each one contains new drum combinations and experiments with rhythmic syncopations.

**Example 3.15** Volans: *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket*, Bars 60–62

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is in 6/4 time and contains three measures. The first measure has a quintuplet of eighth notes. The second measure has a quintuplet of eighth notes with a fermata over the last note. The third measure has a quintuplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff is in 6/4 time and contains six measures. The first measure has a quintuplet of eighth notes. The second measure has a quintuplet of eighth notes. The third measure has a quintuplet of eighth notes. The fourth measure has a quintuplet of eighth notes. The fifth measure has a quintuplet of eighth notes. The sixth measure has a quintuplet of eighth notes. The notation includes various rhythmic markings such as '5' for quintuplets, '7' for septuplets, and dynamic markings like 'ff' and 'fff'. A 'x30' marking is present at the end of the top staff.

Volans's experiments with a more open style of patterning also influenced the overall form of the piece. Whereas the previous pieces tended to rework the same material over and over, *She Who Sleeps* navigates through a large amount of different and often seemingly unrelated material over the course of its 16 minute duration. The piece can be divided into five large sections with a delicate coda on marimba at its conclusion. This constitutes a further departure from African formal models which tend to be based on a small amount of material subjected to a process of constant variation.

*She Who Sleeps* is in many ways a transitional piece marking the end of the Paraphrase series and looking forward to the experiments in form which Volans would undertake over the next few years. It demonstrates the extent to which African

patterns, variation techniques and polyrhythms had become assimilated into Volans's language but it also raises questions about structure and coherence. These concerns will now form part of the following discussion which will attempt to assess the success of the African Paraphrase series and its influence on the future direction of Volans's music.

#### IV) ASSESSMENT 1: THE AFRICAN PARAPHRASE SERIES AS A POLITICAL STATEMENT

Volans's series was the first set of works by a South African composer to attempt a large-scale engagement with indigenous African music at a time when the prohibitive strictures maintained by cultural institutions were extremely hostile towards cross-cultural projects of this kind. While not engaging with indigenous music was, of course, a perfectly reasonable option as an aesthetic choice, the hegemonic allegiance to the European tradition on the part of the South African art music establishment is suggestive of a collective affirmation of the wider political reality and further evidence for these ideological leanings can be gleaned from the treatment of Volans both during and after the project. At a South African Broadcasting Commission composer's forum in 1983, Volans was accused of 'cultural banditry' by the composer Peter Klatzow and in several interviews conducted in 1986 Volans identified the lack of performance opportunities afforded to him as the main reason behind his decision to leave the country and move back to Europe.<sup>99</sup> This opposition has to be seen as complicit with an ideology committed to upholding the notion that indigenous African culture was somehow inferior to Western culture. By breaking

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<sup>99</sup> Gwen Ansell, 'Tuning into African Time', *Mail and Guardian*, 9 February 1996. A newspaper article in the *Weekly Mail* Johannesburg in March 1986 reports that: 'During the past five years Volans has had roughly 140 performances of his works in Europe and America, totalling about 90 hours of music. South Africa has given him seven performances totalling about 90 minutes—10 minutes on SABC radio, seven in concert in Cape Town and the rest in Durban. [...] In South Africa he has had one commission from the Durban municipality and one, worth R250, from the SABC. They wanted a two-minute piece—an offer he could only refuse'. See also, Christine Lucia, 'A Wealth of Music from Stockhausen to Ulundi', *Weekly Mail* (Johannesburg), 14–20 March 1986.

out of these enforced strictures Volans's project explicitly challenged the segregationist policies of the apartheid state at least a decade before cross-cultural projects in art music became a regular occurrence.

Of course any assessment of the success of the series as a political statement also has to take into account musical considerations which go beyond the mere existence of an attempt at inter-cultural dialogue. In *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* Kofi Agawu argues that attitudes which attempt to stress the differences between Western and African music unwittingly participate in the construction of a classic Western/African binary opposition where the African is inevitably seen as the 'other'. Agawu claims that by '[by] constructing phenomena, objects, or people as "different", one stakes a claim to power over them' and he argues further that attempts (often well-intentioned) by scholars to undercomplicate European music in order to make the case for Africa's 'uniqueness' actually have the reverse effect of denying African music the opportunity to participate in critical discourses on equal terms.<sup>100</sup>

While some of the motivations cited by Volans for turning to African music often seem guilty of this,<sup>101</sup> in the actual music it is conversely his pursuit of the more radical features of African music that ultimately emphasise the 'similarities' with his own European 'modernist' background. Throughout the series Volans draws attention to those aspects of African music and visual culture that are in some way subversive and unpredictable: the shifting interlocking techniques, the distinctive

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<sup>100</sup> Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 156 and pp. 162–3.

<sup>101</sup> For more on this point see Thomas Pooley, 'Composition in Crises: Case Studies in South African Art Music', (MA. diss., University of Witwatersand, 2008), p. 40–41. Take for instance his assertion quoted earlier in relation to tone-colour where he claimed that the European ideal is an 'objectified reified sound' that increasingly 'look[s] like it will end in a nightmare of alienation'. This is contrasted to the 'highly personal approach to instruments and instrument building' on the part of the African musician. Crude and rather inaccurate generalisations such as this are symptomatic of a certain overstraining on Volans's part where caricatures of European culture are often invoked in order to make the case for African 'uniqueness'.

approach to instrumentation, the play of inherent rhythms and the rhythmic asymmetry of African textiles. By allowing such features to exist relatively unaltered at the beginning of the series, Volans releases them from their familiar context and exposes their formal structure to greater scrutiny. In this way Martin Scherzinger has argued that Volans's Paraphrase series works acts as a 'critique of the commonplace figuration of African music in the "metaphorics" of "folk" or "world" music (and its attendant de-emphasis of "pure" aesthetic value)'.<sup>102</sup> By pursuing a strategy of transcription and paraphrase, he effectively downplays the 'exoticism' of the material and directs the listener's attention towards a 'formal' appreciation of the sound itself. In doing so Scherzinger argues that Volans challenges a number of preconceived stereotypes about African music which have since been exposed by African musicologists such as Agawu, Akin Euba, and Zabana Kongo:

The *topoi* under critical scrutiny by these African writers today include the alleged primacy of rhythm and timbre in African music (over, say, melody and harmony) no less than the apparently functionalist (instead of contemplative) and kinaesthetic (instead of formal) essence of African music. The point is that Volans's music—effectively translating the sounds and patterns of African music in a new idiom—draws attention to values in the traditional music that uniquely menace such invented *topoi*. And this kind of progressive imagination is open to actual *listening* [his italics] experiences; it is open to a critical reception that is acutely attuned to the music's inner workings. It is in the recesses of its sound, finally, that the music's political ambitions are fully understood.<sup>103</sup>

Although the attitude of the South African musical establishment ensured that the chances of Volans's series effecting any sort of immediate political change in a practical sense were minimal, the series anticipated many of the developments which occurred in the early 1990s in conjunction with the demise of apartheid. Commissioning policies in South Africa underwent a complete sea-change after the transition to democracy and cross-cultural projects have since become the norm

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<sup>102</sup> Scherzinger, 'Art Music in a Cross-Cultural Context', p. 609.

<sup>103</sup> Scherzinger, 'Whose "White Man Sleeps?" Aesthetics and Politics in the Early Work of Kevin Volans, in *Composing Apartheid: Music For and Against Apartheid*, Grant Olwage (ed.), (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), p. 219.

rather than the exception.<sup>104</sup> In this regard the Africa Paraphrase series laid down an important marker towards the fostering of a healthy appreciation of African indigenous forms as well as influencing an entire generation of younger composers to attempt similar projects.

#### V) ASSESSMENT 2: THE AFRICAN PARAPHRASE SERIES AS A PATHWAY TOWARDS A NEW MUSICAL LANGUAGE

On the other hand, the question of whether or not the African Paraphrase series succeeded in providing Volans with a coherent musical language to build on is more complicated. Although *She Who Sleeps* was supposed to mark the end of the series, in several interviews conducted in 1986 Volans began to outline his ideas for a much larger project of which the Paraphrase series was to be just an initial phase:

‘African Paraphrases’ is the first part of a kind of trilogy I suppose you could call it. In Paraphrases I have composed my way out of Africa towards Europe. In the second part—‘Translations from the European’—I hope to start with the European tradition and compose my way back to Africa. The third part will be completely free. It will have to do with the reconciliation which is what that synthesis between African and European is all about. I think I would like to call the overall works ‘Slow Homecoming’.<sup>105</sup>

The existence of these plans for an additional series would seem to indicate that Volans himself felt that he had not yet quite arrived at a language in which he felt totally secure. The second part of the trilogy ‘Translations from the European’ commenced with the ensemble piece *Into Darkness* (1987), a work which makes use of some interlocking techniques but whose sound-world and pointillistic textures would seem very far removed from Africa. It continued with the String Quartet No. 2 *Hunting: Gathering* (1987) where fragments of African and European music are

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<sup>104</sup> After the transition to democracy the South African Music Rights Organisation requested a cross-cultural element in all new commissions. Volans has expressed concerns about this, deeming the requirement ‘inappropriate for a commissioning body, who should not attempt to influence content’. See ‘White Man Sleeps’.

<sup>105</sup> Robbins, ‘The Culture of Silence’. See also Lucia, ‘A Wealth of Music from Stockhausen to Ulundi’.

juxtaposed together in what Volans called a ‘pseudo-narrative’ while the final piece he wrote that year Movement for String Quartet once again displays a more pointillistic surface free from African references.

Despite Volans’s stated intentions to move back to Africa from Europe, it is extremely difficult to discern a clear direction one way or the other amongst any of these pieces; there is certainly nothing like the carefully graded change that was such a feature of the Paraphrase series. Indeed from the outset it would seem that the idea of trying to compose his way back to Africa was fraught with difficulties; the most significant one being the lack of clarity as to what exactly constituted the end-goal, since it can be assumed that Volans hardly intended to work his way back to indigenous forms. In any case, he seems to have abandoned the idea of a trilogy shortly after it began with the result that it is somewhat difficult to say how many of his pieces were actually conceived as part of it.

There were also a number of additional factors which contributed to the stylistic uncertainty of the period immediately following the Paraphrase series. In 1984 Volans was approached by the Kronos Quartet to write a string quartet arrangement of *White Man Sleeps* which was premiered in 1986 and achieved widespread commercial success when Kronos released the first and fifth movements as part of a CD called *White Man Sleeps*, named after Volans’s piece.<sup>106</sup> Although the success of this release effectively launched his career internationally, artistically it turned out to be something of a mixed-blessing. Many of the subsequent commissions he began to receive stipulated the inclusion of a specifically ‘African’

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<sup>106</sup> In 1987 the Kronos Quartet’s release entitled *White Man Sleeps* reached no. 3 on *Billboard* magazine’s ‘Top Classical Albums’ and had been on the charts for 18 weeks. In 1992 the Kronos album *Pieces of Africa*, which included all five movements of the string quartet version of *White Man Sleeps*, reached no. 1 on the same list and held this position for 26 weeks. Lucia, ‘Celebrating Composer’, p. 14.

element.<sup>107</sup> String Quartet No. 2 *Hunting: Gathering* for example was written in response to a commission by Kronos who requested a follow-on piece from *White Man Sleeps*. While exploring this avenue further might have been financially rewarding, Volans became concerned about the aesthetic consequences. After having turned to Africa to overcome the stylistic dogmatism of European New Music, he now found himself increasingly branded an ‘African’ composer which, in effect, placed him in the same position he had been trying to escape from in the first place where fulfilling a stylistic expectation once again became a stifling burden.<sup>108</sup>

A second factor was the influence of the American composer Morton Feldman who had become something of a mentor to Volans over the years. Volans had known Feldman since the late-1970s when the anti-conceptualist strategies he espoused had acted as a rallying cry for many young composers in Cologne. His interest in abstract art and his intuitive approach to composition particularly appealed to Volans who was similarly receptive to visual stimuli. Feldman however was not enthused by Volans’s African work which he viewed as a compositional niche project rather than an attempt to take on the musical mainstream and encouraged Volans to re-engage with the tradition of European modernism.<sup>109</sup>

Both of these factors persuaded Volans to move away from African music and concentrate on developing a more abstract language free from stylistic references. However this move was further complicated by a third factor which was his plan to write an opera based on Bruce Chatwin’s novel *The Songlines*. Chatwin persuaded Volans and the librettist Roger Clarke (who took over the task after Chatwin died) to base the opera on the last days of the surrealist poet Arthur

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<sup>107</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> The two essays where Volans addresses the influence of Feldman are ‘Dancing in the Dark’ and ‘Morton Feldman: From Memory’, in *Vertical Thoughts: Morton Feldman and the Visual Arts*, Seán Kissane (ed.), (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2010), pp. 232–235.



Rimbaud and to incorporate some themes from Chatwin's writing into the work rather than deal directly with the novel itself.<sup>110</sup> The opera was eventually completed in 1993 and titled *The Man with Footsoles of Wind*. As it is partly set in Ethiopia, various references to African music were envisaged and in his String Quartet No. 3 titled *The Songlines*—a work intended as a prelude to the opera—Volans included references to the music of the Hamar tribe of Ethiopia and a Zulu whistle piece.<sup>111</sup>

Volans's output between 1987 and 1993 is therefore characterised by an overall tendency towards increasing abstraction occasionally punctuated by works where literal African elements once again re-emerge. Despite the often intriguing surfaces of this music however, his strategies for incorporating the various strands of his evolving language into coherent forms are not always convincing. One of the most noticeable features of this new direction is the radical departure from the pattern and variation approach of the Paraphrase series—something which first took hold in many sections of *She Who Sleeps*—in favour of much less integrated forms. Indeed he often appears to dismiss the need for form altogether. In an interview with *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto) newspaper for instance he described his new approach in these works as follows:

The music I write now begins with no pre-planning. It's a strictly additive method, with no fixed-references and very little revision. [...] I'd like to write music that has no pre-set style and no form in the sense usually understood. It shouldn't be a matter of listening for a structure. I'm very interested in the point at which repetition becomes meaningless, and in a type of meaninglessness that turns you inward for reflection. After a certain number of repetitions of material, a certain duration, the music should become a thing. [...] I've thought of calling what I do post-formal music, but that would be another label wouldn't it?<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Lucia, 'Celebrating Composer', p. 10. For a review of the opera see Michael Blake, 'Almeida Opera: Kevin Volans and Julian Grant', *Tempo* 186 (1993), pp. 52–53.

<sup>111</sup> Volans, 'String Quartet no. 2 "Hunting: Gathering"', String Quartet No. 3 "The Songlines", sleeve note for compact disc Argo 440687-2, 1994, pp. 3–4.

<sup>112</sup> Robert Everett-Green, 'A Case for "New Ears" from a Musical Innovator', *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 10 March 1990.

One of the major themes which became evident in the immediate aftermath of the Paraphrase series was a tendency to relate the form of his work to visual art and to speak about musical construction in terms of image. In a lecture delivered at the *Darmstadt Ferienkurse für Neue Musik* in 1986 for example, Volans described compositional technique as follows:

Technique is 'the right method at the right time', but what guides us in making the choice of appropriate method cannot be adequately explained except in terms of the resultant image. In other words, unless one is a conceptualist, a discussion of technique is meaningless without a discussion of imagery. It is that indescribable relationship between the method and the image that interests me. It is in this dark area that composition lies.<sup>113</sup>

Through these meditations on musical imagery, Volans seemed to arrive at a new conception of musical form, viewing it as a canvas where materials would function as distinct objects to be arranged. He became particularly interested in artists such as Jasper Johns, Philip Guston and the Durban based artist Andrew Verster who mix abstract and concrete imagery in their work.<sup>114</sup> In some of Volans's pieces from this time such as the second and third String Quartets a similar categorisation of material could be applied to the African (concrete) and the less stylistically classifiable (abstract) materials which are juxtaposed together.<sup>115</sup> Indeed even Volans's working methods began to resemble those of visual artists. In the third string quartet for instance he described his compositional method as reminiscent of Philip Guston's technique of working with his face so close to the canvas that the form of the painting remained unknown until he had finished:

In the main body of the piece (principally the second movement), I juxtaposed very different kinds of music in the order they occurred to me,

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<sup>113</sup> Volans, 'Dancing in the Dark'.

<sup>114</sup> These influences are mentioned in Lucia, 'Celebrating Composer', pp. 10–11 and the sleeve notes for the Balanescu and the Duke Quartet's recordings of Volans's string quartets. See compact disc Argo 440687-2 and compact disc Collins Classics 14172.

<sup>115</sup> String Quartet No. 2 *Hunting: Gathering* for instance contains 23 fragments in total, ranging from quotations and paraphrases of Shona, Hamar, Xhosa, Lesotho and Malienne music to sections containing traces of Scarlatti, Handel, Stravinsky and his own earlier work.

not thinking ahead, and allowing the materials to unfold at their own pace. If there was 'a sense of form' at work, it was covert.<sup>116</sup>

The problem with this approach and more generally with much of Volans's work from this period is that much of the music often appears to descend into arbitrariness. There is no perceptible interrelation between the various parts and the music alternates between a 'meaningless' repetition, as Volans himself put it, and the constant onset of new material. In addition much of this material is not always as 'abstract' as Volans makes it out to be. In the first movement of String Quartet No. 4 *The Ramanujan Notebooks* the music consists of a series of short fragments juxtaposed alongside each other. Even though there is no overt attempt to paraphrase a particular style here, it is impossible not to hear constant references to the string quartet repertoire in the declamatory gestures, cadence points and melodic figurations which are juxtaposed in the piece. Yet without any attempt to mediate between these fragments the piece sounds like an assemblage of second-hand gestures jumbled together. In a review of the Duke Quartet's recording of the fourth and fifth quartets and the unnumbered 'Movement for String Quartet' Gavin Thomas described the experience of listening to the these quartets as follows:

The problem, such as there is, concerns the question of form. Both the fourth and fifth quartets have rather grand ambitions: both aspire to a length verging on the half hour mark, yet they achieve this scale not by any perceptible formal strategy but simply by the continual recycling of a few pithy musical fragments which the longer they go on, the more they come to resemble a dog in fruitless pursuit of its tail.<sup>117</sup>

Despite his stated ambition to 'overcome form' in these pieces, it is not clear how Volans intended to achieve this by not engaging with it. Rather than rethinking the whole concept of form in relation to the material at hand, Volans simply chooses to ignore it and in various interviews and statements the need for structure is radically

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<sup>116</sup> Volans, sleeve notes to compact disc Argo 440687-2, pp. 3–4.

<sup>117</sup> Gavin Thomas, 'Tail Bites Dog', *The Musical Times* 137/1841 (July 1996), p. 29.

downplayed. Often the apparent ‘formless’ nature of African music and the music of Morton Feldman is invoked to justify this lack of structure, yet this ignores the extent to which variations within a repeated pattern structure—a feature of both African and Feldman’s music—actually provide a level of formal coherence which requires close listening in order to relate such variations across time.<sup>118</sup> The incoherence amongst the parts in Volans’s music of this period seems specifically designed to negate critical listening and as such would appear to be incompatible with the idea of an integrated radical work outlined in chapter 1.

I would argue therefore that the Paraphrase series did not immediately provide Volans with a musical language capable of restructuring second-hand materials effectively. Due to his fears of being branded an ‘African’ composer, his attempt to shift direction rapidly beginning with *She Who Sleeps* caused him to temporarily overlook those vital formal elements of African music—the repeated patterning, variation techniques and the intense focus on small quantities of material—which had proved so successful in the earlier stages of the Paraphrase series. I argue that it is only when Volans chose to revisit these techniques and combine them with ideas drawn from his interest in visual art that a truly successful solution to the problem of restructuring second-hand materials is attained. This development begins with the orchestral work *One Hundred Frames* (1991) but the work which really demonstrates the full potential of this new approach is *Cicada* for two pianos which will be the subject of the following analysis.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Volans, ‘Dancing in the Dark’.

<sup>119</sup> In the composition of *One Hundred Frames* Volans’s technique was guided by Katsushika Hokusai’s *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji* (1834), a three volume series of woodblock prints which capture the shape of Mount Fuji from 102 different views. Following Hokusai’s example, Volans decided to write the piece on one hundred different pieces of paper using one hundred chords which are explored in each section by a series of short, sweeping orchestral gestures; each one offering a different view of essentially the same material through different instrumental combinations and timbral adjustments. See ‘One Hundred Frames’ (no date) (<http://www.kevinvolans.com/index.php?id=20>, 12 December 2013).

## VI) ANALYSIS: *CICADA* AND 'NO COMPOSITION'

In his liner notes to the Black Box issue recording of *Cicada*, Volans tells us that the inspiration for the piece came from his experience inside an installation by the American light artist James Turrell:

A friend took me to an opening of Turrell's in Kilkenny. In the evening we sat in a large cubic light box in the grounds of the castle and over a period of an hour watched a square of sky overhead turn from the blue-grey of Irish clouds through Yves Klein blue to slate black. I stayed overnight in my friend's minimalist house in Killiney. The next morning I woke to a glittering square of sunlight reflected off the sea and I decided: no composition; don't change anything except the tone.<sup>120</sup>

What Volans is describing is one of Turrell's Skyspaces, the type of light installation which he is perhaps best known for. The Skyspace is a room which has a section of the roof or side walls removed so that they frame an aperture of the open sky. The viewer sits in the room for an extended period of time observing the gradual transformations of light and colour as the outside environment changes. Appendix 2 shows one of his most famous Skyspaces, the Live Oak Friends Meeting House, a Quaker meeting house in Houston, Texas.

Turrell's work is often considered to form part of a movement known as 'West Coast' or 'Californian' minimalism which grew out of the work of 'East Coast' or 'New York' minimalists such as Carl Andre, Donald Judd and Robert Morris.<sup>121</sup> While West Coast minimalists borrowed from the distinctive forms of the East Coast, their work differed in that these forms were used as a vehicle to actively engage with the viewer's perceptions rather than simply being positioned as inert objects in space.<sup>122</sup> Many artists associated with the new movement began working with light as opposed to the more concrete forms favoured by the New Yorkers. Like

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<sup>120</sup> Volans, 'Cicada', sleeve notes to compact disc Black Box BBM1029, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>121</sup> For more on the differences between East Coast and West Coast minimalism see Kirk Varnedoe, *Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art since Pollock* (Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 112–144.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

a lot of West Coast minimalism, the aesthetic behind Turrell's work involves the contemplative perception of something which at first appears rather ordinary but when isolated reveals a hidden complexity and richness. The transitions between the extremes of light and darkness occur in small incremental stages and over long periods of time, challenging the tendency of many viewers of art to devote only a cursory glance before moving on.

It is easy to see how Turrell's work would have appealed to Volans. In the same way that African music possessed spontaneity and asymmetry within its repetitive forms as opposed to the industrialised precision and predictability of American minimalism, something of the same contrast can be discerned in the West Coast/East Coast minimalist divide in visual art. This difference is eloquently described by Kirk Varnedoe, a former director of the Museum of Modern Art:

In the Los Angeles aesthetic, reduction does not lend towards pragmatic concreteness as it does in East Coast minimalism. Instead, it pushes toward uncertainty as opposed to anything essential or concrete. [...] If minimalism in New York is Tuscan—angular and hard-edged—Los Angeles posits a softer Venetian minimalism.<sup>123</sup>

Turrell's primary influence on the composition of *Cicada* seems to have been the way his work moves the viewer's attention away from a contemplation of the formal features of the object itself (his Skyspace structure) towards something outside of it: the light and the sky above. This shift away from the object, so characteristic of West Coast minimalism, is mirrored in *Cicada* in the way that Volans's chosen object—a repeated pattern—remains virtually static (by traditional standards) for nearly the entire piece while on another level it functions as the site of multiple transformations. Of course more is changed than the tone, but not much more and through this simple strategy Volans manages to create a binding form which reanimates the most basic of materials in a compelling way. Before examining how he goes about this however,

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113–114.

there is first of all the question of Volans's choice of 'object' which reveals a synthesis of African elements in a new form.

i) The choice of 'object' and incremental change

Example 3.16 shows the opening of the piece. The first two bars consist of an interlocking pattern followed by a bar of silence which is repeated 10 times. The individual components out of which this pattern is constructed are extremely basic. The dominant sonority is a chord containing the notes B flat, F, and E in the right hand which alternately combines with a second inversion B flat major chord and another chord [F, C sharp and D] in the left hand. Rhythmically, the pattern is essentially constructed from crotchets and dotted crotchets although each individual chord is separated by a short rest.

Although it uses only very simple materials, these are organised in a way not usually found in Western music instead revealing the strong influence of African techniques. This is apparent, first of all, in the way that Volans sets up the ensemble. The choice of two pianos whose parts are mutually interdependent has an obvious precedent in the early mbira pieces, *Mbira* and *Matepe*, but this influence goes much further. For most of the piece the two pianos adopt the Kushara and Kutsinhira style of mbira playing where one player interlocks a beat behind the other. Characteristically however Volans adapts the technique to his own purposes. As can be observed in example 3.16 it is not simply the case that piano 2 follows piano 1 or vice versa, instead it is the right hand part of piano 2 which follows the right hand part of piano 1 and the left hand part of piano 1 which follows the left hand part of piano 2. The two pianos therefore act as a kind of mirror reflection of each other.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> The title *Cicada* is named after a series of cross-hatch paintings created by the American artist Jasper Johns in the 1970s. The paintings consist of patterns of short abstract strokes or hatch-marks

This creates a panning effect so that when a chord is played on one piano, it is immediately echoed by a chord (often the same one) on the other piano. To magnify this effect Volans specifies that the pianos are to be spaced ‘as far apart as the players can manage’ introducing a spatial dimension to the work. As shall be demonstrated, when less rigid patterns than those shown in example 3.16 are featured, some of the characteristic features of mbira music are preserved in a new context.

**Example 3.16** Volans: *Cicada*, Bars 1–10

The musical score for Example 3.16, Volans: *Cicada*, Bars 1–10, is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a treble and bass clef staff. The first system (bars 1–10) is marked with a tempo of quarter note = 138 and a dynamic of *mf*. The second system (bars 11–20) is marked with a tempo of quarter note = 138 and a dynamic of *mp*. The third system (bars 21–25) is marked with a tempo of quarter note = 126 and a dynamic of *mp*. Pedal markings 'Ped. sempre con 1/2 Ped.' are present in the first two systems. Rehearsal marks 'x 10' and 'x 5' are also included.

which are arranged in green, red, blue, yellow, orange and purple (see appendix 3). Although at first the patterns in the painting seem to be arranged arbitrarily, on closer inspection one notices that they are governed by one strict rule; no pattern of hatch-marks may touch another pattern of the same colour. Volans felt that the paintings reflected the interlocking of the two pianos particularly in the way that they mirror each other’s chords. Volans, ‘Cicada’, p. 1.



5  $\text{♩} = 138$   
*mf*  
*p*  
 $\text{♩} = 138$   
*p*  
*mp*

7  $(\text{♩} \text{ ♩} \text{ ♩} \text{ ♩} \text{ ♩})$  x 12  
*p*  
 $(\text{♩} \text{ ♩} \text{ ♩} \text{ ♩} \text{ ♩})$  x 12  
*p*

9  $\text{♩} = 126 (\text{♩} \text{ ♩} \text{ ♩} \text{ ♩} \text{ ♩})$  x 4  
*p*  
 $\text{♩} = 126 (\text{♩} \text{ ♩} \text{ ♩} \text{ ♩} \text{ ♩})$  x 4  
*p*

iii) Incremental Change

Like the aperture in Turrell's *Skyspaces* the pattern's fundamental structure remains relatively fixed throughout and change is restricted to extremely gradual changes in

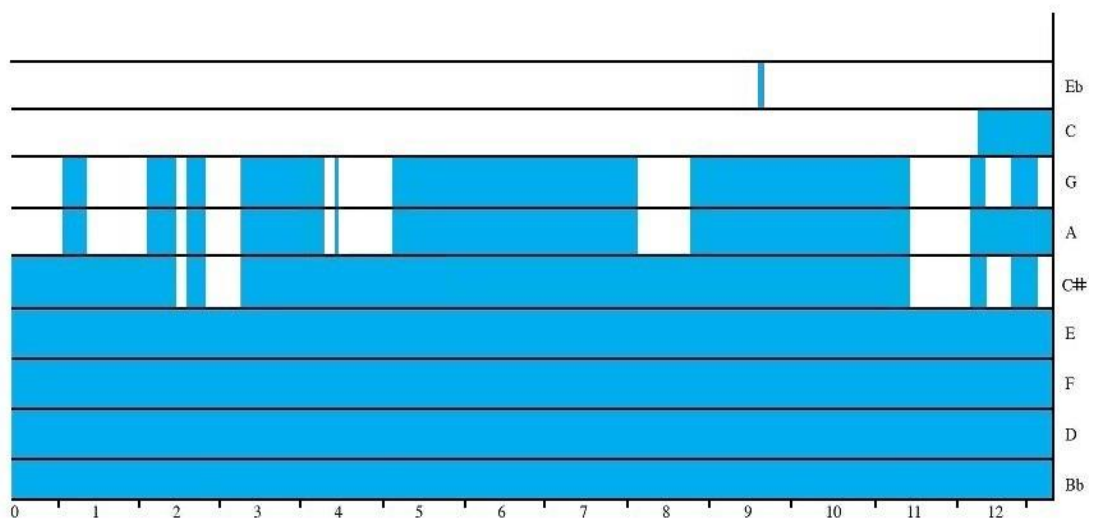
harmony, dynamics, register and tempo. At the beginning of the work the rate of change is extremely slow. The second pattern, which follows after 10 repetitions of the first, is similar but slightly shorter by one crotchet beat. Its left hand part is harmonically the same as the first pattern but a new chord containing the notes A, B flat, and G is introduced in the right hand while the tempo is a shade slower at 126 crotchet bpm. The third pattern restores the original tempo and is essentially the same as the first pattern, although it is a crotchet beat longer. The fourth pattern, which is repeated twelve times, introduces a further subtle adjustment in the left hand when piano 1's left hand part plays the retrograde of the three middle chords of piano 2's part—up to this point piano 1's left hand had been following piano 2 exactly. The second inversion B flat major chord in the left hand parts is also moved up an octave. The fifth pattern introduces a new sonority containing the notes F, B flat, E and G which appears for the first time in the right hand of piano 2 in bar 9. Once again this breaks the established precedent where the right hand of piano 2 had been following piano 1's part exactly. There is also a further adjustment in the tempo which is reduced to 126 crotchet bpm. Between each successive statement there is a bar of rest which is varied as the patterns change.

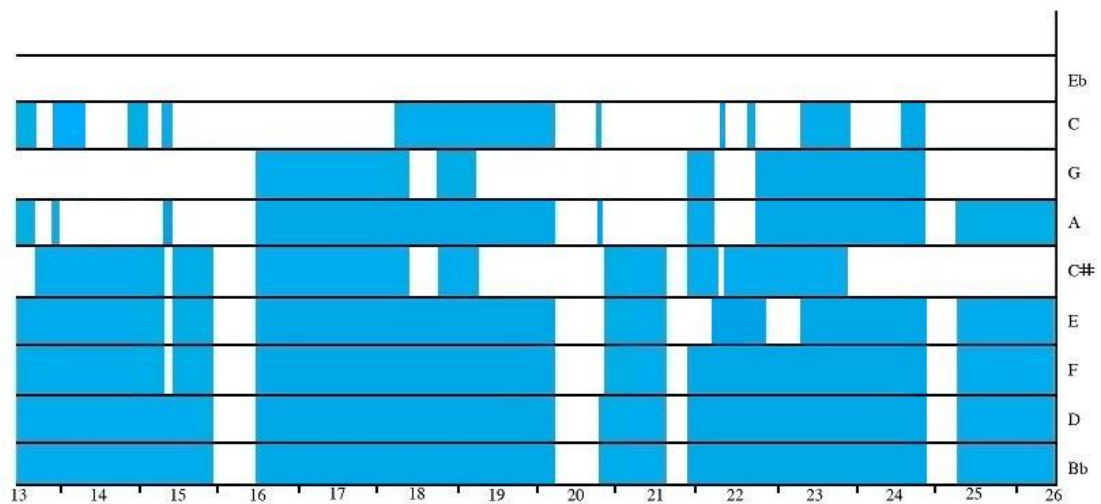
These five opening patterns act as a general paradigm for the strategy of incremental change that Volans adopts throughout the work. There is no rigid procedure in play but rather an intuitive adjustment of the components in each pattern. The rate of change is extremely slow, challenging the listener to focus on the smallest details while the pattern itself does not act as the defining object of the work, but rather as a medium through which the listener can perceive gradual harmonic, registral and tempo changes.

### iii) Harmonic Structure

When Volans wrote that he planned to change nothing except the tone, he seems to have included harmony within this designation. His control of harmony throughout the piece can be considered almost analogous to the gentle gradations of colour that one observes when looking through one of Turrell's Skyspaces. To create a similar experience musically, Volans anchors the harmony around the notes of a B flat major triad which acts as a kind of harmonic base. B flat appears in every interlocking chordal pattern and the notes D and F are usually present in the aggregate of the pattern. The harmonic character of each pattern and the rate of change between successive statements is therefore largely dependent on the presence or absence of added notes among the total aggregate of pitches within each pattern. Example 3.17 maps the distribution of pitches over the course of the entire piece. The numbers which run horizontally at the bottom of the diagram refer to the flow of time in minutes.

#### **Example 3.17** Volans: *Cicada*, Harmonic Timeline





The diagram reveals a clear strategy in the way that Volans handles the harmonic aggregates throughout the piece. The first half is quite structured and appears to follow certain rules. After the pitches of the B flat major triad, the notes E and C sharp are the next most frequent. Then come the pitches G and A; but until the introduction of a C natural at bar 68, these only occur when the E and C sharp are present. The solitary appearance of a single bar with the E flat (bar 54) demonstrates the extent to which African-style anomalies infiltrate all aspects of his music. In the second half of the piece the pitch groupings are much less restricted as the harmony embraces more varied combinations.

#### iv) Dynamics, Register and the Spatial Dimension

The influence of Stockhausen would seem to be very remote in a piece like *Cicada* but there is nevertheless something of the ‘structuralist’ approach in the way that Volans handles many of the musical parameters. Throughout the piece there is a constant mediation—a concept integral to the post-serial experiments of Stockhausen—within each parameter. This is always carried out ‘structurally’ rather than ‘expressively’ something which Volans remarked was a distinguishing feature of his ‘modernist’ approach:

I think of myself as a modernist, not as a post-modernist. I think that what we have in common and what links us to the modernist tradition and the previous generation—and even people like Gerald Barry and myself and Zimmermann and John McGuire, who’s Californian—is that we use dynamics and all the other parameters of music structurally. We are structural composers as opposed to expressive. I don’t write crescendos in my music for expressive purposes. You don’t get a crescendo when there’s a climax. I think that makes the music very different from a lot of so-called post-modern music, which I think is more romantic. The harmony of my work may appear to be romantic. But the way I approach material is more modernist.<sup>125</sup>

In *Cicada*, Volans employs five different dynamic levels ranging from *ppp* to *mf* which work in tandem with the work’s spatial dimension. Generally speaking, Volans distributes the dynamic markings to the individual hands of each player rather than to the whole texture. If we look at the dynamic markings in bars 95–98 (example 3.18), this can be clearly observed. In bar 95, piano 2’s left hand, marked *p*, is slightly louder than both its right hand and both hands of piano 1 which are all marked *pp*. In bar 97 piano 1’s right hand is the loudest this time, marked *mp* in comparison to its left hand which is *p* while both piano 2’s hands are *pp*. The following bar yields yet another reversal. Piano 2 is marked *mp* and piano 1 is marked *pp*. Throughout the piece different combinations of dynamic levels are combined to project certain parts. These can be used to bring out a particular hand’s part, one piano over the other, or a certain register. This constant interchange results in a very subtle dynamic panning across the listener’s aural plane, and adds another dimension to the music. Volans also instructs the players to treat the piece as a very gradual crescendo so that the playing becomes weightier as the piece progresses, a direction which intensifies the effect of this dynamic distribution.

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<sup>125</sup> Michael, Dervan, ‘Sounds of the New Simplicity’, *Irish Times*, 28 April 1998.

Example 3.18 Volans: *Cicada*, Bars 95–98

The musical score for Example 3.18, Volans: *Cicada*, Bars 95–98, is presented in four systems. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first two systems are marked *pp* in both hands, with a *x3* repeat sign above the right-hand staff. The third system has *mp* in the right hand and *p* in the left hand. The fourth system has *pp* in the right hand and *mp* in the left hand. The music features complex chordal textures with frequent chord changes and rests.

A similar strategy is employed by Volans with regard to register. Throughout there is an alternation between patterns in which all of the chords in each hand are fixed and other patterns where the chords of each hand jump between registers. As with his use of dynamics, different permutations can occur between all four hands. In bars 95–98 shown above the right hand of both pianos is static in register while there is a constant alternation in the left hand parts. Between bars 110–113 however all of the

chords in both pianos are fixed in register while on either side of this section, bars 108 and 115–116, there is movement between different registers in both hands.

vi) Stasis/Dynamism

What the above analyses of the harmonic, dynamic and register changes illustrate is the sense of movement throughout the piece from areas of almost complete stasis to areas where there is a great deal of activity. When changes in multiple parameters occur all at once or when there is a considerable degree of movement in a highly perceptible parameter such as harmony the texture can become quite enlivened. The type of repetition applied to the various patterns is crucial in this respect. A comparison of bar 64 with the passage between 67–79 demonstrates this (see example 3.19 which shows bars 64–72). Bar 64 contains only two chordal sonorities, the second inversion B flat major chord in the left hand and the E, B flat, F chord in the right hand. Registral movement is limited to a predictable octave alternation in the left hand and the effect of the dynamic panning is negligible due to the fact that the same pattern is repeated ten times. The sum total of these repetitions lasts approximately 40 seconds. In contrast bars 67–79 last roughly the same amount of time but throughout these bars there are eleven different right hand chords and four different left hand chords that when combined form a variety of different sonorities. The left hand parts of both pianos shift unpredictably between registers and even though the registral movement in the right hand is quite limited, the changing sequence of new chords gives some impression of movement. There is also a change in dynamics in bar 71 where each part becomes one step louder than the markings in bar 64. None of these bars are exactly repeated and as a result the passage appears

much more dynamic than the pattern in bar 64 where, in comparison, the degree of change and movement is much more restricted.

**Example 3.19** Volans: *Cicada*, Bars 64–72

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs).  
- **System 1 (Bars 64-66):** Features a complex rhythmic pattern. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 126. The first staff has a dynamic marking of *ppp*, and the second staff has *pp*. A repeat sign with a first ending bracket and a double bar line is present, with a multiplier *x 10* above it.  
- **System 2 (Bars 64-66):** Similar to the first system, but with the first staff marked *pp* and the second staff marked *ppp*.  
- **System 3 (Bars 67-72):** Shows a more fluid melodic and harmonic progression. The first staff begins with a measure number of 67.  
- **System 4 (Bars 68-72):** Continues the fluid progression, starting with a measure number of 68.

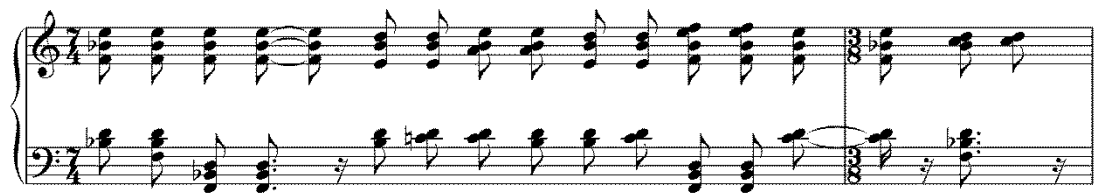


#### vi) Inherent Rhythms

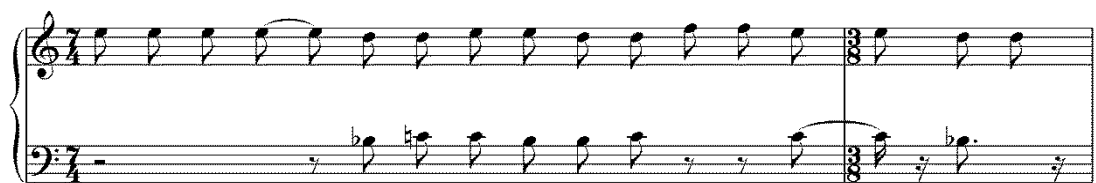
In sections of the piece where there is a higher proportion of changing sonorities such as bars 67–79, the interlocking style of the patterns manages to produce an effect similar to the ‘inherent rhythms’ that were discussed earlier in the analysis of *Matepe*. Obviously with a texture consisting of chords as opposed to the widely spaced single note textures of mbira music the effect is much more subtle. But nevertheless it is possible to hear several melodies advancing and receding in some of the more animated patterns. Example 3.20a shows a condensed version of bars 71 and 72. Some of the pitches such as the B flat in the right hand parts and the D in the left hand parts remain static. In the top voice of player 1’s right hand however, there is a mostly stepwise melody within the range of a minor third played on the first two

crotchet beats and thereafter on the second half of every crotchet beat. This interlocks with player 2's right hand which plays the same melody at a quaver's distance. When both hands interlock it produces a melodic stream of quavers in the top voice of both hands (example 3.20b). A similar but slightly more fleeting effect also occurs in the left hand when the B flat oscillates with a C natural. While much of the harmony remains static in many areas of the work, this only serves to pronounce the melodic impact of inherent rhythms whenever there is a sudden increase in the rate of harmonic change.

**Example 3.20a** Volans: *Cicada*, Bar 71–72 (condensed)



**Example 3.20b** Volans: *Cicada*, Bar 71–72 (isolated 'inherent' melodies)



#### vii) Interruptions

Although the vast majority of the piece is focused on the interlocking chordal patterns, in the latter half of the piece Volans randomly introduces a pattern which bears no resemblance to the standard pattern used throughout. Example 3.21 shows the first occurrence of this pattern in bar 114, approximately fifteen and a half minutes into the work. It consists of a rising scale fragment in single notes split between both pianos. It is cast in minims rather than crotchets or dotted crotchets and

on each of the four occasions when it appears (bars 114, 150, 155, 174–176) it is given the slowest of the tempo markings receiving 80, 80, 72 and 96 crotchet bpm respectively. As the pattern is completely self-contained and has no logical connection to anything else in the piece, it seems to function as a destabilising device; introduced to disorientate the listener who has been focused exclusively on the main pattern for the previous fifteen and a half minutes.

**Example 3.21** Volans: *Cicada*, Bar 114

The image shows two systems of musical notation for piano accompaniment. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system has a tempo marking of quarter note = 80 and a repeat sign with 'x 5'. The second system also has a tempo marking of quarter note = 80 and a repeat sign with 'x 5', and includes a dynamic marking of 'mp' (mezzo-piano) under the first note of the treble staff.

Like many of the other devices discussed in this analysis, its origins can be traced back to Volans’s African work and more specifically to African textile design where repeated patterns are often disrupted by the intrusion of a highly differentiated motif. It recalls a similar device observed earlier in the analysis of *Leaping Dance* where an interlocking hocket pattern was disrupted by an unrelated semi-quaver passage.

Though composed eight years after the conclusion of the Paraphrase series, *Cicada* is the work which best displays the synthesis of African elements in Volans’s music and reveals the extent to which such features have been transformed since they first appeared in *Mbira* in 1980. Although there is nothing which stands out as recognisably African on the surface; the interlocking patterns, the inherent rhythms, the interrupting sections and the non-developmental forms of variation are all features

which influence the work at a deep structural level, providing the supporting framework for a more European content. There is nothing particularly radical about this content, made up as it is from the basic building blocks of tonality. However the factor which succeeds in reanimating it is Volans's ability to translate ideas from visual art, moving the site of musical activity away from the object itself and towards the edges of the material. The combination of these influences produces a form which is binding, yet allows for tangents of disintegration; and which encourages deep listening without having to rely on traditional ways of achieving structural relations.

VII) 'THE BLANK CANVASS': FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN STRING QUARTET NO. 6 AND THE CONCERTO FOR DOUBLE ORCHESTRA

In a number of works since *Cicada*, Volans limited the total content and pursued a similar policy of incremental change at the margins of the material. The reduction of material in these pieces is even more extreme than in *Cicada* and exemplifies a tendency which Volans has described as follows:

Looking back over the music of the 20th century, I have been struck by how on the whole mainstream music has been very 'busy'. From Stravinsky to Schoenberg, Stockhausen to Steve Reich, the norm has been to maintain a high level of information, contrast and activity in the work. Emptiness has not been a favourite mode of expression. By contrast, visual artists have repeatedly simplified their imagery and had regular 'clean-outs'. Malevich, Mondrian, Yves Klein, Rothko, Agnes Martin, Brice Marden and others immediately spring to mind. In music their equivalents have remained by and large underground—La Monte Young, Phil Niblock. Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that musical audiences have become more and more conservative over the past 25 years [...] whereas the art-going public have been exposed to, and generally accepted, a fairly radical body of work. At the turn of the century I became increasingly interested in eliminating subject matter in my music as far as possible. My ideal would be the equivalent of the blank canvas. I am still a long way off achieving this: old habits die hard.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Volans, concert programme for his 60th birthday concert at the Royal Kilmainham Hospital Dublin, 4 July 2009.

This aim to achieve a ‘blank canvas’ is obviously more of an aspiration than an attainable objective but by distilling his content to the bare minimum, the necessity for processes to sustain interest in the material becomes all the more crucial. Two works in particular stand out—String Quartet No. 6 and the Concerto for Double Orchestra. Both of these retain some of the ‘African’ elements of *Cicada* including the use of two spatially separated ensembles which interlock and a heavy reliance on repetition to propel the material through time. However the presence of African patterning and variation techniques are much less evident and the actual concepts which lie behind both pieces owe more to visual art practices and considerations of space, colour and texture.

String Quartet No. 6 is not in fact a string quartet at all but a piece for two spatially separated string quartets which can be performed live with both quartets or with one live and the other pre-recorded. The vast majority of the piece consists of just two chords which overlap between both quartets. Example 3.22 shows the opening five bars. Quartet 1 begins with a chord of open fifths (D–A/C–G) with an added E in the first violin. As this chord is fading out Quartet 2 enters with a different chord, a B flat major chord with an added E and the two quartets momentarily overlap blending the harmonies together.

As inspiration behind the piece Volans cites the work of the American Abstract Expressionist painter Mark Rothko:

With one chord bleeding into the next, I wanted to suggest, say, the bleeding of one colour field into another, rather like Rothko—in the same way that Rothko took a cue from Rembrandt and ‘bled’ his pictures to the edges.<sup>127</sup>

In his paintings, Rothko created an illusion of movement by applying multiple layers of paint on top of each other. This gave his colour fields a deep luminosity and created a feeling of advancement and recession between the different forms. In String

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

Quartet No. 6 something of this feeling is captured in the way that the chords advance from the silence and are then ‘bled’ into each other before receding back and fading out. Volans controls this movement throughout by varying the type of attack as well as the amount of silence between successive chords.

**Example 3.22** Volans: String Quartet No. 6, Bars 1–5

The musical score for Example 3.22 consists of two systems of staves for four string instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The first system covers bars 1-3, with a tempo marking of quarter note = 72 and a rehearsal mark III. The second system covers bars 4-5. Dynamics range from piano (p) and pianissimo (pp) to mezzo-piano (mp) and sostenuto (sim.). The time signatures are 5/4, 3/4, and 5/4.

Like *Cicada*, this basic format remains largely unaltered and the focus of musical change shifts towards the manipulation of tone and colour. Here the string quartet medium provided more possibilities than the piano and as well as possessing the capacity to advance and recede dynamically on a single pitch, Volans also takes advantage of the greater range of timbral adjustments available to string instruments, making use of variations in vibrato, harmonics, the use of the mute and bowing

techniques such as *sul ponticello*. The most perceptible rate of change occurs in the harmony and as the piece progresses the somewhat rigid distinction observed between the chords at the start of the piece begins to break down. Example 3.23 shows bars 152–155 approximately half way through the piece. Out of the four chords which make up the passage only the third chord—the B flat major with the added E—is the same as the opening. The rest show a ‘bleeding’ together of some elements of both chords heard at the beginning.

**Example 3.23** Volans: String Quartet No. 6, Bars 152–155

The inspiration for the Concerto for Double Orchestra also came from a visual source but this time not from a specific work but from a chance experience. At an exhibition by the German installation artist and film director Rebecca Horn, Volans was sitting in front of a screen waiting for the video projector to start when the screen suddenly went blank:

I went to see the video of her work and I was sitting there waiting for it to start and the projector came on and on the screen just came black lines, horizontal lines like ruled paper and the instant I saw that I had the whole piece. [...] I realised that what I wanted to do was like a black and white

painting, a vertically divided painting where the left is white and the right is black.<sup>128</sup>

Translating this image into music Volans came up with the idea of splitting an orchestra in two and then swapping a chord back and forth between both orchestras. The concept has certain similarities with String Quartet No. 6 and indeed a sizeable quantity of material from this work reappears in the concerto's latter stages, but for the most part the focus in the concerto is on the 'edges' of the chords rather than on 'bleeding' them together. Example 3.24 shows how this image is translated into music in the opening six bars.

**Example 3.24** Volans: Concerto for Double Orchestra, Bars 1–5

The musical score for Example 3.24 is written for two orchestras, Orch. 1 and Orch. 2, in 5/4 time. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 152. The score shows the first five bars of the piece. Orch. 1 begins with a forte (ff) dynamic and plays a chord of A, D, and E in the first bar, followed by a chord of G sharp, B, and C sharp in the second bar. Orch. 2 begins with a piano (p) dynamic and plays a chord of G sharp, B, and C sharp in the first bar, followed by a chord of A, D, and E in the second bar. Both orchestras end each bar with an accented pizzicato. The score is written in treble and bass clefs for both staves.

The emphasis here is on the attack at the beginning and at the endings of the chords. The first chord contains the notes A, D and E while the second contains these three pitches plus an additional G sharp, B and C sharp. The chords have contrasting dynamics and orchestration but they both end with the same accented pizzicato giving each a rather 'hard-edged' finish. Throughout the piece Volans experiments

<sup>128</sup> Interview with the author.



with different types of attack at the edges of the chords and continually adjusts the orchestration, timbre and dynamics to yield various different colours.

## VIII) CONCLUSION

Volans's more recent music has further developed this translation of ideas drawn from the visual arts, experimenting with spatially separated ensembles, minimal content and in some of his most recent music, superimposed tempi. Nevertheless an African sense of pattern continues to exert an influence on his music below the surface and repetition remains the driving force propelling the material through time. In less skilled hands, repetition can often descend into a predictability which discourages the type of critical listening synonymous with the notion of a radical work. Yet in most of Volans's music, repetition is rarely empty. Its function is not simply to extend his material through time but to form a constitutive base on top of which various strategies are devised to generate musical interest. This binds his music together but not to the extent that it ever hardens into a lifeless object. His repetitions are inherently unstable, providing a degree of underlying continuity which is subverted and broken at unpredictable junctures. The template for this approach was discovered by Volans in African music and textiles and it was through the carefully graded stages of the Paraphrase series that the kind of variation techniques that would later resurface in his mature music were absorbed.

However the aspect of Volans's music which really breaks new ground is his relocation of the site of musical discourse to the margins of the material, a strategy inspired by his life-long interest in visual art. This solution adds several new layers of depth to his music and introduces a new interplay between dynamics, voicings, register, timbre and types of attack, parameters which are usually considered

secondary to larger-scale transformations in the domain of pitch and rhythm. This strategy demands a type of listening which resists the conventional linear idea of narrative but nevertheless requires the ability to relate changes in the various parameters across time. The reduced approach content directs attention towards changes in the slightest details and encourages a form of engagement perhaps more prevalent in the world of visual art where achieving the maximum from the minimum has proved to be one of its most resilient strategies.

Throughout all of this, Volans's material remains very much composed of basic second-hand elements: diatonic pitch collections, tonal chords and simple rhythmic constructions. There is nothing in his music which has not occurred at a previous point in music history. Yet it is his ability to draw a fresh perspectives on this material and reinvigorate it through his inventive experiments in form that marks him out as one of the most distinctive and radical composers working in contemporary music today.

## CHAPTER 4: THE PLAY OF CONTRADICTIONS: THE MUSIC OF RAYMOND DEANE.

My work embodies contradictions that I don't attempt to overcome: indeed, its character is probably defined by the productive friction of contradictions.<sup>1</sup>

In the programme notes to his orchestral piece *Ripieno* (1998–9), Deane, commenting on the title's 'etymological proximity to *replenish* [his italics]', tells us that he chose this title as it seemed to evoke 'the possibility of an aesthetic of plenitude as against one of impoverishment; of dialectic, drama and perspective as opposed to the flat surface of post-modernism'. He then follows this with the question: 'Can this be done without lapsing into nostalgia?'<sup>2</sup> These brief musings point towards the same aesthetic dilemma identified in the last chapter and offer an insight into the concerns of a composer whose career has in many respects been preoccupied with formulating an answer to this question. From an early age Deane embraced the music and ideals of the post-war avant-garde and his enthusiasm for this approach to composition led to the formation of a firmly modernist outlook which has continued to exert itself throughout his career. Yet like many composers of his generation, he eventually came to the conclusion that the era of high modernism had passed and that new solutions were needed which could preserve the spirit of modernism whilst readmitting material that might have raised eyebrows in the highly wrought atmosphere of the 1950s and 60s.<sup>3</sup> Much of Deane's compositional focus has been on finding ways to structure and extend this reclaimed

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Deane, quoted on the composer's profile page of the contemporary music centre website (<http://www.cmc.ie/composers/composer.cfm?composerID=30>, 16 January 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Deane, 'Ripieno', sleeve notes for compact disc RTÉ CD 274, 2007, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> In response to an article by Patrick Zuk published in the *Journal of Music in Ireland*, Deane had the following to say about the importance of the modernist legacy: 'As for modernism, it's not merely a thing of the past, but a living challenge which no contemporary artist can afford to ignore just as no physicist can pretend the Theory of Relativity never happened'. See Deane, 'Letters: What was Modernism?', *Journal of Music in Ireland* 1/5 (2005), p. 7.

material in a way that maintains an awareness of its historically and socially mediated condition. He has thus striven to avoid or problematise the kind of traditional developmental techniques that such material can often imply and in doing so has managed to craft new structures which fulfil his aesthetic objectives of creating music with ‘dialectic, drama and perspective’ without sacrificing its radical edge.

Deane’s path towards achieving a secure compositional style however has been anything but straightforward. The conventional career trajectory, consisting of a linear narrative stretching from an initial formative phase of experimentation to an eventual period of maturity is, in Deane’s case, more complicated. This chapter will therefore begin with an overview of the main stylistic divisions of his career which aims to chart his evolving concept of musical material and lend some context to the analyses undertaken later. The analytical section of the chapter will begin with an examination of his work *Embers* composed for string quartet in 1973. This work, because of its central importance as an example of his early approach to handling retrieved historical materials and the distilled clarity of its structure, will be analysed in full and will act as something of a paradigm piece serving to set out the major features of Deane’s overall approach. The rest of the analyses will focus on specific techniques that he has developed with greater sophistication in later works but which nevertheless form a continuity with *Embers* in their common purpose of creating coherent and critical structures from pre-existing material.

#### D) CAREER OVERVIEW

Deane’s aesthetic outlook has undergone substantial shifts over the course of his career, with the result that a relatively clear-cut tripartite division can be discerned.

The first of these runs up until 1974, the year he left Ireland to study abroad. During these early years Deane composed a number of works which although diverse in style, contain in embryo many of the structural traits that would go on to form the foundations of his music as a whole. The second period, which lasts from 1974 to 1988 is a prolonged phase of stylistic uncertainty marked by a considerable degree of indecision between choosing to follow up on the innovations of his earlier years or opting to follow a more ostensibly avant-garde idiom heavily influenced by the legacy of post-war serialism. The final period, from 1988 onwards, finds a balance between both of these tendencies and is characterised by a re-engagement with the structural procedures of his early works now combined with the advances in technique that he had acquired since. This consolidation heralded a new period of stylistic assurance and can be said to constitute Deane's mature style. The following subsections explore each of these divisions in more detail.

#### i) Formative Years (up to 1974)

Deane's initial outlook was shaped decisively by his enthusiasm for the music of Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez, György Ligeti and Luciano Berio as well as the modernism of the early 20th century.<sup>4</sup> Yet without any kind of formal compositional instruction, his assimilation of this music was largely intuitive.<sup>5</sup> While these limitations were no doubt frustrating, this isolation may have had certain

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<sup>4</sup> The question of influence is addressed in the following interviews. See, 'Contemporary Music Centre Interview with Benjamin Dwyer', (<http://www.raymonddeane.com/articles.php>, 28 May 2011); 'A Very Ad Hoc Person: Michael Dungan Talks to the Composer Raymond Deane', (<http://www.cmc.ie/articles/article43.html>, 12 Dec 2012); Deane, 'RTÉ's First Festival of Living Music', *Journal of Music in Ireland* 2/6 (2002), p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> The Ireland of Deane's youth was still very much a culturally insular society that lacked the necessary resources to cultivate a thriving contemporary music scene. Despite certain anomalous occurrences such as the Dublin Festivals of 20th Century Music which began as an annual event in 1969, there was little in the way of any meaningful opportunities to receive a comprehensive training in composition. Although he completed a B Mus degree at University College Dublin (graduating in 1974) he later described the experience as 'four wasted years' due to the stultifying atmosphere of the music department.

advantages which were not so apparent at the time. Without a teacher, Deane was forced to confront and synthesise a number of diverse influences entirely on his own terms, something which gave rise to a number of highly personal responses that were to prove of lasting significance.

The beginnings of Deane's formal solutions to the problem of reclaiming second-hand materials can be traced back to a performance of Berio's *Sequenza VII* for oboe which he witnessed at the *Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik* in Darmstadt in the summer of 1969, the only real course of formal instruction that he attended throughout his teenage years.<sup>6</sup> In this work, Berio set up a dialectical process between a B natural which acts as a fulcrum, and progressively elaborate atonal writing which seeks to destabilise it. At the work's outset, a sustained B natural is played by an offstage instrument or a pre-recorded tape. The oboe soon enters thereafter, intoning the same pitch and gradually introducing pitches above and below the B natural. As the writing becomes increasingly complex, the B natural diminishes in significance and the oboe appears to achieve independence, progressing towards ever more elaborate degrees of virtuosity using pitch-bends, micro intervals and multi-phonics. At the work's conclusion the player returns once again to the B natural.

What seemed to impress Deane most about this piece was its inherently dramatic and expressive approach to structure, one which appeared to preserve many of the dialectical qualities characteristic of tonality yet without having to rely on any of its attendant techniques such as motivic development.<sup>7</sup> In terms of style it remained firmly rooted in a modernist sensibility. On his return he promptly set about composing a series of works which explored various structural possibilities

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<sup>6</sup> Deane, 'RTÉ's First Festival of Living Music', p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

suggested to him by the experience of Berio's *Sequenza VII*. The first of these, Orphic Piece I, part of a set of piano pieces entitled *Orphica* (1969–70, rev. 1981, 1996), follows the model established by Berio quite closely, even to the extent that Deane has since referred to the piece as a 'productive rip-off'.<sup>8</sup> Here, an A sharp/B natural dyad, an instance of what Deane terms a 'fetish' sonority, plays an analogous role to that of Berio's sustained B natural in *Sequenza VII*. The dyad is subjected to violent incursions from a heterogeneous array of surrounding material consisting of glissandos, two-handed tremolos and cluster chords which seek to destabilise it. While the influence of Berio's structural procedure is unmistakable, Deane's piece differs in one crucial respect. At the end of *Sequenza VII* the oboe returns to the B natural which was heard at the work's outset giving it a feeling of closure. In the final bars of Deane's piece, a similar conclusion looks likely as the listener hears the A sharp/B natural sustained over a series of chords played deep in the piano's lower register. At the last moment however, the dyad expands outwards to form an A/C minor third, a sonority that had hitherto not featured in the piece.

In other works from this period, Deane began to elaborate on these structural possibilities in a much more personal way. The remaining three pieces of the *Orphica* cycle are similarly concerned with the dramatic possibilities arising out of confrontations between diverse sets of materials, in which each individual set tends to form a contradictory or negating function in relation to each other. Often one set will gain a cumulative momentum through a kind of minimalist-style, obsessive repetition before being forced into a destructive collision with another set. The chamber work *Aliens* (1971–2), further explored the dramatic potential of this technique, this time using an array of familiar sounding musical objects. Other works

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

such as the *Four Inscriptions* (1973) for harpsichord experiment with the juxtapositions of harmonic aggregates based on a segmentation of the black and white notes on the keyboard, while in his orchestral work *Sphinxes* (1972) harmonic aggregates suggesting the key of F major are embroiled in a conflict with a five note cluster chord. In *Embers* (1973) for string quartet, many of these innovations are further refined using a very limited amount of material while the overall dramatic structure is more tightly controlled.

From these brief descriptions it can be observed that a notable feature of these early works is their assimilation of a broad heterogeneous mix of material. On one extreme, much of the writing could be broadly classified as being in some way idiomatic of post-war avant-garde gestures. This is particularly the case with the piano music which features an array of stylistic devices—extremes of gesture, agitated trills, clusters and tremoli—that are reminiscent of the piano music of Berio and Stockhausen. While these gestures often achieve a high degree of surface complexity, they are always deployed freely rather than being the product of any kind of system, serial or otherwise. As an accomplished pianist, much of the piano music which features such writing was composed for himself to perform.<sup>9</sup> When composing for larger ensembles, on the other hand, Deane was usually forced to pare-down his technical demands to accommodate the performance limitations of the players he was writing for; a restriction which resulted in material of greater simplicity that often contained allusions to historical styles. Another significant aspect of the material in these early scores is the presence of reclaimed tonal entities which form an integral part of the harmonic language. Some of these tonal chords are interwoven into the texture alongside sonorities of a more unclassifiable kind, but

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<sup>9</sup> Deane won a competition at the 1972 Feis Ceoil performing Skryabin's Tenth Piano Sonata. Patrick Zuk, *Raymond Deane*, (Dublin: Field Day Publications, 2006), p. 3.



often they are subject to the kind of fetish treatment similar to that described in relation to the A sharp/B natural dyad in Orphic Piece 1 and forced into confrontations with rival atonal material.

With these early pieces, a bare outline of Deane's evolving concept of form begins to come into view. While in one sense the stylistic diversity of this period might be interpreted by some as evidence of a young composer still trying to find his feet, there is a consistency in the way that Deane handles these gestures which suggests that he had consciously developed a number of concerns about the historical nature of the material he was employing. For one thing, there is a resolute avoidance of procedures which could be construed as being in any way affirmative of a particular set of materials. Instead their treatment suggests a conscious realisation of their 'disintegrated' or 'culturally exhausted' state. One telling indication of this is the fact that the materials never develop out of themselves in a manner which would suggest a working out of latent tendencies. Often they assume an almost monad-like existence, remaining self-contained and static until they come into contact with another set whereupon they tend to fragment. On other occasions they are the subject of what might be called 'fake' developments where they appear to develop only for this process to be abandoned or interrupted shortly thereafter. The result of this is that the materials are kept in a constant condition of detachment, hovering between illusionary states of temporary affirmation and the seemingly more immanent threat of subversion. This tendency is particularly noticeable in his treatment of tonal materials whose traditional functions are negated or subjected to the kind of fetish chord treatment already discussed.

In the absence of development then, Deane's solution to the problem of constructing musical form in these early works involves the creation of a series of

oppositional hierarchies which interact dialectically, a process he would later term ‘structural dialectic’. As he related to Patrick Zuk:

I strive at all costs to avoid neutrality, a ‘flat surface’ [...] If tonality is a system of hierarchies [...] then in the absence of tonality, and indeed in the absence of a simple opting for the horizon of atonality, I choose to invent new hierarchies, valid for the given work, so that many of the musical experiences characteristic of tonality still remain available. Or are they simply being parodied?! This entails establishing from the start a series of relationships, allowing the ear to become accustomed to them and proceeding from there according to the needs of the composition in question.<sup>10</sup>

Most of his early works display some manifestation of this technique with the oppositions occurring at various different levels— between tonal and atonal material, between transparent and more complex writing, or between contrasting ideas of various other kinds. Materials are made to interact dialectically with each other in a struggle to occupy the musical foreground giving each component a dramatic function and the resultant struggle for supremacy between these rival entities is what occupies the central dramatic episode of a particular piece.

One of the key structural devices which emerges in these early works is the climax which becomes one of the fundamental building-blocks of Deane’s music. This was the aspect of Berio’s music which most impressed Deane. Traditionally, climaxes generally occurred as the culminating end-points of constructive processes involving harmonic progressions and thematic developments. They are therefore generated internally from resources within the material itself. In the absence of functional harmonic progression or motivic developments, Deane’s approach to building climaxes is substantially different and can be seen as an example of form being imposed ‘from the outside’. In much of his music the momentum leading up to the climactic point is generated with little change in the constitution of the objects themselves. Instead, the swell in energy is provided by external methods such as

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<sup>10</sup> Raymond Deane quoted in Zuk, *Raymond Deane*, p. 9.

cumulative repetitions or increases in dynamics which force heterogeneous materials into climactic curves. In his mature music, Deane develops a much wider range of climax building techniques which will be discussed later.

One final observation regarding Deane's early music needs to be mentioned here and it concerns the manner in which his pieces conclude. In his book on Mahler, Adorno wrote that 'all new music is tormented by the question of how it can close, not merely end, now that concluding cadences, which themselves have something of the nature of the recapitulation, no longer suffice'.<sup>11</sup> He was referring to the powerful sense of affirmation and wholeness projected by traditional closing gestures, giving the impression that the tensions generated earlier are now resolved. In Adorno's view, such affirmation was no longer possible in the 20th century. Judging by the manner in which Deane chooses to end his pieces, he seems to share Adorno's concerns. Often his music ends without transcending the conflicts that took place earlier in the work and suggest new departures rather than the attainment of any particular goal. Throughout his music, dialectical oppositions are abandoned, dissolved or are frequently superseded by new material which had previously not featured in the work, such as the A/C minor third which concluded Orphic piece 1. This way of ending his pieces can be interpreted as another instance of Deane's intention to avoid any kind of gestures which would deliver an affirmative stamp on his music, something which forms yet another manifestation of his fundamentally negative and critical approach.

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<sup>11</sup> Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, p. 94.

ii) Second Period (1974–88)

Deane regards the works composed before 1974 as constituting his ‘first maturity’<sup>12</sup> and he has singled out *Embers* in particular as his ‘most nearly perfect’ composition.<sup>13</sup> However this estimation of his early achievements was not always so positive. In the years he subsequently spent studying abroad, he rejected much of this music, setting it aside in favour of what he hoped would be a more intense engagement with the post-war European tradition.<sup>14</sup> While much of the concentration and focus of his early works could be attributed to performance limitations in Ireland which restricted him in terms of technical complexity, once abroad he was actively encouraged to experiment with new techniques. Upon graduating from UCD, he was awarded a scholarship to study with the American composer Gerald Bennett at the Musikakademie in Basle. In 1976 he moved to Cologne where he studied with Karlheinz Stockhausen before moving to Berlin two years later to study with the Korean composer Isang Yun. Of these three teachers, it was Bennett who exerted the most decisive influence. From 1974 onwards there is a marked change in Deane’s compositional style which began to take on a much greater technical complexity, a development he attributed to his teacher’s insistence that he should engage with a wider range of techniques—many of which were derived from serial or post-serial techniques.<sup>15</sup>

Deane’s experience of Stockhausen on the other hand proved to be a huge disappointment. By the time Deane arrived in Cologne, Stockhausen’s interest in

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<sup>12</sup> Deane quoted in ‘Contemporary Music Centre Interview with Benjamin Dwyer’.

<sup>13</sup> Deane quoted in Zuk, *Raymond Deane*, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with the composer conducted on the 25 June 2010.

<sup>15</sup> In the interview with Dwyer, Deane had the following to say about his experience with Bennett in Basle: ‘I [...] went abroad with the whole idea to broaden my experience, to broaden my knowledge, to broaden my resources. I now had a teacher who was nagging at me not to be doing the same thing I was always doing, that I should become more exploratory and use different techniques and so on, and in a way, all that concentration that was in those first pieces fell apart. So I became an immature composer, having been a mature composer, and then had to work my way back from there which took about fifteen years’.

teaching students had reached an all-time low. He was frequently absent and the lectures he did deliver consisted mostly of scattered analysis of his own works which Deane found either uninteresting or irrelevant. While analyses of his own work had always been Stockhausen's style of teaching, Deane's account of these lectures contrasts sharply with the professionalism which Volans and Barry described:

He had no real interest in me or indeed in any of his students, except insofar as he could get one or two of them to come out to his house to do work for him. He would say that he was going to discuss a particular work or certain procedures at the next class, but would then come along and do something completely different, whatever came into his head or whatever he happened to be working on. I found the whole thing an almost complete waste of time.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless despite his sense of apathy towards the lectures, Deane's creative outlook at the time was heavily influenced by the rigours of Stockhausen's formal approach which he studied on his own, avidly reading articles and studying scores.

While these years were undoubtedly a period of rapid absorption and greatly contributed to the formation of a solid technique, their short-term impact on his overall compositional development was more dubious. Reflecting back, Deane himself takes the view that they impeded rather than assisted the growth of what, in hindsight, was the formation of an intuitive but also highly original approach in his earlier works.<sup>17</sup> Yet owing to his enthusiasm for the serial tradition, he accepted these changes in style perhaps somewhat uncritically, regarding them as a natural progression from the infatuation with all things avant-garde that he had held since his teenage years. Nevertheless the overriding impression made by these works, especially when compared to the highly focused construction of his early pieces, is of a stylistic transition which at times seems rather forced. The focus and clarity of his early period, with a few notable exceptions, is largely abandoned, making way for the inclusion of a much greater quantity of material within a single work and a more

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with the composer.

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

‘theoretically’ rigorous application of technique. As a result however, the articulation of structure in many of these pieces becomes inscribed at such an abstract level (if it is present at all) that it often becomes difficult to perceive a work’s unfolding logic with anything like the same type of clarity that was such a feature in his earlier pieces. The levels of opposition that he had intuitively crafted in his early works are replaced by what at times appears to be an over-anxious concern with correctly following the dictates of whatever system he happened to be experimenting with at the time, usually a personalised adaptation of various serial or post-serial techniques. In addition, much of the writing seems preoccupied with maintaining an outward veneer of surface complexity to the extent that it often seems contrived to affirm the composer’s unflinching ‘modernist’ credentials rather than being the product of sincerely held convictions.

This considerable change in style would seem to indicate that Deane felt the potential of post-serialism had not yet been exhausted and that there remained certain latent possibilities to be explored. However beginning in the early 1980s, there were signs that he was beginning to reassess this direction. In one of his ‘Tailpiece’ columns in the Irish music journal *Soundpost*, he writes that ‘serialism can no longer be equated with “The New Music” [his capitalisation], it has, in a sense, passed into the bloodstream of the more interesting contemporary composers, many of whom still employ elements of serial technique or else employ other organisational principles [...] to limit their own freedom’.<sup>18</sup> By this estimation Deane seems to be conceding that, serialism, can no longer be seen as the standard bearer of New Music and that it is now just one of a number of different techniques that the composer can draw on to create material. In another of his *Soundpost* articles, we find a conception

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<sup>18</sup> Deane, ‘Tailpiece’, *Soundpost*, Oct-Nov, p. 44.

of musical material that seems much more in keeping with the approach found in his early works:

The contemporary composer—and I exclude such riff-raff as ‘new tonalists’, ‘new romanticists’ etc.—seeks to achieve the unknown by means of the known, by astounding us with undreamt-of blendings of familiar forces, and by a renewed emphasis on such factors as harmonic progression and the mediation of the space between stasis and high motion—but these dimensions are now perceived through spectacles which have no doubt been profoundly modified by the electronic experience.<sup>19</sup>

Elsewhere these sentiments are stated more explicitly:

Today, the most exciting music is that in which the objects—the repertoire—of tonality are present, but treated like those values which a writer like Bataille would claim are an essential precondition of the erotic pleasure we get from subverting them. If music has a function, then it’s that of jolting our minds and bodies from their ingrained tendency towards slothfulness. By all means let’s revel in Tchaikovsky [...], but don’t let’s expect a composer of our time to provide us with aural cushions. By all means let’s not dismiss the possibility that our music be ‘entertaining’, but let’s not sell our souls to the demand for entertainment at all costs.<sup>20</sup>

This idea that the contemporary composer should aim to ‘achieve the unknown by means of the known’ and by ‘undreamt-of blendings of familiar forces’ seems a clear argument for the reincorporation of historical materials. However this is accompanied by the admonition that these should now be perceived through ‘spectacles’ and that subverting these materials is an essential precondition of their redeployment.

Such developments seemed to pave the way for a re-engagement with the ‘structural dialectic’ style of his earlier works and over the next few years there were sporadic signs of a gradual transition taking place. The piano piece *Avatars* (1982) marks perhaps the start of this change. It reintroduces a perceptible interplay of oppositions—albeit with material which maintains a more outwardly complex appearance. It also ends with a quotation from the Hugo Wolf song ‘Alles endet, was entstehet’. The radio play *Krespel* (1983) (discussed in the next section), based on a

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<sup>19</sup> Deane, ‘Tailpiece’, *Soundpost*, Dec-Jan 1983, p. 52.

<sup>20</sup> Deane, ‘Tailpiece’, *Soundpost*, Apr-May 1983, p. 40.

short story by E. T. A. Hoffmann, incorporates an assortment of quotations from the repertoire and can be interpreted as further evidence of a new stylistic direction emerging.

### iii) Mature Style (1988–)

While these works were harbingers of Deane's mature style it is not until 1988 that it becomes firmly established with the period since then being devoted to rediscovering, with greater sophistication, the structural innovations of his early period and combining them with the formidable technique that he had acquired during the intervening years. This profound change in direction is signalled with the composition of *Quaternion* (1988) for piano and orchestra, whose opening movement recalls the formal methods of his earlier pieces in the working out of dialectical tensions between opposing musical objects. More generally however, his work from this time onwards tends to display a much greater assurance and consistency with regard to structure than had been the case with his middle period pieces. There is also the sense that by this time Deane—building on the ideas articulated in the two quotations in the previous section—had begun to feel aesthetically secure with the idea of basing much of the content of his music on material which bore direct or indirect allusions to the past. The self-conscious complexity of his middle period recedes, giving way to a new openness yet one in which material is always viewed from a critical distance.

Like his early works there is something of a spectrum involved with regard to the range of material Deane chooses to work with. Much of the actual nuts and bolts of his mature language are based on fairly conventional pitch resources. For example, in *Dekatriad* (1995) (analysed later) for string orchestra, much of the piece is built on



six superimposed scale patterns—diatonic major and minor, pentatonic, whole tone, octatonic and chromatic. In addition there is also a renewal of interest in the deployment of fetish chords, a feature that was such a prominent structural device in his early work. *Dekatriad* furnishes a classic exposition of Deane's treatment of this technique, as a chord based on the notes of a B flat major scale is progressively destabilised. Another striking example is what Deane refers to as the 'golden chord' in *Ripieno*, a twelve-note chromatic entity which recurs at important structural points. At the far opposite end of the spectrum, there is also a line of pieces which continue to explore a more ostensibly avant-garde idiom such as *Inter Pares* for string quartet and *Fügung* (1995) for harpsichord and bass clarinet. In contrast to the middle period music where this type of writing often seemed to be pursued as an end in itself, in his mature work the fact that it possesses a greater surface complexity does not substantially alter the manner in which it is handled within the overall form and this material tends to function in much the same way as the more conventional material just discussed.

As well as these abstracted 'small-change' elements there are also many examples in Deane's work of more direct stylistic references to the repertoire; a tendency which began in the early 1980s but becomes a regular feature of his mature music. The use of material from diverse historical sources is, of course, a much documented feature of postmodernism where recognisable styles are often freely mixed together within a single work. However as the quotations in the previous section would appear to suggest, from relatively early on Deane rejected the arbitrary structuring of historical materials which has characterised much postmodernist borrowing. Indeed this position seems to have been theoretically developed as far back as 1978 when, in an essay entitled 'The "Nature" of New Music', Deane took

issue with the music of John Cage, dismissing the composer's 'random juxtaposition of any and every available sound' as 'patently naïve' and akin to a kind of relativism.<sup>21</sup> Instead he insisted on the need for the composer to be actively involved in a process of mediating between the various historical fragments by 'inventing processes which transform one sound into another, or regulating moments when certain sounds will step forwards or recede'.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless attempting to categorise his treatment of this material under a single category is problematic for a number of reasons. Although it is true that in almost all cases where such materials occur they are undermined in some way, it has already been observed that this is a general characteristic of Deane's music and not just something applied to direct borrowings. In commenting upon this aspect of his music Deane himself suggests that these fragments are best understood as operating along a continuum which moves from moments of surprising directness to other instances where their treatment is more ironic:

If you are working with heterogeneous materials, which I do, that can range from different types of musical language that you make face one another, like something tonal and something atonal, and they confront one another, and it can go all the way from that to a quotation from whatever; all the way to parody, all the way to pastiche, and all the way back to something that people would not hear as something extraneous. For me, it's all part of the same continuum.<sup>23</sup>

The movement back and forth between these extremes is related to his conception of musical drama as a series of shifting perspectives. This creates an uneasy feeling of strangeness as the listener is often left unsure as to which perspective to adopt as an unambiguous view on the material is consistently obscured. In spite of these difficulties I would argue that Deane's treatment of direct stylistic borrowings can be

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<sup>21</sup> Deane, 'Diabolus in Natura: The "Nature" of New Music', *Maynooth Review* 4/ 2 (1978), p. 29

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Deane, 'Contemporary Music Centre Interview with Benjamin Dwyer'.

broadly grouped under four categories—quotation, pastiche, parody and grotesque—which often move fluidly between each other.

The work which features the most extensive selection of direct quotations from the repertoire is *Krespel*, the radiophonic opera based on the short story *Rat Krespel* by E. T. A. Hoffmann that Deane composed in 1983. In 1990 Deane adapted the piece for violin and orchestra giving it the title *Krespel's Concerto: Fantasia after E. T. A. Hoffmann*. Throughout both versions various different musical ideas are employed to represent the principal characters. The most prominent of these is the aria 'Elle a fui, la tourterelle' from Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* which represents Antonia, Krespel's daughter who has inherited a beautiful singing voice from her deceased mother, a celebrated Italian prima donna. The choice of this piece is clearly intended to evoke something of the world of 19th century domestic bourgeois music-making with the quoted music being a direct transcription from the original vocal score which features a particularly simple piano accompaniment (example 4.1). Throughout the piece the aria plays an important dramatic role as a measure of Antonia's emotional turmoil, suggested by the relative degrees of distortion which the quoted material is subjected to.

Within a few bars of its first appearance in the first movement, the violin (representing Krespel) intrudes, overlaying it with an erratic and angular melody that clashes with its B flat major tonality. After one complete strain, it begins to dissolve into the orchestral texture becoming enveloped by atonal harmonies and distorted echoes of the opening phrase. When the melody appears again towards the end of the movement, it is even more distorted; it fails to progress beyond a number of laboured repetitions of its opening phrase which are taken up by the brass and woodwind (choir in the original version) in a series of atonal transpositions and intertwined with

fragments of a funereal plainchant melody which featured during the earlier burial scene. It continues to appear at a number of other significant junctures in the drama, signifying Antonia's lingering presence to the extent that Deane has suggested that the entire work could be seen as a set of variations on the melody.

**Example 4.1** Deane: *Krespel's Concerto*, Dramatis Personae, Bars 48–51, Antonia's melody [Soprano or clarinet depending on version]

Cl./Sop  
Mais elle est tou-jours fi-dè-le Et te gar-de sa

Pno.

Vln.  
vibr.  
*pp* < *mp*  
*p* < *mf*

The other significant instance of quotations in the work is during the third movement where, in the original radiophonic opera version, Herr Studiosus and Krespel are discussing the vulgarity and empty virtuosity of much contemporary Italian music and their German emulators. In this instance Deane concocts a grotesquely exaggerated parody of the Italian *bel canto* style, intended as a representation of Krespel's deceased wife who apparently had possessed 'all the self-will and capriciousness of every prima donna who ever sang'.<sup>24</sup> This episode culminates when the banal melody is superimposed with phrases from Schumann's *Carnival*, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and the Offenbach melody whereupon the whole assemblage swells into an outlandish climax intended by Deane to satirise the 'frivolity of Venice and the vulgarity of Germany, combining the two in a collage

<sup>24</sup> E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Tales of Hoffmann*, R. J. Hollingdale (trans.), (London: Penguin, 1982), p. 176.

through which Antonia's melody shines in the trumpet'.<sup>25</sup> In each instance, the quotations are subjected to processes which transform them. They emerge from more abstract textures before dissolving back into them once again, mediating between tonality and atonality, familiarity and unfamiliarity and evoking a kind of surrealist, hallucinatory atmosphere.

Some of Deane's other works from this time make similarly self-conscious references to tradition by attempting to paraphrase a specific historical style. However these moments of directness tend to be only temporary as they soon move along the continuum to a stage where their treatment becomes more parodistic or ironic. *After-Pieces* is a set of four piano pieces whose reworking of historical materials is suggested by the title which according to Deane 'implies that inchoate sense of "coming after" that informs many of my works'.<sup>26</sup> A clear example of this is the first piece 'By the Clear Dark Fountain' named after the French folksong 'Á la claire fontaine' on which it is based (example 4.2).<sup>27</sup>

The piece begins with a semiquaver ostinato idea in the right hand consisting entirely of tonal derivatives that meander through a range of keys without definitively settling in any one of them. In bar 4, the left hand enters with a short statement of a melody derived from the opening four chords of the ostinato. So far, this introduction sounds like an attempt to recapture the characteristic 'floating' textures of well-known French piano pieces such as Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit*. However in bar 5, Deane introduces the negating element; a repeated G sharp octave which soon takes on a more subversive character by being articulated in sharp

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<sup>25</sup> Deane, 'Orchestral Works', sleeve notes to compact disc Marco Polo, 8.225106, 1997, pp. 2–3.

<sup>26</sup> Deane, programme note for *After-Pieces* (1990) (<http://www.raymonddeane.com/compositions.php>, 26 April 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Although the melodic material in Deane's piece shares certain melodic contours with the folk song, his alterations to it move it a considerable distance away from the original melody making it doubtful that anyone familiar with the song would recognise it.

accented staccatos and tremolandi. Both of these elements enter into a dramatic conflict over the remainder of the piece utilising the kind of dialectical process observed earlier in pieces such as Orphic Piece 1.

**Example 4.2** Deane: *After-Pieces*, ‘By the Clear Dark Fountain’, Bars 1–6

15<sup>ma</sup> -----

♩ = CA 52

*pp*      *p*      *pp*  
*Legatissimo, ma articolato*

*Pochiss Ped*

(15)

(*pp*)  
*mf*      *f*

(15)

*p*

*ppp*      *pp*      *mp*

However in comparison with the earlier works the overall treatment of the materials in this case seems much more parodistic with Deane making use of many of the stylised mannerisms typical of Romantic piano music. A prime example of this is the somewhat tongue-in-cheek cadenza which begins in bar 50 comprising a rapid two-handed flourish of the ostinato material which unfurls across the entire range of the piano before coming to a halt on a dominant seventh chord in the low register. The piece then concludes with a short coda consisting of a series of chords which sound as if they are trying to achieve a traditional cadence but fail to do so.

In both previous examples the appearance of quoted or paraphrased material seemed initially quite sincere and it was only after being subjected to gradual distortion or destructive collisions that their self-consciously critical deployment became apparent. In other pieces however the critical impetus behind the quoted or paraphrased material is apparent immediately. At the beginning of *The Poet and his Double* for instance, the English poet Shelley sings a number of phrases from ‘God Save the Queen’ in a squeakily high tenor voice on his arrival in Ireland, a gesture symbolising the farcical nature of his absurdly idealistic and inevitably failed attempts to enlighten the native population in more oppressive times.

An even more savage form of parody, perhaps better described as grotesque, manifests itself in the third movement of his String Quartet No. 3 *Inter Pares* (2000). Approximately mid-way through the movement, fragments of a jig suddenly emerge from a texture which up until this point had recalled the surface complexity of the post-war avant-garde (example 4.3). Its features are deliberately distorted and it is played *sul pont* giving it a harsh and somewhat hackneyed tone. After gradually being introduced in fragments, it briefly occupies the foreground before being dissolved by the surrounding material. Deane has commented that the appearance of the distorted jig in *Inter Pares* was intended as a derisory poke at the kind of air-brushed ‘Celticism’ that he believes has become ubiquitous in recent years:

I was thinking more of the Celtic Tiger and certain ‘Lord of the Dance’-type manifestations of it [...] and so in the middle of the Scherzo you get this ghastly apparition of an Irish tune that goes mad for about forty seconds and then disappears into thin air. That’s my comment on the Celtic Tiger.<sup>28</sup>

There is certainly a clear reference to the alternating quaver triplet/quaver rhythms in bars 105–106 which feature in a prominent section of the hit phenomenon

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted from ‘Contemporary Music Centre Interview with Benjamin Dwyer’.

*Riverdance* while the tune itself (composed by Deane) is a deliberately crude version of an Irish jig.

**Example 4.3** Deane: String Quartet No. 3, *Inter Pares*, Third Movement, Bars 84–85

The musical score for Example 4.3 consists of four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The music is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one flat. The score is divided into two measures, with a 12/16 time signature change indicated at the beginning of the second measure.   
 - **Violin I:** Starts with a *pizz.* (pizzicato) instruction and a *sfz* (sforzando) dynamic. The second measure is marked *arco s.p.* (arco sostenuto piano) and *mf* (mezzo-forte).   
 - **Violin II:** Features *vibr.* (vibrato) and *f pp* (fortissimo pianissimo) dynamics. A *gliss.* (glissando) is indicated in the second measure, with a *fp* (fortissimo pianissimo) dynamic.   
 - **Viola:** Also features *vibr.* and *f pp* dynamics. A *gliss.* is marked in the second measure, with a *fp* dynamic.   
 - **Violoncello:** Starts with *pizz.* and *p* (piano) dynamics, moving through *f* (forte) and *ff* (fortissimo) dynamics. The second measure is marked *arco* and *f* dynamic.   
 The score includes various performance markings such as accents, slurs, and triplet markings (indicated by a '3' over a group of notes).

Unlike previous generations of Irish composers, Deane has steered clear of any attempts to forge a distinctly ‘Irish’ form of art music—namely one which draws on elements of the folk tradition to resolve the long standing quest for the ‘Irish Bartók’. This idea was emphatically rejected by Deane in 1983 who, in a passage which shows the clear influence of Adorno, dismissed the entire enterprise as an inward-looking edifice of cultural insularity:

Nationalism: ‘Why have we no Irish Bartók?’ Because of history and geography—it so happened that Bartók discovered Eastern-European folk music at a time when its ‘barbarism’ chimed in perfectly with the ethos of Western ‘classical’ music. Such circumstances don’t apply in contemporary Ireland, and attempts to wed traditional Irish music to an ‘avant-garde’ idiom can lead only to a kind of Bord Fáilte aesthetic.<sup>29</sup>

However a critical reading of Deane’s more recent comments on Irish traditional music would seem to suggest that his problem is not with Irish traditional music *per se* but rather with the tendency of some of its practitioners to enthusiastically

<sup>29</sup> Deane, ‘Tailpiece’, April–May 1983. p. 40. Bord Fáilte was the name of the Irish tourist board as this time.



conform to commercial dictates, something which Deane drew particular attention to during the years of the Celtic Tiger, seeing it as symptomatic of an identity crisis and a potent reflection of the country's on-going cultural alignment with imperialistic Anglo-American norms.<sup>30</sup>

In terms of specific techniques the most significant formal development in Deane's mature style is the replacement of his earlier tendency to simply repeat material with slight variations with more sophisticated methods of creating climaxes and achieving extended forms. One of the most prevalent of these is his penchant for building up structures and then proceeding to dismantle them. Often his pieces begin with a series of fragmented statements of an initial idea which gathers momentum through techniques that, on many occasions, bear allusions to traditional motivic development. However this idea is only allowed progress to a certain point before it is made collapse in on itself through a process of self-destruction. After going through these stages of disintegration, the decaying remnants are then salvaged to form the basis of a new construct and the cycle repeats. As he described in an interview with Arthur Sealy:

I like to build up structures as a preliminary phase to dismantling them and the very process of dismantling a structure is itself a process that takes place across time. You dismantle a structure, the ruins are there and then you build something else from those ruins and then you dismantle that. That's one of the ways that I put together my music. I like the idea of there being a germ of destruction in every seemingly self-sufficient structure that proves it's not really self-sufficient at all.<sup>31</sup>

Several of his most important pieces of recent years such as *Seachanges* (1993), the Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra (1993–4) (analysed later), *Marche Oubliée* (1996, rev. 2004) (analysed later), *Ripieno* (1998–9) and the Violin Concerto (2003) are all

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<sup>30</sup> See, Deane, 'The Honour of Non-Existence—Classical Composers in Irish Society', in *Irish Musical Studies 3: Music and Irish Cultural History*, Gerard Gillen and Harry White (eds.), (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1995), pp. 199–211.

<sup>31</sup> Deane quoted from an interview with Arthur Sealy on the DVD *Order and disOrder*, Mountmellick Community School, MCS003.

constructed in this fashion. Through this process Deane manages to achieve two important objectives. First, the process facilitates the construction of much larger and more complex structures by providing a continual supply of new material to recycle. This is a considerable development from the earlier works which tended to collide relatively static musical objects. The second objective is that it manages to generate this material via an immanent critique of the traditional developmental model.

In many respects, this method of build-up and collapse recalls Adorno's description of what he saw as Berg's tendency to drive Schoenberg's technique of developing variation in the opposite direction so that the music 'dissolves'. It also recalls his description of Mahler's techniques of disjunction, fractures, collapse and breakthrough. As discussed in chapter 1, Adorno interpreted these techniques as critical in that they had the effect of problematising the traditional affirmative meanings that remained embedded in such material. It was Adorno's view that by the early 20th century these forms had become so debased and objectified that they could only function ideologically if left 'bald and inflexible' as masks. In light of Max Paddison's extension of this idea to include many of the characteristic features of the avant-garde up to the 1950s and 1960s, Deane's description of his constructs as lacking self-sufficiency is illuminating. As with some of his previous statements, it again carries the implication that insufficiency or a lack of historical necessity is an inevitable condition of much musical material at this stage of the 20th century. In this regard perhaps the major difference between the critical techniques of Mahler and Berg and those of Deane is the sheer pervasiveness with which the spectre of immanent destruction hangs over his music. There is a much more purposeful and conscious deployment of these deconstructive techniques throughout his scores.

With this brief overview of Deane's career and his evolving theories of musical material we turn now to an examination of how these structural processes are realised in the actual music. The analyses will begin with the string quartet *Embers*. I have chosen to start with this relatively early piece as it presents the fundamental workings of Deane's approach in a clear and concise form. The material is relatively simple and it furnishes a good example of his early approach to reincorporating historical materials. Following on from this will be three analyses of pieces taken from his mature period—*Marche Oubliée*, *Dekatriad*, and the Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra, which explore more sophisticated developments of various techniques.

## II) PARADIGM ANALYSIS: STRUCTURAL DIALECTIC IN *EMBERS*

*Embers* represents the most developed early example of Deane's concept of 'structural dialectic'. The title was suggested to him by Samuel Beckett's radio play of the same name.<sup>32</sup> Although Deane insists that there is no direct connection between both works, there are nevertheless a number of similarities which suggest that his decision to name the piece after Beckett's play was far from an arbitrary one. The most obvious of these is the strange atmosphere of detachment that pervades both works.<sup>33</sup> In Beckett's play, the existential status of the protagonist, Henry, a man walking along a shingle beach and perpetually haunted by the contents of his mind, is unclear. He seems to exist somewhere between life and death. In an interview Beckett remarked that '*Embers* rests on an ambiguity: is the character having a hallucination or is he in the presence of reality?'<sup>34</sup> Throughout the play, Henry consistently fails to finish any of the stories he begins to tell, interrupting

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<sup>32</sup> Zuk, *Raymond Deane*, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup> This observation is also shared by Zuk. *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Beckett quoted in Clas Zilliacus, *Beckett and broadcasting: a study of the works of Samuel Beckett for and in radio and television*, (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1976), p. 83.

himself with flashbacks of past events and haunting experiences of people in his life. There is a sense of absence and exhaustion to his broken narrative, which at the play's conclusion, trails off, leaving the listener with only the sound of the sea. Similar ambiguities exist in Deane's work, particularly regarding its material which recalls musical gestures from earlier periods.

#### i) Material and Distance

Apart from the reference to Beckett, Deane has also suggested that perhaps the word 'embers' refers metaphorically to the disintegrated leftovers of a fire that was once the Western music tradition and has described the piece as composed of 'musical fragments which seem to have some remote but uncertain origin'.<sup>35</sup> Although some sort of connection with the past is clearly discernible, attempting to pin-point its exact location is more problematic. Throughout the piece the material is kept at a certain distance, obscuring any sense of directness which the listener might feel towards similar material in another context. An examination of the opening should illustrate this point (example 4.4). The piece begins with four short statements of a melodic fragment played by the first violin which give the impression that they are trying to become a whole melody. As can be observed, the pitch content of the melody is loosely suggestive of E minor; its rhythmic structure is relatively simple and straightforward, although it avoids settling into any regular metric grouping; and its gently alternating melodic contour for the most part avoids any large dissonant leaps. Combined with the instruction that it be played with vibrato, the musical language employed here seems quite traditional.

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<sup>35</sup> Deane, programme note for *Embers* (no date) (<http://www.raymonddeane.com/compositions.php>, 26 April 2012).

**Example 4.4** Deane: *Embers*, Bars 1–20

At the same time however, a direct access to the lush expressivity suggested by the melody is mitigated by a number of factors which come together to lend the passage an air of detachment. The first of these is the presence of a tritone (E, B flat) played by the viola and cello which accompanies the melody on each repetition. This introduces an obstinately static dissonance that clashes with the E minor harmony implied by the melody. This dissonance is further increased with the addition of a G sharp in the second violin on the fourth repetition. A second factor is the resolute avoidance of any of the conventional techniques that have historically been applied to such material. In a more traditional context, a melody such as this might be expected to develop by expanding on the intervallic or rhythmic features contained within it. Here however, the melody always fades out, doing so on notes which have strong historical affinities for resolving to the tonic, an F sharp or a D sharp—respectively the leading note and supertonic of the E harmonic minor scale. The fragment is thus left open-ended and in a state of unresolved tension, a condition which would seem to point towards the necessity of further development to resolve this tension. Yet the implied development never happens. Although it undergoes

slight variations —really no more than a reordering of internal components—and its range expands from a fourth to an octave by the third repetition, these minimal adjustments are hardly enough to constitute a proper ‘development’. The tritone remains fixed and any sense of progression is inhibited by the melody’s inability to break out of this induced stasis.

By avoiding development and punctuating the score with long silences, the fragments appear almost as dream-images which fleetingly emerge onto the foreground only to retreat back to silence. However, this act of critical negation also creates a compositional problem. Without any kind of development Deane is still compelled to provide some alternative means of creating an extended form other than repetition if he is to fulfil his self-imposed requirement of a music that preserves depth, dialectic and perspective. The solution he devises is to introduce a new element, and to set both elements against each other. This new element appears for the first time in bar 22 (example 4.5) and consists of a two-note ascending figure (E, F sharp) again played by the first violin and heard over a succession of tonal chords which, in Deane’s words ‘give the impression they’re seeking a cadence’.<sup>36</sup>

**Example 4.5** Deane: *Embers*, Bars 21–26

The musical score for Example 4.5 consists of five measures for four instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The first violin part begins in measure 21 with a melodic line consisting of a tritone interval (E and F#) that is repeated and expanded in range. The other instruments provide harmonic support with sustained notes and vibrato. Dynamics are marked as piano (p) and vibrato (vibr.) is indicated for the strings.

<sup>36</sup> Deane quoted in Zuk, *Raymond Deane*, p. 36.

As with the opening melody the musical language out of which this new element is constructed is strikingly simple. The chords which harmonise the two-note figure are quite plainly tonal: the first is an F major chord in first inversion, the second is a G minor seventh chord and the third is a diminished chord. It possesses characteristics which are the opposite of the melodic fragment—the two-note ascending motive is static in both rhythm and pitch whereas the melody of the fragment is constantly fluctuating. On the other hand, there is harmonic movement in the underlying chords whereas the tritone accompaniment to the melodic fragment is motionless.

#### ii) Dialectical Frictions

With the introduction of the cadential gesture, all of the essential materials are now in place. Yet so far, nothing dialectical has really taken place. This process begins in the next stage of the piece where the materials are gradually brought into contact. In bar 29 the melodic fragment reappears again (example 4.6). At first, it seems to follow the paradigm set by the opening four fragments by almost fading to silence, but in bar 33, it breaks with the established precedent and resumes its course, momentarily entertaining the possibility of real development. Towards the end of this bar the static harmony drops out whereupon the first violin, breaking out of its octave-bound range, makes a relatively erratic descent to A below middle C accompanied by a crescendo to *ff*, the first real dramatic breakout in the piece. However before the melody can progress any further, the cadential figure intercedes; this time much more forcefully than before and marked *f*. With this incursion, its function as an element of negation becomes clear and it recedes calmly to *ppp* with each successive statement separated by short silences.

**Example 4.6** Deane: *Embers*, Bars 29–35

After this episode, there follows a series of similar encounters which take the following form: the melodic fragment is stated, appears to progress to a certain point, before the two-note figure intercedes, negating its development, whereupon a brief period of silence ensues and the process repeats. The sequence of events is now genuinely dialectical—when one element negates the other it seems to have the effect of transforming both elements. However it is crucial to distinguish the changes that occur as a result of these interactions from the kind of changes associated with traditional developmental technique. Here, the changes that occur in the material exhibit none of the expansive pretensions normally associated with such procedures. On the contrary, the process frequently appears more destructive. As the materials ‘rub’ against each other the melodic fragment seems to generate an internal friction of its own, assuming an increasingly agitated character and exhibiting signs of gradual disintegration, something which gives the outward impression of being caused by its failure to overcome the negating force of the cadential element. Example 4.7 shows the melodic fragment from bar 71 where this process of deconstruction is considerably advanced. It is now articulated in staccatos with tremolandi in the accompaniment. It seems to be aiming for some sort of cathartic release which is denied by the intervention of the cadential element, a negation which results in it taking on an increasingly animated, frenetic character.



**Example 4.7** Deane: *Embers*, Bars 71–77

The musical score for Example 4.7 consists of two staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a whole rest, followed by a series of eighth notes. Dynamics include *pp cresc.*, *mf*, *mp*, and *cresc.* There is a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3' and a 'stacc. sempre' instruction. The second staff continues with eighth notes, some with vibrato (*vibr.*) markings. Dynamics include *ff*, *mp*, *p < mf < f < ff*, and *p*. It also features a 'stacc. sempre' instruction and a final vibrato marking.

The changes which occur in the cadential element are of a very different nature. In addition to impeding the development of the melodic fragment, the harmony in the second and third episodes appears to achieve the cadential ‘resolution’ suggested by the stepwise descending bassline and the pitch centricity of E. Although the ‘cadence’ itself is far from conventional—coming to rest on a chord of open fifths and octaves—the combination of these factors is enough to recall the associations of stability which make it function as the dialectical counterpart to the melodic fragment, whose defining characteristic is its failure to achieve this kind of ‘resolution’ and completeness.

iii) Fragmentation

Although there are many changes taking place within the objects themselves, the material at this stage is still confined to the two ideas introduced at the beginning of the piece resulting in a form which is circular rather than linear. At the same time, within this circularity there is a contradiction between the largely static form in which the objects are set and the increasingly animated character of the objects themselves. In Deane’s music, such structures are inherently unstable and towards the latter stages of the piece the dialectical relationship which had become more and more unstable over the previous episodes finally begins to breakdown. When the melodic fragment resumes in bar 93 (example 4.8), instead of being impeded by the

cadential element, it seems to achieve the cathartic release it had always been seeking. The foreshortening note-values quicken into a passage of tremolandi chords which then converge to form a semi-tonal cluster before expanding outwards and culminating in the most substantial crescendo of the entire piece (from *ppp* to *fff*).

**Example 4.8** Deane: *Embers*, Bars 93–97

Yet just when there seemed to be the possibility of real progress, the music stops and silence ensues once again. The cadential element appears as usual but now it too, even more than the melodic fragment, begins to show signs of fragmentation. When the first two chords reappear the two-note ascending motif is absent for the first time while in bar 114 the first violin veers off into a jagged meandering melody that recalls the ‘breakout’ of the melodic fragment in the first episode (example 4.9).

**Example 4.9** Deane: *Embers*, Bars 113–124

The chords resume in bar 118 but their construction deviates considerably from the consistent pitch content, fixed registers and predictable sequence of the four previous episodes. There is no longer the same descending motion towards a cadence particularly with the intrusion of a new sonority played with harmonics in bar 122. In addition the two-note ascending motive in the chords of bars 118 and 126 is no longer played in the high register, being eventually relegated to the cello in bar 126. This passage demonstrates the way in which Deane's music often embraces passages of fragmentation but always in a context where they can be plotted against an underlying sense of integration.

iv) 'Synthesis' and Rejection

Deane could have probably chosen to end the piece at this point. According to the logic of his negative dialectic this would have made complete sense, leaving both elements completely un-reconciled and dismantled. However just when the possibility of some kind of reproachment between both elements appeared least likely, the music settles into an E minor tune on the first violin over a static accompaniment of open fifths and octaves (example 4.10).

**Example 4.10** Deane: *Embers*, Bars 130–133

The musical score for Example 4.10 consists of four staves. The top staff is for Violin I (Vln. I), which plays a melodic line in E minor with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The second staff is for Violin II (Vln. II), the third for Viola (Vla.), and the fourth for Cello (Vc.). These three lower staves provide a static accompaniment of open fifths and octaves in E minor with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic, marked *n. v.* (no vibrato).

Deane's description of this melody's function is illuminating in the context of his conception of form:

Is this the 'whole' melody that the first violin had been striving to put together from the start? Are we dealing after all with a reassuring kind of 'sublation' or 'synthesis'?<sup>37</sup>

To function convincingly as a synthesis the music must resolve certain contradictions between opposing sets of materials. In his description quoted earlier, Deane mentioned the sense of 'striving' to become a complete melody that the melodic fragment had seemed to be aiming for throughout the piece. Its melody had always carried with it strong implications of E minor, yet this was always obscured by the sustained tritone and the tendency of the melody to fade out in an open-ended manner. In this new melody these dissonances are now 'resolved'; the tritone expands to an open fifth and at the end of the phrase the melody comes to rest on an E. Previously the only instance of a harmonic 'resolution' of this kind was in the cadential element—which came to rest on a chord of open fifths and octaves built on E—and which seemed to convey the impression of completeness which had always eluded the melodic fragment. The expansion of the tritone to a perfect fifth and the resolution of the melody's final note onto the 'tonic' E could thus be seen as a synthesis of the contradictions which existed previously between both elements.

There is also another level on which a synthesis could be said to occur. The melody itself is clearly derived from the medieval plainchant, the *Dies Irae*—the second and third bars of the first statement (bars 131–132) are almost a direct transcription. This is significant as Deane described the cadences heard earlier in the piece as having a 'medieval flavour' due to the presence of open fifths and octaves in the final chord. This new melody, the combination of the open intervals in the accompaniment and the obvious allusions to the *Dies Irae* all convey strong

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<sup>37</sup> Deane quoted in Zuk, *Raymond Deane*, p. 37.

associations of medieval music in this section. As discussed, the use of direct quotations and paraphrases are common in Deane's music, and they form part of a moving perspective between retrieved musical objects:

There is a certain grotesque, a rather parodistic and ironic streak [...] that's there in almost every piece. [...] I would even regard a piece like *Embers* as having a slightly ironic aspect to it in that it distances itself from the material, though at certain moments that distance is removed. And that is something that some people find disconcerting about my music in that you never quite know what distance it's from. It starts off with a certain distance, and then that distance is removed, and you are suddenly involved with something that seems much more direct, and then the distance is restored.<sup>38</sup>

One could therefore interpret the musical narrative as moving from the detached fragments at the beginning, through the central episodes—where this distance is increased, to an eventual culmination with the arrival of the plainchant melody in the final section, where this distance is finally removed. However in bar 140 (example 4.11), after three statements of the new melody, distance is once again restored; the cadential element interrupts *ff* performing what Deane calls 'its old task of negation and rejection'<sup>39</sup> thus destroying any semblance of a possible synthesis and the piece ends on an ambiguous dominant seventh chord in B flat major, a sonority which has never sounded in the piece before.

**Example 4.11** Deane: *Embers*, Bars 138–151

<sup>38</sup> Deane, 'Contemporary Music Centre Interview with Benjamin Dwyer'.

<sup>39</sup> Deane quoted in Zuk, *Raymond Deane*, p. 38.

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The score is written in a single system with four staves. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music features long, flowing lines with many ties. Dynamics are marked as *p dim.* (piano, decrescendo) in the middle of the system and *pppp* (pianissimo) at the end of the system. The Vln. I staff starts with a treble clef and a sharp sign. The Vln. II staff starts with a treble clef. The Vla. staff starts with an alto clef. The Vc. staff starts with a bass clef.

*Embers* is the most complete early example of Deane's conception of musical form as the 'productive friction of contradictions'. The contradiction at the heart of the piece centres on the disparity between the historical nature of the materials themselves and the contemporary context in which they are cast. However this disparity is turned into a productive asset. The critical proscription on articulating these materials in any kind of traditional way forces into being an alternative structure which pits the insufficiencies of the objects against each other. The dialectical friction generated by this procedure produces a form which is inherently dramatic; finally balancing tight dialectical workings with moments that seem to embrace fragmentation. Throughout the piece the perspective on the material is constantly shifting, moving from moments of detachment to periods where the relation to the material seems more direct. At the end however, the contradictions remain unresolved, distance is restored and any nostalgic feelings prompted by the materials are dissipated by the manner in which the piece ends.

In terms of its significance in the context of Deane's career, *Embers* contains in embryo two important strategies: 1) the technique of dismantling structures and 2) the productive friction of opposing entities. Nearly all of Deane's works contain some manifestation of these techniques and as with *Embers* they are often combined

together. In certain pieces however, one or the other tends to predominate and in his mature music his deployment of these techniques tends to be much more complex. The next two analyses will therefore examine two pieces taken from his mature music—*Marche Oubliée* and *Dekatriad*—which provide examples of more complex deployments of both of these techniques in isolation. Following on from this will be an analysis of the Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra where all of these techniques are combined together within the context of a large multi-movement work.

### III) ANALYSIS: DISMANTLING STRUCTURES IN *MARCHE OUBLIÉE*

As we have seen with *Embers*, the technique of dismantling structures is prefigured in the way that the melodic fragment is progressively pulled apart on successive episodes showing more and more signs of disintegration. In Deane's mature music, this process is a far more pervasive and highly fraught exercise than the slow stages of decay observed in *Embers*. Often, the overall form of a work is extended into a series of sections in which a particular structure gathers momentum before collapsing in on itself, fragmenting into 'ruins' which are then used as the basis for a new construct and the cycle repeats. It is here that one of the primary building-blocks of Deane's music—the process of building extended climaxes—really comes into view. The recurring cycles of build-up and collapse form gradual accretions of energy which eventually culminate in points of dramatic collapse, lending his mature music a much more fluid and dynamic overall structure.

*Marche Oubliée*, for piano trio, was inspired by the novel *The General of the Dead Army* written by the Albanian novelist Ismail Kadaré in which he describes an image of dead soldiers after a war marching as an army underneath the ground.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Deane, *Order and disOrder*.

Deane combined this idea with the traditional genre of the funeral march where he imagined dead soldiers marching rather than mourners.<sup>41</sup> Due to their condition, Deane visualised the soldiers stumbling with the result that the march fails to keep strict time and every now and then ‘tumbles over and turns into something completely different’.<sup>42</sup> Much of the drama in the piece arises from the tension generated between the funeral march idea—something generally associated with a reserved, sombre character and usually cast in strict 4/4 time—and the strategies that Deane employs to subvert and disrupt it:

In [...] *Marche Oubliée* [...] you have this idea of a funeral march. But instead of writing a funeral march in 4/4 time, you may have a 4/4 bar with an added quaver at the end. Or a 4/4 bar followed by a 7/8 bar. So again, you have that idea of a very familiar, very fixed, very regular thing that is taken, but instead of writing ‘within’ that, you write ‘upon’ that, using it as an idea for material that you then, kind of pull apart. In [...] *Marche Oubliée* it sounds to the ear as one of the most traditional pieces I’ve ever written. It sounds almost like Bartók in places. But the basic principle is the same, that of ‘dismantling’ and ‘putting back together in new shapes.’<sup>43</sup>

The following analysis will focus on the opening section (bars 1–55) giving a detailed examination of Deane’s dismantling technique.

#### i) Initial Build-up and Collapse (Bars 1–31)

In contrast to the start of *Embers* where the historically retrieved materials were presented with a certain degree of self-conscious detachment, the beginning of *Marche Oubliée* (example 4.12) sounds almost like a direct pastiche of early 20th century modernism. The ‘march’ ostinato motif (motif a)—a three note figure (F, D, C) is introduced in the piano. After four repetitions, a transposed variant of this motif (motif a1) with its first note prolonged is taken up by the cello in bar 4 and extended

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Deane quoted in Arthur Sealy, ‘Raymond Deane’s *Seachanges (with Danse Macabre)*: Study Notes by Arthur Sealy’. Available to download on the Contemporary Music Centre Website (<http://www.cmc.ie/education/explore/syllabus/deane/pdfs/seachanges-study-notes.pdf>).



into a four note figure (E flat, C, B flat, D flat) with the addition of an ascending minor third in bar 5. This four-note figure—a descending motion followed by two ascending ones—becomes the paradigmatic motivic shape for much of this opening section. On the cello's next statement the motive is further developed sequentially and by intervallic expansion in bars 8 and 9 to produce two further variants (motives a2 and a3) which build towards the A flat in bar 9. Also in bar 9, the piano's right hand enters with motif a1, setting off an imitative dialogue with the cello in the following bar. The cello then concludes its first appearance with a further sequential statement of the principal motif, this time employing a slightly different ordering of the expanded intervals from motive a2 in bar 8 before ending on a C natural.

**Example 4.12** Deane: *Marche Oubliée*, Bars 1–12

The musical score for Example 4.12, Deane: *Marche Oubliée*, Bars 1–12, is presented in three systems. The first system covers bars 1-4, the second system covers bars 5-8, and the third system covers bars 9-12. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 80. The score includes parts for Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The piano part is divided into upper and lower cases (U.C. and 8th). Motives a1, a2, and a3 are labeled. Dynamics include pp, p, mf, and legato markings.

(8).....

Despite the periodic imposition of irregular time signatures which occasionally trip up the ‘march’ idea, throughout these opening twelve bars the presentation of the material seems almost naively predictable. The methods used to extend it are the traditional stock-in-trade devices of thematic development and neither the materials themselves nor the use of these techniques can be considered particularly radical or innovative for a work conceived in the closing decade of the 20th century. However, behind its outwardly traditional appearance, Deane has in fact already established two strategies which will become central to the subsequent process of dismantlement.

The first of these is the creation of various dialectical interactions amongst the instruments, something most clearly apparent in the diverging tendencies exhibited between the ostinato in the piano’s left hand part—which is tied to repeating a relatively static pattern—and the variant motifs in the cello which seem to possess a latent compulsion to develop. There is also the imitative dialogue between the cello and the piano’s right hand part. At this stage in the piece these dialectical relationships are relatively contained, but it is largely by directing his subversive procedures through these channels that Deane manages to generate the straining tension necessary to pull the entire construct apart further on. The second strategy concerns the actual methods of dismantlement, the most important of which

will involve an intensification of the technique of intervallic expansion that appears for the first time in bars 8 and 9. Again, at this point in the piece its destructive potential remains concealed as it appears to form part of the relatively straightforward developmental process that leads to the A flat in the cello in bar 9.

A comparison of the first twelve bars with bars 23–30 (example 4.13) demonstrates the way in which the construct is pulled apart by exaggerating these tendencies and intensifying the exchanges between the violin and cello which join together and enter into an increasingly animated dialogue with the piano's right hand part, an interaction which in turn is set against the stasis of the ostinato in the piano's left hand. The gestures themselves exploit the traditional expressive technique of cumulative dynamics and progressively shorter rhythmic values. However instead of acting as a traditional affirmative summation of the opening material, these gestures function as a dramatic negation, disrupting the progress of the music through collapse and acting as a confirmation of the material's disintegrated state.

While this succession of climaxes provides the framework, the actual dismantling mechanism is carried out by extending the technique of intervallic expansion to all areas of the texture in bars 23-26. For the most part, the underlying shape and directional contour of the principal motif remains that of the four-note figure established at the outset but its intervallic identity is increasingly distorted by the insertion of larger intervals to replace one or more of the original ones, causing it to stretch. As this development takes effect, the technique of intervallic expansion begins to give way to a process of intervallic levelling-out. From bar 26 onwards the intervals of a perfect and diminished fifth begin to predominate, neutralising the distinctive sound-world of the original motivic material.

Example 4.13 Deane: *Marche Oubliée*, Bars 23–30

Violin (Vln.) part: *p* *mf* *mp* *f* *mp* *f* *ff*

Viola (Vc.) part: *mf* *f* *p* *mf* *mp* *f* *mf* *ff*

Piano (Pno.) part: *mf* *f* *f* *f*

8<sup>va</sup>

Violin (Vln.) part: *ff* *p* *molto* *gliss.*

Viola (Vc.) part: *ff* *p* *molto* *gliss.*

Piano (Pno.) part: *ff* *f* *ff* *ff* *f* *cresc.*

(8)

Violin (Vln.) part: *fff*

Viola (Vc.) part: *fff* *f* *mf* *pp*

Piano (Pno.) part: *secco* *p*

(8)

Two other subversive strategies are also employed by Deane in this section. The first of these is the increasing frequency of the irregular time signatures which at the beginning had functioned as a device to disrupt the underlying 4/4 metre. By the latter stages of this section however, there is no longer even an implied 4/4 meter to subvert due to the greater proliferation of irregular time signatures. From bars 22–29, there are just three bars in 4/4 time, none of which are placed side by side. The other strategy in play is the progressive verticalisation of the piano texture, something which becomes highly significant in the following section. At the beginning of the piece the piano part is predominantly horizontal with the opening bars mostly consisting of linear melodic statements. As the piece progresses however there is a tendency for certain intervals to become detached and form vertical sonorities which are sustained in the right hand, particularly from bar 19 onwards. Towards the latter stages of the section, this process is combined with a practice of sustaining some of the notes at the end of a melodic phrase. This occurs for the first time in bar 10 but at this stage its impact is barely noticeable. By bar 26 however, it is used to cloud the texture by generating a harmonic haze, particularly in the lower register of the piano.

ii) Fragmentation and Transition (Bars 31—55)

After the collapse of the initial construct the music enters into a period of fragmentation which lasts from bars 31 to 54. The function of this section is to allow for the emergence of a new construct, one which can be seen to have coalesced out of the ruins carried over from the previous section. This new construct—an accented demi-semi-quaver idea—appears fully-formed for the first time in bar 55 where it goes on to form the basis of a whole new section. To get to this stage, Deane uses his technique of colliding musical objects with an opposition between the horizontal and

the vertical now occupying the dramatic foreground. The ostinato motif tries to reassert itself but is prevented from doing so by the blocking actions of vertical sonorities which impede its progress and eventually come to dominate the entire section. In example 4.14 this strategy can be clearly observed. Whenever the ostinato motif is played, it has the appearance of being cut off by the interjection of a staccato chord, a collision which becomes more intense as the section progresses.

**Example 4.14** Deane: *Marche Oubliée*, Bars 32–35

The texture here is less rigidly stratified than previously with voices often overlapping to give the impression of chaos. What is also evident is the extent to which nearly all of the materials are in some way composed of ruins carried over from the previous section. Fragments of the ostinato motif litter the texture and are subject to even more distortion as the passage progresses. The B, G sharp, F sharp, A ‘blocking’ chord that appears for the first time in bar 31 is constructed from the notes of the violin’s opening statement in bars 12 and 13 while the chord in the piano at the end of bar 35 is constructed from inverted intervals of the ostinato motif. As the section progresses, further remnants appear, the most notable being a jagged statement of the principal motif in the violin which manages to rise to one last crescendo in bar 40 before being submerged in the haze of dissonance emerging from

chordal sonorities in the low registers of the piano. By bar 41 the texture has become almost exclusively vertical, converging into a succession of chords (bar 44 onwards) which round off the section and lead into the new construct.

**Example 4.15** Deane: *Marche Oubliée*, Bars 41–45

The original directional contour and intervallic construction of the ostinato motif is still perceptible in the three part movement of these chords but the expansive pretensions which this material seemed to possess at the beginning of the piece now appear to have been definitively negated. The bar lengths and then the rhythmic durations of the figure begin to contract, quickening into demi-semi-quavers in bar 54 before breaking into the new material in the following bar (example 4.16). Consistent with the idea of deriving new material from the ruins of the previous construct, the pitches of the new rhythmic figure are derived from the lower two notes of the chords which sound on the second crotchet beat from bar 44 onwards, transposed down by two octaves and transferred to the string parts. This figure now becomes the basis of a new section until it too is ultimately found to be insufficient.

Example 4.16 Deane: *Marche Oubliée*, Bars 52–55

The musical score for Example 4.16, Deane's *Marche Oubliée*, bars 52–55, is presented in four systems. The first system shows the beginning of bars 52–55 with dynamics *sempre p* in both staves. The second system shows the piano accompaniment with *ff* and *fff* dynamics, including triplets and a *3* marking. The third system shows a tempo marking of quarter note = 66 and the instruction *con forza* with *ff* dynamics. The fourth system shows empty staves.

Despite the high degree of activity which occurs throughout this opening, the dramatic conflicts which occupy the work's foreground can distract from the fact that throughout the section surprisingly little in the way of 'real' development has actually taken place. From the time that the initial construct is set-up to the point of its collapse nearly all of the material is still restricted to modifications of the ostinato motif and its four-note variants in the violin and cello. Although some techniques



associated with traditional development are used, they are applied to the material in a deconstructive rather than a constructive fashion. The new chordal rhythmic figure which emerges in bar 55 does not come into being through a process of organic construction but rather coalesces out of a dialectical conflict of disparate fragments. As with *Embers*, all of this is very far removed from the logic of traditional developmental procedures where material takes on the characteristics of growth and expansion. At the same time however, many of the traditional dramatic devices such as expressive climaxes and dialectic are preserved while the overall form retains a sense of narrative: the sections are related rather than being randomly juxtaposed despite the fact that this interconnectedness is problematised by areas of disorienting disintegration. This dismantling process repeats several times over the course of the piece where it has a cumulative effect; on each successive build-up and climax the music becomes more frenetic and the material even more disintegrated. By the end of the piece all that remains are the scattered ruins of an all-encompassing process of destruction.

#### IV) ANALYSIS: PRODUCTIVE FRICTIONS AND FETISH SONORITIES IN *DEKATRIAD*

The other technique identified in *Embers* was the creation of ‘productive frictions’ generated by musical objects ‘rubbing’ off one another. This involved an interaction between two relatively well defined objects. However throughout his music there is considerable variation in the way that this technique is employed. For instance, the dialectic may involve just a single distinct entity pitted against an opposing heterogeneity or, on the other hand, it may involve several distinct objects circling around each other. One of the strategies mentioned already in the overview was the use of fetish chords where a particular sonority is granted an elevated status—usually

at the beginning or at a structurally significant point in the piece before being subjected to incursions from surrounding material. In *Dekatriad*, the chief fetish chord emphasised at the start of the piece is a sonority made up of all the notes of the B flat major scale which later undergoes substantial modifications based on its role within an evolving formal process. The following analysis will first examine the opening section which provides a particularly clear demonstration of how musical objects are brought into conflict using the fetish chord technique while the second part will analyse the role of the fetish region of B flat major within the overall dramatic structure.

#### i) Fetish Sonorities and Dialectical Form

The material content of *Dekatriad* is organised around six different pitch collections based on the following scales: diatonic major, chromatic, whole-tone, diatonic minor, octatonic and pentatonic. As standard pitch collections, there is nothing particularly innovative about the mere fact of their combined inclusion in a single work. What is notable however, are the steps Deane takes in order to reanimate these materials. For much of the work these collections form distinctive vertical sonorities which interact throughout. During the opening section the intervallic construction of the chords remains relatively consistent and they each maintain the same pitch and registral formation, allowing them to be recognised as distinct recurring entities. However certain collections such as the diatonic major are far more likely to stand out than others, while in terms of the relative levels of consonance and dissonance, a clear spectrum emerges with regard to the harmonic properties of each. It is these oppositions that Deane exploits as the dialectical basis of the opening section.

Over the course of the first nine bars, a chord containing all the notes of the B flat major scale and encompassing a span of five octaves is gradually built up by the thirteen string players. In bar 10 (example 4.17) the principal motivic figure of the piece, a short semi-quaver idea, with parallel doublings is introduced in the violins. This momentarily seems to destabilise the B flat major collection but on each successive repetition it returns to the exact chord formation established at the outset, ultimately serving to reinforce it in the mind of the listener. Although this semi-quaver figure saturates the texture for much of the piece and appears using different combinations of strings throughout, its role is largely subordinate to the larger musical argument between the various pitch collections. It does not develop to any significant degree and instead acts as a medium through which conflicts between the different pitch collections are directed.

**Example 4.17** *Dekatriad*, Bars 10–11

The musical score for Example 4.17, *Dekatriad*, Bars 10–11, is presented for five string instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The score is divided into two measures. The first measure is in 4/4 time, and the second measure is in 3/4 time. The key signature has one flat (B-flat major). The score includes dynamic markings such as *sf pp* and *p*. The music features a complex chord structure with parallel doublings in the violins.

Having comprehensively established the B flat major collection as the fetish sonority, Deane soon introduces rival sonorities constructed from the other pitch collections which give the impression of attempting to undermine it. In bar 20 the

chromatic collection is introduced with staggered entries in all parts, eventually coalescing into a full chord by the third crotchet beat of bar 21. Both of these pitch collections oscillate over the coming twelve bars with the chromatic chord attempting to shift the pitch centre down a semi-tone to A natural (both the bass note and the highest note of the chord have this pitch). From the glissando in bar 23 onwards the music seems to increasingly tilt in favour of the chromatic collection which receives the larger durational units and takes over the principal motive in bar 26 (example 4.18). The B flat diatonic major collection continues to intervene with fortissimo dynamics and tremolandi but sounds increasingly unsettled and is definitively supplanted between bars 27 and 30 where the chromatic collection temporarily becomes the dominant sonority.

**Example 4.18:** *Dekatriad*, Bars 23–27

The musical score for Example 4.18, *Dekatriad*, Bars 23–27, is presented for five instruments: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (Db.). The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is characterized by complex textures and overlapping chords. Dynamics range from fortissimo (ff) to pianissimo (pp). A glissando is marked in bar 23. The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#).

(8)

Vln. I  
Vln. II  
Vla.  
Vc.  
Db.

*f* *p* *mf*  
*f* *p* *mf*  
*f* *p* *mf*  
*f* *p* *mf*

Similar conflicts mark the introduction of the other pitch collections. When the whole-tone collection enters at bar 31, all three collections—diatonic major, chromatic and whole-tone—engage in similar animated oscillations creating the appearance of a dramatic struggle between rival sonorities attempting to occupy the musical space. On each occasion when a new collection is introduced it appears to temporarily assume the status of a new fetish sonority only to be supplanted a few bars later. Apart from parallel transpositions when a particular pitch collection takes over the principal motive, the fundamental identity of the chords remain largely unchanged. Despite this however the passage is still dialectical, only here, instead of change occurring within the objects, their shifting status within the dialectic is signalled by the way it is articulated or in the relative dynamic levels and durational values assigned to each.

## ii) Fetish Chords and the overall formal context

This opening sets up the dramatic scenario of the remainder of the piece which revolves around the question of whether or not the B flat major sonority will return to

reassert the primacy it established at the outset. It often reappears at crucial moments only to be swept aside again by material derived from the other pitch collections. In this role it functions as a key reference point in areas of the piece which are more fragmentary. The section which follows the opening (bars 61–100) is a particularly good example of this balance between integration and disintegration. The tight dialectical workings are temporarily abandoned and replaced by a series of contrasting and playful textures; each one lasting no more than ten bars. At the same time however, all of these textures are integrated into two climactic curves which culminate on chords that reassert the B flat major fetish region. The first of these chords—a B flat major 6/4 chord with an added C played tremolandi in all parts—appears in bar 83 at the culmination point of a passage which Deane has described as ‘almost Bergian’, owing to its intensely expressive character. This chord comes closest to a pure B flat major triad heard so far in the piece making its appearance at this juncture particularly striking. After another climactic build-up a second fetish chord appears in bar 100. This chord contains all the notes of the B flat major diatonic collection and again has F as its bass.

These chords function as crucial musical signposts, keeping the fetish region of B flat major to the forefront. Significantly, they both have F as their lowest note. In traditional tonal music of course, the note F would, in the context of B flat major, be the bass note of the dominant chord. In *Dekatriad*, this note seems to function as a sort of recurring dominant pedal, keeping the chords suspended and creating the desire for some sort of resolution. In this sense their real significance only becomes apparent towards the end of the piece when the music eventually ‘resolves’ to an unadorned root position B flat major triad in bar 132 (example 4.19).

**Example 4.19:** *Dekatriad*, Bars 132–137

The musical score for Example 4.19, *Dekatriad*, Bars 132–137, is presented in a five-staff format. The instruments are Vlns. I, Vlns. II, Vlas., Vcs., and Db. The time signature is 4/4. The key signature is B-flat major. The score shows a complex interplay of dynamics and articulation across the instruments. Vlns. I and II play a melodic line with pizzicato and accents. Vlas. and Vcs. provide harmonic support with sustained notes and pizzicato. Db. plays a bass line with pizzicato and arco. Dynamics range from pp to mf.

This moment has all the appearances of a genuine synthesis and appears to act as the conclusion to an overall formal scenario in which B flat major is established, negated and then, via a series of digressions, re-established even more definitively at the end. For the next thirty-five bars fragmented statements of the principal motive are heard against a backdrop of sustained B flat major chords. Despite certain interruptions—the intermittent intrusion of clashing harmonies (mostly an A major 6/4 chord with an added B) and certain hesitations on the part of the principal motive in concluding its statements—the music always returns to a root position B flat major chord, appearing to reinforce its position. However at bar 167 the harmony suddenly slides upwards concluding the piece on a G major chord in first inversion. In commenting on the ending Deane writes: ‘The final G major chord stands apart from what went before—not a summation as in “proper” tonal music, but a dismissal’. This concluding gesture is a typical characteristic of Deane’s, one that we have already

observed in *Embers*, where the illusion of synthesis is rejected in favour of ambiguity and disorientation.

Although some aspects of *Dekatriad* resemble the outlines of a traditional sonata form, the way in which the structure is held together is markedly untraditional and coherence between the parts is achieved through unconventional means: fetish chords, structural dialectic, and a delicate balance between integration and fragmentation. These formal innovations result in a structure capable of infusing quite conventional materials with a renewed vitality. In the end however, any optimistic appraisal of the materials themselves is definitively dismissed by the manner in which the piece concludes. Despite the comforting illusions of a synthesis which the coda seemed to guarantee, the contradictions within the piece remain unresolved and open-ended.

#### V) ANALYSIS: COMBINED STRATEGIES IN THE CONCERTO FOR OBOE AND ORCHESTRA

While the previous two analyses looked at works where a specific structural technique was especially evident, in most of Deane's works it is more often the case that several techniques are combined together. The Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra is a particularly good example in this regard as it exhibits some realisation of all the techniques that have been discussed up to this point. It is also notable for being one of a number of works where the dialectical conflicts, on which so much of Deane's music hinges, are fought out between various instrumental groupings within the ensemble itself or between the ensemble and a soloist. Considering that Deane's music is so reliant on the creation of these oppositions, the concertante format in particular would seem to be especially suited to his approach.



The Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra is also important for a number of other reasons. While Deane has generally avoided engaging with political issues in any direct fashion in his music, the work is in many ways the most political of all his pieces. It was composed on his return from a trip to the Middle East where he experienced at first-hand the latter stages of the first *intifada* (1987–93)—the Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation.<sup>44</sup> These experiences informed the composition of the concerto which deals with the themes of exile and oppression. After a brief overview which details the layout of the concerto and its connection to some of the themes mentioned, the analytical section will focus on the opening movement which combines various manifestations of all the techniques discussed so far within the parameters of a single movement and then briefly discuss their role within the overall form.

#### i) Overview

The very mention of the word ‘concerto’ especially when combined with the large forces that Deane has envisaged here, brings to mind associations with the Romantic conception of the genre where the individual soloist, after engaging in a heroic struggle with the orchestra, eventually asserts his dominance through extravagant displays of technical virtuosity. The fact that Deane has in mind the aim of subverting these conventional associations is perhaps not especially noteworthy in itself as the form has long since been a target for subversive strategies and the undermining of stereotypes. What is significant however is the manner in which he

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<sup>44</sup> During this trip he visited Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories where his arrival coincided with the last months of the first *intifada*. The plight of the Palestinian people surrounded by the seemingly invincible might of the Israeli Defence Forces, stirred in him a deep sense of outrage directed at both the state of Israel and its international supporters. The refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila—the site of massacres of Palestinians carried out by Lebanese phalangist militias supported by Israel during the 1982 Lebanon-Israeli conflict—made a particularly deep impression on him. See Zuk, *Raymond Deane*, p. 88.

goes about constructing the relationship between the soloist and the orchestra, particularly in light of the circumstances surrounding its genesis. In his programme notes he writes:

The soloist never plays the role of strutting hero typical of the romantic concerto, but is treated like an exile from the orchestra, the role of which is often oppressive. A soprano saxophone mimics the soloist from the orchestra, as if it had usurped its place. While in Richard Strauss's Oboe Concerto, for example, the orchestra is reduced and the musical language correspondingly understated, as if the very use of solo oboe induced neo-classicism, here the soloist faces a full-sized orchestra with triple woodwind, a huge battery of percussion, and organ. The struggle is unequal, and the soloist is often engulfed by [the] orchestral mass—only to emerge bloodied but unbowed.<sup>45</sup>

In one sense therefore, the opposition could not be more straightforward; an orchestra of considerable proportions pitted against a solo instrument often noted for its 'sensitive' or 'delicate' tone clearly signifies a theme of unequal struggle. Yet although the orchestra has the capacity to overwhelm the soloist and often does, throughout the piece the soloist manages to maintain a kind of defiant independence and Deane constructs a range of musical signifiers to convey this trait, many of which rely on devices discussed earlier. One of the key elements in the work is the role played by the soprano saxophone, an instrument clearly chosen for its capacity to 'mimic' the distinctive sound of the oboe. The theme of exile is symbolised by the fact that the soprano saxophone occupies the oboe's seat in the orchestra where it plays the role of the orchestra's proxy. In contrast to the frequently brutish force exercised by the orchestra, the soprano saxophone tends to challenge the independence of the soloist on a motivic level, interrupting its phrases and attempting to undermine whatever degree of independence it achieves.

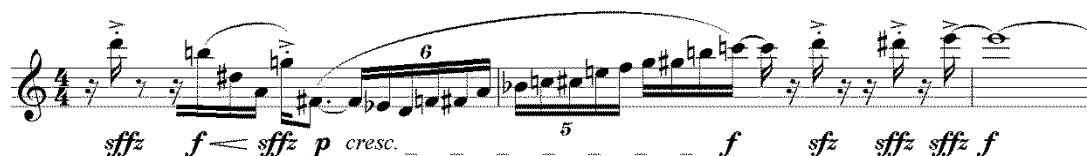
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<sup>45</sup> Deane, programme note for *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra* (1994) (<http://www.raymonddeane.com/compositions.php>, 28 April 2012).

## ii) Musical Signifiers and Dialectical Form

As the previous analyses have shown, in order to be able to gauge the status of a particular musical object within the dialectical relationship that Deane has constructed for it, there must be an initial stage when it assumes a fixed shape or performs a certain set of characteristics that serve as a point of reference from which the relative degrees of change in its status can be measured. In both *Marche Oubliée* and *Dekatriad* these periods of stability occurred at the beginning of the piece where the main musical ideas were presented in isolation, repeated several times and only then deconstructed or brought into contact with other entities. In the Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra, the work's main musical idea—an ascending broken scalic figure containing all twelve notes of the chromatic scale and culminating on a high E—does not crystallise into a well-defined shape until bars 49–51 (example 4.20).

### Example 4.20: Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra, Bars 49–51 [Oboe soloist part]



It is preceded by a melodic fragment which is ‘developed’ by the soloist out of a single note, B, before being gradually subjected to the same kind of dismantling procedure observed earlier in *Marche Oubliée* (example 4.21). Although this melodic fragment never assumes a definite shape due to the constant rhythmic and intervallic distortions inflicted upon it, the majority of its repetitions tend to emphasise a five-note figure comprising of two descending intervals, followed by an ascent and a descent. The soloist is soon joined by multi-divided strings which take up the fragment in imitative counterpoint accompanied by staccato interjections from the woodwind and brass, a texture which threatens to engulf the soloist, becoming

densely polyphonic and serving as an initial display of the orchestra's superior sonic capacity. In response, the soloist's part becomes more and more elaborate, dissolving the fragment through complex rhythmic variations and the insertion of broken scale passages between the original intervals which pull the figure out of shape. The increased activity and dynamic of the orchestra create the appearance of the soloist being submerged by the surrounding mass but it eventually culminates on a high E, defiantly sustaining the note for twelve bars as the orchestral chaos subsides.

**Example 4.21:** Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra, Bars 1–12 [Oboe soloist part]

While this opening constitutes another example of a musical idea which initially seemed to have expansive pretensions being subjected to a rigorous process of dissolution, it is also through the same process of dissolution that the principal motive of the work—the ascending scale gesture—comes into being. Once again the distinction between this process and traditional development here is crucial. The new material is seen to emerge via a technique of destruction as opposed to construction. It is not the resources contained within the original ‘developed’ melodic fragment which provide the basis for the new motive but rather the material—the broken scale runs—that were used to prise it apart.

The emergence of this ascending scale figure in bar 49–51 is also important in the way that it relates to the larger dialectical interaction between the soloist and the orchestra. The fact that the soloist manages to construct its own identity under the threat of being engulfed by the orchestral mass functions as an important symbolic statement of its resistance. Perhaps the most crucial element is the soloist's culmination on the high E which is sustained over the orchestral chaos from bars 51–62. This is another example of a fetish sonority and the soloist's ability to maintain both the integrity of the ascending figure and continue to reach the high E fetish tone become the main signifiers through which its status within the dialectic can be gauged.

A good example of the kind of exchange that occurs throughout between the soloist and the orchestra is the passage between bars 75–98, which introduces the negating functions of the soprano saxophone (see example 4.22 which shows bars 75–86). In the preceding bars leading up to this passage the soloist had managed to repeat the ascending scale gesture six times without being impeded, each time culminating on the high E. However before it begins its seventh repetition the soprano saxophone enters a crotchet beat ahead, pre-empting the note D which the soloist begins its ascent on. After two more incursions the soprano saxophone eventually takes over the scale gesture completely in bar 80 only to culminate on a jarring D sharp, supplanting the soloist's fetish tone. The destabilisation of this symbolic note leads to an extended period where the pre-eminence of the soloist is increasingly undermined by the soprano saxophone. In the ensuing dialogue, the soprano saxophone, aided by a growing number of woodwind, percussion and brass, leads a series of ascending gestures which terminate on the contradictory D sharp. The soloist, on the other hand, appears wholly unable to reassert the E fetish tone or

the primacy formerly conveyed by the calm repetitions of the ascending scale, and its phrases become increasing agitated. In bar 82 for instance, it begins a stuttering repetition of a short fragment (whose pitch content is derived from ‘ruins’ of the opening motive) which is subject to a diminution procedure and concludes in an agitated trill. The soloist’s re-enters in bar 85 with the broken scale fragment except here it descends and is similarly subjected to a diminution procedure which terminates in a trill on D sharp and E in bar 90, an indication of its struggling attempts to recapture the E fetish tone.

**Example 4.22:** Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra, Bars 75–86 [Oboe and Soprano Saxophone only]

The musical score for Example 4.22 is presented in three systems, each with a Soprano Saxophone (Sop. Sax.) and Oboe (Ob.) part. The time signature is 3/4. The first system (bars 75-76) features the Soprano Saxophone with dynamics *sf* > *pp* and *pp* >, and the Oboe with dynamics *p*, *cresc.*, *f*, *p*, and *f*. The second system (bars 77-78) shows the Soprano Saxophone with dynamics *pp*, *mp*, and *pp*, and the Oboe with dynamics *p* and *f*. The third system (bars 79-80) features the Soprano Saxophone with dynamics *mf*, *cresc. molto*, and *ff*, and the Oboe with dynamic *p*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and fingerings (5, 6, 3, 5, 3).

The image displays three systems of musical notation for Soprano Saxophone (Sop. Sax.) and Oboe (Ob.).

- System 1 (4/4 time):** The Soprano Saxophone part is mostly silent. The Oboe part features a continuous sixteenth-note scale starting on a low note and ascending. Dynamics include *(p)* (piano) and *cresc.* (crescendo) leading to *ff* (fortissimo). A trill (*tr.*) is marked in the final measure.
- System 2 (3/4 time):** The Soprano Saxophone part begins with a melodic line starting on a low note and ascending, marked with *f* (forte) and *cresc.* (crescendo), reaching *ff* and *fff* (fortississimo) by the end. The Oboe part is mostly silent, with a few notes in the final measure.
- System 3 (6/8 time):** The Soprano Saxophone part is silent. The Oboe part features a melodic line with a wide interval, marked with a slur and a fermata.

As this process continues the orchestra gradually insinuates itself more and more into the texture. The oboe eventually reclaims the high E in bar 110 but all of its gestures are now composed of descending rather than ascending scales, a clear signifier of a change in status and it eventually drops out all together in bar 126.

However when the orchestral climax subsides, the soloist tentatively begins to wind its way upwards with a series of scale fragments punctuated with energetic incursions by the soprano saxophone. As the other instruments gradually drop off, the soloist continues its rise until it eventually reaches the high E to conclude the movement, according to Deane, ‘bloodied but unbowed’ from the preceding conflict.

ii) The function of musical signifiers within the overall form

These symbolic gestures play a role in both of the subsequent movements. In the scherzo-like second movement—where the relationship between the soloist and orchestra is much more playful—the soloist once again emerges at the end with its identity intact, concluding a series of ascending scale gestures with a reiteration of the high E. However it is in the final movement that the full import of the extra-musical influence comes to bear when the soloist, after gradually winding its way upwards throughout the movement eventually reaches the high E in bar 90. This sets off a chain reaction in the orchestra which after entering with a first inversion C major chord with an added F (in this context a strikingly bright sonority) seems to reaffirm the oboe's statement with a series of sonorous gestures using similar tonally derived chords. However these gestures are tinged with a growing strain of irony as dissonant fragments particularly in the high registers begin to populate the spaces in between each statement and increasingly infiltrate the texture. When the section culminates in bar 116 with an over-the-top Mahlerian climax on an A major ninth chord it becomes clear that the apparent jubilation of the orchestra is an ironic ploy. The soloist fails to reassert the E fetish tone and the entire structure then collapses in on itself. When it subsequently re-emerges, the oboe's final statement, a repetition of the gesture that opened the work, is taken over by the soprano saxophone. Deane describes this episode as follows:

After an episode of sinuous lamentation, the oboe rises to its highest region at which point the orchestra is released from its confinement, as if the liberation of the exile simultaneously liberates the oppressor. There is a colossal climax which is too jubilant to last and collapses into desolation. Even the oboe's final plaint is taken over by the soprano saxophone, which has the last word.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*



As we have seen this *dénouement* is typical of Deane where a momentary appearance of a possible synthesis after a protracted struggle is dismissed at the last moment. Within the context of this work however the outcome would appear to symbolically encapsulate the fractured narrative of the Palestinian struggle, which in Deane's words 'seemed constantly fated to approach liberation and then be thrust back into subjection'.<sup>47</sup>

Composed twenty years after *Embers*, the Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra illustrates the extent of the development that Deane's music has undergone in the intervening years. The concept of 'structural dialectic' is realised here on a vastly more expansive scale and with a much greater degree of complexity in its use of various structural techniques. In addition, his overall command of the dramatic pacing is much more assured and a greater variety of resources are harnessed in the articulation of a central dialectical argument. Yet on a fundamental level, virtually all of the techniques on display in this work are in some way prefigured in *Embers* and other early works such as Orphic Piece I. This is an indication of an underlying consistency which connects his early concerns with his mature work.

The theme of exile which informs the organisational scheme of the concerto resurfaces later in the composition *Passage Work* (2001) for soprano, tape and chamber ensemble. This work was composed during the earliest stage of the Second *intifada*; an even more bloody conflict than the first Palestinian uprising. The intricate figurations from the first movement of the Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra are recalled in much of the instrumental writing which makes a similar use of rising and falling arpeggios in often violent and abrasive textures. The work uses a text-collage based on fragments which address the theme of displacement, exile and

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<sup>47</sup> Zuk, *Raymond Deane*, p. 88.

injustice from the work of Walter Benjamin and the poets Antonio Machado, Pablo Neruda, Paul Celan and Mahmoud Darwish whose left-wing perspectives would seem to be in accord with Deane's own political views. The title also relates tangentially to Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* whose original German title is *Passagen-Werk*. However this rather elliptical reference could also be construed as having a deeper meaning. The crystallisation of a meaningful whole from the banal fragments of musical history mirrors Benjamin's method of extrapolating larger philosophical questions from the smallest and seemingly trivial details. In both the *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra* and *Passage Work*, the trivial and banal are enlivened in the service of articulating—in a more unambiguous fashion than usual—the political dimension of Deane's work which although never explicit, is never too far beneath the surface of his music.

## VI) CONCLUSION

On first hearing Deane's music may appear to be the most traditional sounding of the three composers examined in this study. The way his pieces are structured as a succession of climactic points, his frequent allusions to past styles and the overall expressiveness of his music combine to rouse frequent feelings of familiarity in the listener. However these moments of transparency are never more than fleeting images as subversive tendencies working deep within the music quickly disorientate the listener to ensure that an unmediated access to the material remains constantly beyond reach. Although elements of these processes can be found in the music of Mahler and the Second Viennese School, what is unique about Deane's approach is the manner in which they inform every aspect of the form. The self-destruction of constructs is intensified to a degree not found in earlier music and the variety of

techniques he has invented while developing this strategy constitute a significant formal innovation. These processes demand a high degree of concentration to follow and help bind the disparate elements of his music together in areas which embrace fragmentation or depart suddenly from the underlying musical argument. At the conclusion of his pieces the splintered fragments of the preceding conflicts are left suspended or are else set aside in favour of new possibilities.

In developing these processes the major achievement of Deane's music resides in the way it has retained a narrative structure without having to reinstate techniques associated with more traditional conceptions of musical form. However because the innovations in his music lie in processes which take place behind the surface, the originality of his approach is less obvious and requires close listening to discern. The result of this is that Deane's work is less well-known outside of Ireland than it deserves to be. Nevertheless his music has a depth which few other composers who self-consciously choose to work with the rubble of history can rival.

## CONCLUSION: A POSTMODERNISM OF RESISTANCE OR A POSTMODERNISM OF SLACKNESS?

All relevant art today defines itself in relation to modernism. If this is so, then a theory of contemporary aesthetics has the task of conceptualising a dialectical continuation of modernism. It will strive to affirm essential categories of modernism, but at the same time to free them from their modernist rigidity and bring them back to life. The category of artistic modernism *par excellence* is form.<sup>1</sup>

This study has endeavoured to stake out the parameters of what might constitute a radical aesthetic of postmodernism in music. While accepting that the resort to past stocks of materials has since become a matter of course over the past four decades, the attempt has been made to distinguish between progressive and reactionary approaches within this phenomenon. In doing so, the study has sought to preserve the category of the individual expressive Subject which is so central to Adorno's aesthetics of modernism. The retention of this category is crucial to the survival of radical composition as it is only through the efforts of the creative Subject in restructuring received material that new creations can come into being. This process is expressed through form and it is with this issue that this study has been most concerned.

The critique of Adorno's Stravinsky essay in *Philosophy of New Music* clarified some of the potential challenges involved in this process, specifically in relation to second-hand materials. Due to the fact that these materials are abstracted out of historical forms where their meaning was predicated upon their relation to the whole, the need arises for new ways of relating these fragments together which often appear to counteract the more organic modes of construction with which they were previously associated. The failure of Adorno to understand this point was one of the

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Bürger, *The Decline of Modernism*, Nicholas Walker (trans.), (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 44.

factors which led him to unfairly accuse Stravinsky of structural arbitrariness. Here however, the fault lay not so much with the philosophical foundations of Adorno's critique but rather with its practical application which relied on a rather outdated and one-dimensional conception of form. If a broader notion of structural inter-relatedness could be adopted then there would seem to be no reason why Adorno's aesthetics cannot be productively applied to assess much recent music. Using these insights, this study has argued that the music of Deane, Barry and Volans represents a critical and radical response to the challenge of composing amidst the ruins of postmodernism.

However such considerations of form have not characterised many of the recent discussions on what is felt to constitute 'a radical postmodernism'. Since the breakdown of mainstream modernism, the splitting of the field into many often divergent directions has ensured that the notion of what exactly constitutes a radical musical aesthetic has been highly contested. Nevertheless one of the more noticeable features of the postmodernism debate with regard to music has been the almost systematic privileging of stylistic pluralism over any meaningful discussion of how these materials might coalesce into a music which does more than simply juxtapose an eclectic mix of styles. Instead the tendency has been to celebrate how such music succeeds in breaking down boundaries by adopting an inclusive attitude towards genres previously ostracised by modernism's rigid distinction between high and low culture.

The degree to which this is the case can be demonstrated by examining a selection of relatively recent writings on the music of John Zorn, whose work has often been described as epitomising a radical postmodernism. I would argue that this categorisation is inaccurate and the following discussion aims to demonstrate not

only why this is so but also to critique the insufficiently thought-out reasoning of many of the claims made on his behalf by several noted critics and musicologists. This critique should throw into greater relief the ‘authentic’ approach of the three composers covered in this study and further clarify the aesthetic of a radical postmodernism by charting its opposite extreme.

#### CURRENT CONCEPTIONS OF A RADICAL POSTMODERNISM

Writers attempting to identify the quintessential figures of a particular era typically base their selections on how well certain stylistic tropes deduced from the period as a whole are represented in their work. In this respect it is easy to see how Zorn’s music has proved to be of interest to musicologists interested in postmodernism. Described by John Rockwell, the music critic of the *New York Times* as ‘the single most interesting, important, and influential composer to arise from the Manhattan “downtown” avant-garde scene since Steve Reich and Philip Glass’,<sup>2</sup> Zorn’s work has come to embody what for many writers are the typical features of postmodernism: diversity, fragmentation and a refusal to abide by the distinction between high and low culture. Some measure of this can be gauged from the following short description of his music by David Brackett:

The majority of his work from the mid-80s through the early 90s involves rapid cuts between different styles of music, each section typically lasting less than thirty seconds, an approach that has often been compared to someone with a short attention span watching TV with a remote control. The styles involved are quite diverse, although many appear in almost every piece of Zorn’s: swing-type jazz at a variety of tempos, bluesy shuffles, ‘noise’ of different densities and types, punk music, film music from the 60s and 70s, *Klangfarbenmelodie*, quotations of 18th and 19th century art music, New-Orleans-style funk, jazz fusion, country music, cartoon music, and so on.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Kenneth Gloag, *Postmodernism in Music* (Cambridge Introductions to Music) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> David Brackett, “‘Where’s It At?’: Postmodern Theory and the Contemporary Music Field”, in *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, Judy Lohead and Joseph Auner (eds.), (London/New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 214.

The range of these borrowings, which traverse both history and genre, seems consistent with the accounts of postmodernism in other fields by theorists such as Charles Jencks and Fredric Jameson. Yet since scholarly writings on this topic first began to emerge in the 1990s, Zorn's work has been mentioned not only in conjunction with postmodernism, but more specifically with a 'radical' postmodernism, a label first attached to his music by Jonathan D. Kramer.

For Kramer one of the defining features of postmodernism in music is the demotion of 'textual unity from the status of a totalising meta-narrative to one of many possible smaller narratives'.<sup>4</sup> Observing Hal Foster's division of postmodernism into two camps: one of reaction and one of resistance, Kramer regards 'at least some' of Zorn's music as suitable for inclusion in the latter category due to its radical repudiation of unity.<sup>5</sup> This classification is intended to highlight the contrast between Zorn's music and the music of those who Kramer regards as postmodern neoconservatives due to their continued preoccupation with notions of organic unity. The piece he identifies as best exemplifying this radical postmodernism is *Forbidden Fruit*, a work scored for voice, string quartet and turntables. The piece is a collage of self-contained musical moments which range from familiar excerpts of the classical repertoire to the kind of gestural extremes characteristic of certain strands of modernism. As Ellie Hisama describes it:

Fragments of familiar musical themes fly by—Carmen's Habanera vamp; the opening of Mozart's Piano Sonata in B flat major, K. 315; a phrase by the soloist in Bruch's G minor violin concerto—only to have their cadences smudged or snatched away.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan D. Kramer, 'Beyond Unity: Toward an Understanding of Musical Postmodernism', in *Concert Music, Rock, and Jazz since 1945: Essays and Analytical Studies*, Elizabeth West Marvin and Richard Hermann (eds.), (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1995), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Ellie M. Hisama, 'Postcolonialism on the Make: The Music of John Mellencamp, David Bowie, and John Zorn', *Popular Music* 12/2 (May 1993), p. 97.

The constantly changing surface and the perceived audacity of the juxtapositions prompted Kramer to enthusiastically describe the piece as follows:

Listening to *Forbidden Fruit* can be as dizzying as it is electrifying. You never know what is coming next, nor when. The stylistic juxtapositions are amazingly bold. If there were any discernible thread of continuity, the music would surely more tame, more predictable, more ordinary. But there is not.<sup>7</sup>

While Kramer is certainly right in describing the piece as postmodern, the notion that the mere disregard for structural unity—of the variety pursued by Zorn in this piece—constitutes a ‘radical’ postmodernism is highly problematic. If one considers that all the materials in *Forbidden Fruit* are of an unabashedly second-hand nature—even, or indeed, especially the ostensibly ‘modernist’ surface moments which sound like samples from a Xenakis or Lachenmann quartet—then the search for a radical dimension must necessarily turn to the way these fragments are related. However the technique of collage—which is essentially what Zorn’s strategy amounts to in this piece—can hardly by itself be considered particularly innovative at this late stage in the 20th century having already appeared on several previous occasions in the music of composers such as Charles Ives, Bernd Alois Zimmermann and Luciano Berio. But what makes *Forbidden Fruit* a particularly empty instance of collage is the complete absence of any sense of interconnectedness between the constituent moments. Although collage techniques by definition tend to emphasise the separateness of the individual fragments to a much greater extent than other strategies—a tendency which led Adorno to view it with suspicion—in the work of the composers just mentioned there is always some strand of continuity which grants each of the separate parts a degree of meaning in relation to the whole.

Something of the difference between Kramer’s version of a radical postmodernism and the one outlined in this study can be gauged by comparing Zorn’s

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<sup>7</sup> Jonathan D. Kramer, ‘Beyond Unity’, p. 22.



approach in *Forbidden Fruit* with that of Deane, whose music also makes use of quotations and stylistic borrowings. When the aria ‘Elle a fui, la tourterelle’ from Offenbach’s *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* first appears in *Krespel* it is made dissolve into a more abstract texture and as the music progresses similar processes of deconstruction make the fragment function as a measure of Antonia’s psychological well-being. When borrowings are used elsewhere in his music they operate along a continuum where they are viewed from a range of different perspectives from pastiche to parody or from grotesque to irony. The important point is that the movement along the various degrees of this scale always takes place through active processes invented by the composer. In Zorn’s music on the other hand, no comparable formal processes are perceivable and as a result the individual moments remain completely static. When the Habanera figure appears in *Forbidden Fruit* it lasts for a few seconds before being supplanted by a *col legno* section. There is no sense of relation between this brief quotation and any of the surrounding material nor does the assemblage as a whole crystallise into any higher formulation. Thus if neither the materials themselves nor the form into which they are reworked can be said to constitute something definitively new, then it is hard to see how such music can be described as ‘radical’.

Others who have championed Zorn’s music have been less inclined to view the fragmented surfaces of his music as its primary achievement and have instead attempted to make the case that Zorn *does* in fact explore innovative ways of restructuring second-hand materials. Susan McClary for instance cites Zorn’s work as an example of a musical postmodernism which ‘present[s] a highly ruptured, eclectic surface that nonetheless traces a perceptible background trajectory’.<sup>8</sup> Although McClary does not specifically mention the word ‘radical’ in this context,

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<sup>8</sup> Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2000), p. 145.

her discussion of Zorn's music is clearly intended to function as the radical counterbalance to the more conservative postmodernism of Philip Glass. In contrast to Kramer's celebration of postmodern chaos, McClary prefaces her discussion with the contention that 'although the program of deconstructing narrative is at times a crucial enterprise, narrative is too important a mode of cultural activity to abdicate altogether'.<sup>9</sup> The piece which she cites as an example of this reimagining of musical narrative is Zorn's *Spillane*, the title track from the same album on which *Forbidden Fruit* also appears. *Spillane* is one of Zorn's so-called 'file card' compositions, a technique which Zorn himself describes as follows:

Because I write in moments, in disparate sound blocks, I sometimes find it convenient to store these 'events' on filing cards so they can be sorted and ordered with minimum effort.<sup>10</sup>

The piece is titled after Mickey Spillane, the author of the series of crime fiction novels featuring the detective Mike Hammer.<sup>11</sup> According to Zorn 'each card relates to some aspect of Spillane's work, his world, his characters, his ideology'.<sup>12</sup> The piece is thus a series of stylistic pastiches comprising various types of jazz, easy listening, blues, atmospheric sounds and film soundtrack music, all montaged together side by side. As McClary describes it:

In the course of the first five minutes of *Spillane*, we hear a woman's scream, a jittery high-hat cymbal introducing a jazz combo, police sirens and dogs barking, another variety of jazz, a gong, a blur of synthesizers and vibes, a strip show complete with noisy patrons—and so it goes for twenty-five minutes.<sup>13</sup>

This is an accurate description of the way the piece progresses and according to McClary, if one is armed with the clue provided by the title 'the sequence of events in this piece makes sense' and produces 'a narrative schemata easily followed by

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> John Zorn, 'On *Spillane*', sleeve notes to compact disc Nonesuch, 7559-79172-2, 1987.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> McClary, *Conventional Wisdom*, p. 145

anyone acquainted with urban pulp fiction and the Hollywood movies that translated that genre to the screen'.<sup>14</sup> She attempts to flesh out some of the nuances of this narrative in the following passage:

Our anticipation of narrative continuity, formal unity, and closure is gratified when, three-quarters of the way through the piece, another outbreak of screams occurs—this time seven of them, surrounded by the transcendental strains of organ and synth choir, punctuated by machine-gun fire. After this climax, the *dénouement* involves a not-quite-audible conversation in a piano bar, more cool jazz, and an extended, melancholy passage on electric guitar mixed with the sounds of a receding rainstorm.<sup>15</sup>

While it may be possible to view *Spillane* as exhibiting a greater degree of coherence than *Forbidden Fruit*, this coherence is solely reliant upon an association with an external subject rather than being a product of the processes born out of an engagement with the material itself. The individual sound blocks come and go without any perceptible linkage between them other than their association with the urban environment typical of Spillane's crime fiction and *film noir*. In contrast to McClary's enthusiastic appraisal, a critical evaluation of this piece might ask just exactly how much creative effort is required to achieve this level of coherence given that all the individual sound blocks constitute the most stereotyped reproductions of their respective genres and the overall form contains no traces of interconnectedness other than the tokenistic reappearance of material near the end.

At this point it may be objected that a form of critique is being unfairly applied to the music of John Zorn when a similar lack of coherence was also discernable in some of the music of the three composers examined in this study. This was particularly apparent in the music which Volans composed in the years after the African Paraphrase series where some of his pieces seemed to display a level of arbitrariness not dissimilar from that pursued in a piece like *Forbidden Fruit*. Yet

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 146.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

while there are indeed a number of pieces which seem guilty of this, unlike Zorn, this tendency cannot be said to characterise Volans's work as a whole. Works such as *Cicada* and String Quartet No. 6, which may be seen as representative of Volans's mature approach, explore various different ways of reincorporating familiar materials that achieve new structural relations and for this reason these pieces have been chosen as examples of a radical postmodernism in this study. Where some of his pieces fail to achieve adequate form, it is noticeable that these are concentrated at a point in Volans's career where his music was undergoing a significant stylistic shift. With Zorn on the other hand, arbitrary juxtaposition is a structural principle that seems to operate consistently throughout his music. There is also the fact that even in the most structurally diffuse works by Barry and Volans there are at least the imprints of their own personal style left on the material. Among such devices one could list the rhythmic freneticism or the unvarnished orchestration of Barry's music or the pattern techniques and the attention to instrumental colour in the music of Volans. In Zorn's work on the other hand there is an over-reliance on the most formulaic materialisations of the various styles he appropriates. These are frequently included without any modifications to their surfaces other than the sense of rupture induced by the constant jumping from one genre to the next.

In contrast to the fragmentary textures of *Spillane* and *Forbidden Fruit* some commentators have claimed that Zorn's 'concert' music from the mid-1990s onwards shows a much greater concern with notions of integration and coherence than his earlier work. In addition to the 'file-card' pieces like *Spillane* and the various pop band experiments he has engaged in, Zorn has also composed works which fall more comfortably under the designation of 'classical' music.<sup>16</sup> The most extensive

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<sup>16</sup> John Brackett, *John Zorn: Tradition and Transgression* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

arguments for the existence of a greater degree of coherence in these works have been put forward by John Brackett, the author of the only book on the composer's music. According to Brackett one of the ways in which Zorn achieves coherence is by adapting music by other composers into his work:

In more recent works [...] direct or even slightly disguised quotations give way to a method of composition where works by other composers are integrated into the overall fabric of Zorn's own compositions. With his more recent practices, the referential piece is subsumed and manipulated in the interest of the piece at hand. In other words, a variety of musical features—melodic lines, chords, rhythms, etc.—are used as source material whose compositional end is to serve the individual logic, unity and coherence of Zorn's *own* work. With these works, the listener may not even recognise any surface similarities between the 'original' work and Zorn's own composition, as the two are seamlessly blended together.<sup>17</sup>

Brackett attempts to demonstrate this new concern with integration through an analysis of Zorn's *Aporias: Requia for Piano and Orchestra*.<sup>18</sup> This piece is based on Stravinsky's *Requiem Canticles*; it is in ten movements, each of which has a specific title and a dedication to various artists who have influenced Zorn's music. The movements which are the focus of Brackett's analysis are the third movement 'Misterioso' dedicated to the painter Francis Bacon, and the eighth movement 'Drammatico' dedicated to Marlene Dietrich.

In both analyses Brackett painstakingly proceeds to show how certain figures in Zorn's work have their origin in pitch collections derived from Stravinsky's score. He demonstrates for instance that the opening chord of 'Misterioso', derives its pitches from the first six pitch classes heard in the opening trumpet part of the 'Tuba Mirum' or that the D sharp/E idea which follows in the cello 'corresponds to the ordered pitch classes played by the first trumpet in measure 116 of Stravinsky's score' and so on.<sup>19</sup> However because these collections are chosen from several different places in Stravinsky's score and then reworked into new figures it is not

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 118–119.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 118–155.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 128–130.

actually possible to hear any kind of relation between both works. From the listener's perspective Zorn could have essentially borrowed the pitches from anywhere. The only section of his analysis which attempts to show how *Aporias* achieves coherence as a self-standing work in its own right is a brief discussion on how recurring ninth chords 'function as associative signposts that allow the listener to make connections and forge pathways through *Aporias*'.<sup>20</sup> However, the notion that the intermittent appearance of a very broadly defined ninth chord provides a substantial degree of structural interconnectedness seems inadequate to support this claim. Considering the amount of attention Brackett's analysis devotes to tracing pitch correspondences between both works, one would have expected more extensive formal relations to be discernable. Yet the individual gestures in *Aporias* seem as unrelated to each other as those in *Spillane* or *Forbidden Fruit* and there appears to be no audible formal structure or stylistic consistency other than fragmentation. As Kenneth Gloag remarks:

Without the benefits of Zorn's own comments, and it could be argued, the benefit of Brackett's detailed analysis of the relationship between the two works, it would be difficult to actually hear a sense of unity in *Aporias*. The textures still sound fragmentary.<sup>21</sup>

A similar technique of borrowing pitch materials from pre-existing musical sources has been discussed in relation to Gerald Barry's music. The most frequently cited example of this is his opera *The Intelligence Park* which uses passing chords extracted from Bach's chorales to generate much of opera's harmonic material. While this aspect of the opera's composition is often mentioned, nowhere has it been seriously suggested that the Bach material is used 'to serve the individual logic, unity and coherence' of *The Intelligence Park* as Brackett claims the Stravinsky material does in *Aporias*. It is simply used as raw pitch material to be manipulated in the

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 146–151.

<sup>21</sup> Gloag, *Postmodernism in Music*, p. 113.

course of a composition whose coherence and logic must be worked out on its own terms. Thus the knowledge that some of the material has its origins in a pre-existing source constitutes an interesting but largely irrelevant point when it comes to elucidating the work's structure and in no way can it be said to constitute some underlying unity between the source and the resultant composition.

In Gloag's study of music and postmodernism, Zorn is the subject of a chapter devoted to 'a postmodernism of resistance'. Gloag's decision to choose Zorn, above all other composers, as the best exemplar of this tendency seems heavily influenced by the claims made on his behalf by the writers just discussed.<sup>22</sup> However there are numerous points in the chapter where Gloag himself seems unconvinced of his own decision to position Zorn's music in this category. Some of these observations are quite incisive and if developed further might have amounted to a substantial critique. Writing about *Forbidden Fruit* for instance he suggests that the constant pursuit of unpredictability may be self-defeating:

It may also be, when we become more familiar with Zorn's music in general, that, although the specific details may be surprising, we come to expect the unexpected and the unpredictable becomes predictable, with the constant changes of fragmentary ideas and sounds becoming defining, perhaps now expected, indicators of Zorn's consistently inconsistent style.<sup>23</sup>

While in his conclusion to the chapter he remarks that because 'there is so much emphasis on "other" music [...] it is at times difficult to hear referring what the 'self' is, or how it might be constructed, in Zorn's music'.<sup>24</sup> Indeed one wonders why Gloag chose Zorn as his example since some of the procedures adopted by the supposedly 'radical' Zorn seem not dissimilar from the 'conservatism' of George Rochberg who is viewed as representing a 'postmodernism of reaction' in the

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<sup>22</sup> See chapter 6 'The Music of John Zorn: "A Postmodernism of Resistance"', pp. 100–114.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 105.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 113.

previous chapter.<sup>25</sup> Ultimately however it is the familiar checklist of postmodern *topoi* (diversity, pluralism, fragmentation) which are cited as the reasons for Zorn's inclusion without any real discussion of what makes these features indicative of a specifically 'radical' postmodernism.

#### POSTMODERN COMPLACENCY AND A FINAL WORD FROM ADORNO

The point of referencing these examples from the literature is to highlight the inadequate considerations of structure in the reception of music deemed to constitute a radical postmodernism, a designation which would seem to imply the breaking of new ground. As this study has outlined, the question of whether or not a work based on second-hand material can be described as such depends on how the material is reinterpreted, a process which can only be expressed through the work's form. In attempting to do this the radical composer seeks to negate the historically built-in expectations that accompany such material. However this constitutes only a first step and everything depends on whether this strategy amounts to something more than an abstract negation. If no new set of structural interrelations are invented to fill the void left by the initial negation then the music inevitably descends into a succession of meaningless fragments. It is here that the major flaw can be detected with Zorn's approach. While the continuation which his stylistic quotations seems to demand are cut off and thus negated, the music fails to progress beyond this point and no new formal scheme is brought into being.

Rather than viewing this as a deficiency, much of the critical commentary referenced above has opted to view the stylistic juxtapositions of Zorn's music as an innovation in its own right or else has attempted to justify it by appealing to some

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<sup>25</sup> See for instance the discussion on Rochberg's *Music for the Magic Theatre* which includes quotations from a diverse range of sources including Mahler, Mozart, Varèse, Beethoven, Webern, Stockhausen and Miles Davis. *Ibid*, pp. 84–91.



tenuous notion of coherence. Whatever the exact reasoning, questions of structure are relegated to a secondary concern behind a fragmentary eclecticism which is celebrated for supposedly challenging the boundaries imposed by modernism. While attempting to redress some of the excesses and shortcomings of modernism is a worthy cause, it is not clear how resorting to an ‘anything goes’ pluralism where all music is reduced to a set of stylistic coinages furthers this project. A most concerning aspect of this commentary is the de-emphasis on notions of a personal style or an unwillingness to discover those crucial imprints left by the Subject which were formerly viewed as evidence of an imaginative mind at work.

Far from being a radical approach, I would contend that Zorn’s strategy actually amounts to a rather conservative aesthetic position. For its formal structure it relies on a repeat of practices associated with what Peter Bürger has called ‘the historical avant-garde’—movements such as Dada and Surrealism which launched an attack on aesthetic formalism and the institutionalisation of art through a negation of the organic work.<sup>26</sup> By denying the relation of the part to the whole the historical avant-garde hoped that an aesthetic of shock would arise through the denial of meaning and thus affect a change in the recipient’s ‘life praxis’. Of course the problem with this strategy is that the shock soon neutralises itself and is absorbed and for this reason the historical avant-garde largely failed in its intentions.<sup>27</sup> It is therefore not surprising that when such tendencies reappear in postmodernism the results are less than convincing. The shock has already been absorbed and can only amount to a poor imitation of procedures that we are already familiar with. As Bürger notes: ‘The Neo-avant-garde, which stages for a second-time the avant-gardiste break with tradition, becomes a manifestation that is void of sense and that

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<sup>26</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Michael Shaw (trans.), (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 79–80.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 55–59 and pp. 80–81.

permits the positing of any meaning whatsoever'.<sup>28</sup> Yet over the last few decades such techniques have so often proved to be the default procedure for those eager to concoct a veneer of radicalism through a slack opportunism rather than through a meaningful engagement with their material. Furthermore a particularly noticeable development is how amenable to commercial appropriation such practices have proved themselves to be. 'Shock-tactics' reminiscent of the historical avant-garde now form as much a part of the marketing tools used by the advertising industry as they do in much postmodern art.

At this point it is perhaps worth recalling Robert Hullot-Kentor's assertion that Adorno's 'Stravinsky and the Restoration', despite its flaws, may in fact prove to be one of the most penetrating critiques of certain strands of postmodernism by providing some tools of resistance against a variety of contemporary cultural theory which can 'only think to weigh in as the hero of every battle against the injustice done by what claims to hear a difference between music that is emphatically composed and music that is not'.<sup>29</sup> If we take seriously Hullot-Kentor's remarks about *Philosophy of New Music*, then one of the most striking things about the 'Stravinsky and the Restoration' essay is how suitable some of the passages are as critical descriptions of Zorn's music. By simply replacing Stravinsky's name with Zorn's and some slight editing to deliver a contemporary resonance one gets an idea of just how perceptive Adorno's anticipation of some of the traits in a full-blown postmodernism actually were and just how relevant they may yet prove to be. For example as a description of the overuse of juxtaposition in Zorn's music:

One trick defines every manipulation of form in Zorn and is soon used to exhaustion: Time is suspended, as if in a circus scene, and complexes of time are presented as if they were spatial. The trick surrenders power over the

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 61.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Things Beyond Resemblance*, p. 66.

consciousness of duration, which emerges naked and heteronomous and gives the lie to the musical intention in the boredom that arises.<sup>30</sup>

Or, for instance in the way that stereotyped reproductions of various different genres are prioritised over the formation of a unique and personal style:

The [S]ubject that in music is prohibited from speaking of itself ceases to actually 'produce' and contents itself with the empty echo of an objective musical language that is no longer its own. [...] His music is consistently focused on something else, which it 'distorts' through the overexposure of its rigid and mechanical traits. Through the rigorous manipulation of the hollowed-out musical language, reduced to wreckage, *Spillane [The Soldier's Tale]* brings into existence a second, phantasmagorical and regressive musical language. [...] Thus is constituted the *monologue interieur* that the deluge of TV, internet [radio] and video games [gramophone music] carries on in the slack consciousness of city dwellers.<sup>31</sup>

And finally, as a reproach against critics who let themselves be seduced all too easily by the speed at which Zorn's music traverses genres:

The fateful error of his apologists is that they interpret the deficit of anything fixedly established in his music, of any subject matter in the strictest sense, as a guarantee of vitality. But this deficit obviates any breath of form, any continuity of process, and ultimately any 'life'.<sup>32</sup>

That these few isolated comments seem to grant more insight into certain tendencies prevalent in contemporary music than any of the critics mentioned above demonstrates the ongoing need for critical evaluations that attempt to demonstrate how the social content of musical material is reinterpreted at the level of structure.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Bürger's categorisation of the avant-garde as a rejection of art's autonomy character and its institutionalisation employs a much more specific definition of this term than the one adhered to in this study where it has been used in a more general sense to refer to the radical pursuit of the 'New'. His definition of modernism is equally

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<sup>30</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, pp. 142–143.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 134–135.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 122–123.

precise and denotes the opposite of these tendencies; namely the intensification of art's autonomy character by striving for a purity of form but without challenging its reliance upon institutional patronage. While it may be objected that Bürger's definitions of these terms are excessively rigid, they do serve as useful orientation points from which to situate the work of Deane, Barry and Volans.

At the beginning of this study it was noted how each of the composers, in their various statements, had seemed more inclined to align their work with modernism rather than any other term. It has since been argued that this alliance is expressed through their continued engagement with problems of form and the critical restructuring of received material. At the same time however it was also noted how each of the three composers had rejected the exclusionary aesthetic advocated by certain doctrinaire forms of modernism where materials that were perceived to be obsolete were systematically expunged in a quest for formal purity.

Conversely the embrace of discarded everyday materials in the music of Deane, Barry and Volans has certain affinities with Bürger's description of the historical avant-garde and indeed their frequent use of abstracted tonal materials has often been deemed by commentators to constitute a kind of *objet trouvé* procedure. However their preoccupation with binding this material into coherent structures distances their work from the formal anarchism of the historical avant-garde. Although their work often displays a high degree of fragmentation this is usually set against underlying continuities of some kind which prevent the overall structure from descending into arbitrariness.

Looking back over their respective careers I think it can be said that all three composers have rejected the stylistic cul-de-sacs that inevitably arise when either of the divergent tendencies described by Bürger are followed to their logical extremes

and even more so when they reappear in various mannerist guises. The replication of 1950s style integral serialism in the Cologne New Music scene of the 1970s and 80s and the revival of avant-garde practices by composers like John Zorn are both essentially imitations of styles whose historical moment has passed. Despite their radical pretensions both of these tendencies cannot be considered any more progressive than the outright imitations of historical styles by conservatives.

The music of Deane, Barry and Volans has retained and rejected elements of both currents running throughout art in the 20th century. Nevertheless when it comes to deciding upon which of these tendencies their work shows more affinity with, one is definitely inclined to lean more towards modernism. In their continuing preoccupation with the issue of form and, by implication, their retention of the category of the expressive Subject their music has, in the words of Burger, striven 'to affirm essential categories of modernism, but at the same time to free them from their modernist rigidity and bring them back to life'. A 'postmodernism of resistance' thus has more of the modern in it than the eclecticism and restorative efforts of other varieties of postmodernism which rely on neo-avant-gardiste procedures or a straightforward anti-modernism, both of which attempt to bypass the Subject. This study has endeavoured to reveal processes in the music of Deane, Barry and Volans which show that the existence of a creative subjectivity remains a possibility that can be carried forward well into the 21st century. In the final analysis, the imprint of the creative Subject is all that matters in radical art and the depth of these traces should act as the true measure of an artist's worth.

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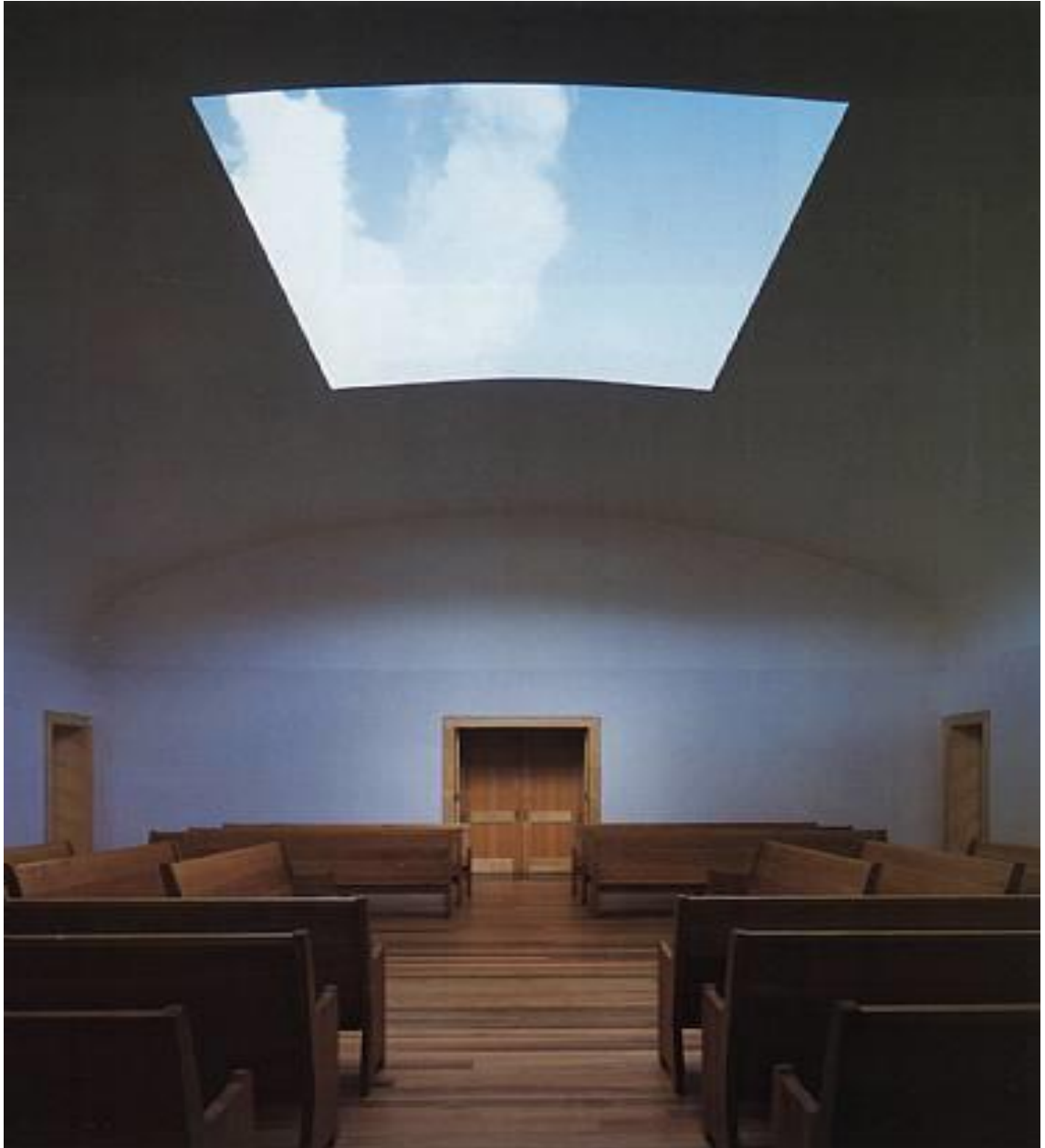
## APPENDIX 1



Kasai Velvet, Former Belgian Congo, 54 x 54 cm, embroidered and tufted palm-leaf fibre.



## APPENDIX 2



James Turrell, Live Oak Friends Meeting House, 2000, Skyspace,  
Houston, Texas.

APPENDIX 3



Jasper Johns, *Cicada*, 1979, silkscreen, 56.4 x 46.2 cm.