

# 'Voodoo Tradition': Composer as Curator

James William Cave

PhD

University of York  
Music Department

August 2018

## **Abstract**

The word 'curate' derives from the Latin verb *curare*, meaning 'to care'; historically, a curator has been thought of as 'one who cares for a collection' (Graham and Cook, 2010, p.10). More recently, there has been a dramatic expansion in the range of activities undertaken by curators; the term 'curate' is being used in more and more contexts, and an increasing number of people are referring to themselves as 'curators', as will later be discussed (Graham and Cook, 2010).

My portfolio, which comprises four original pieces, three essays and a series of commentaries, considers whether the concept of curating is applicable to composition. I have focussed on this concept in two distinct ways. Firstly, considering the role of 'curator-as-archivist', I have explored the ways in which archives of sounds, texts and images can act as the basis for musical compositions. Secondly, thinking about 'curator-as-historian', I have explored the idea of curating as a particular mode of engagement with history, in which the past is encountered as an array of fragmentary materials, rather than as a unified narrative.

A number of research questions underpin the essays, the compositions and the commentaries:

- *Can creative practice be used as a form of historical enquiry?*
- *Conversely, how can historical enquiry inform creative practice?*
- *What might it mean to think of the composer as the curator, rather than the author, of his or her musical materials?*
- *Does the notion of composer as curator rather than author also undermine the idea of composer as solitary practitioner? Is the composer always essentially engaged in an act of collaboration, either with other living artists, or with the originators of the other texts that inform his or her work?*

## Contents

Abstract .....	2
Contents.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
Catalogue of Scores and Recordings .....	7
Author's Declaration .....	9
Introduction.....	10
Essay 1: Curating.....	19
Essay 2: 'Voodoo Tradition': Composer as Curator .....	33
Essay 3: The Idea of History as Archive .....	50
Commentary 1: 'Towards the Unknown Region' : the idea of cultural memory in Latrabjarg .....	71
Commentary 2: God's Keyboard: a processional .....	91
Commentary 3: 'Begin again, shall we?': composing an operatic version of Joshua Casteel's Returns .....	108
Commentary 4: 'Shards of Vocabulary' : choral settings of texts familiar and unfamiliar .....	134
Resource List .....	155
Appendix A: Structure Table for Returns .....	162

## **Acknowledgements**

This PhD was completed with financial support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Additional funding or financial support for individual projects was provided by Terry Holmes (Latrabjarg), the Sir Jack Lyons Celebration Award (God's Keyboard), the Hinrichsen Foundation, Mahler-LeWitt Studios, Anna Mahler Foundation, Santander Global Connections programme, and YuFund (Returns), the Dean and Chapter of York Minster (Ave Maria), Cantores Olicanae (Seaside Songbook), and Vocalis (Hardingfele Carols).

My composition supervisor Professor William Brooks has been a genial source of advice, support and criticism throughout my course of study; my internal examiner, Dr Ambrose Field has provided invaluable critical oversight at key points in the process of composition and research. My research supervisor, Dr Áine Sheil, has helped me greatly with my argument and critical writing.

I would like to thank all of the people, ensembles and choirs that have performed the pieces in this portfolio: Chris Mullender, The University of York Chamber Ensemble and Chamber Choir, Ana Beard-Fernandez, Tim Ferguson, Benedict Williams, Simone Ibbett-Brown, James Whittle, x24, Zamar, Fontane Liang, Matt Redman, Will Ozard, Zoe Scheuregger, John Cummins and other members of the Returns Ensemble, the choirs of York Minster and Worcester Cathedral, conducted by Robert Sharpe and Peter Nardone, Ebor Singers, conducted by Paul Gameson, Cantores Olicanae, King-Cave Project and Vocalis.

Thanks are due also to my collaborators on the *Returns* opera project: librettist Bethan Ellis, director Rosie Parker, designer Anthony Lamble,

producers Supriya Nagarajan and Jacqueline Greaves, singers Teit Kanstrup and CN Lester, and musical director Jon Brigg. David Gothard introduced me to the writing of Joshua Casteel, and was a valuable and insightful mentor during the early stages of the composition process. Marina Mahler's generous support enabled me to complete a substantial portion of the work whilst Composer-in-Residence at the Mahler-LeWitt Studios, Spoleto; Guy Robertson proved to be a convivial host during my stay in Italy as curator of the Mahler-LeWitt programme. By producing an early workshop version of *Returns*, Abigail Toland gave the project impetus, and has provided useful advice about the practicalities of opera production. Kristi Casteel and Rebekah Latchis, of the Joshua Casteel Foundation, have shown great generosity in giving me permission to set the text of *Returns*, and in welcoming me into their home and providing me with great insight into Joshua's life and work during a research trip to the US. The writings and legacy of Joshua Casteel (1979-2012) have been a source of great inspiration not just in the composition of *Returns* but also in shaping my thinking about the role of the artist in society.

Whilst Composer-in-Residence at the Banff Centre, I was fortunate to receive expert instruction in Persian and Indian classical traditions from Kiya Tabassian and the late Dhruva Ghosh (1957-2017); the impact of this teaching reverberates through the score of *Returns* and continues to inform much of my recent work. The alumni of the inaugural Banff World Music Residency provided me with friendship, support and a sense of community during my stay, most particularly the members of Pneuma Ensemble — Gaven Dianda, Tricia Postle and Eleanor Verette — and my fellow Composer-in-Residence Patrick Jones. Without David Lyons' generosity, through the benevolence of the Sir Jack Lyons Celebration Trust, this residency would not have been possible.

During my time as a postgraduate student at York, I've been fortunate to draw inspiration, support and friendship from many other students, amongst them Li Cheong, Chang Seok Choi, Jon Hughes, Nektarios Rodosthenous, Ben Eyes, James Whittle and Rich Powell. Above all, Jon Brigg's critical reflections, musical insights and enthusiastic support of my music have helped me to grow greatly in confidence as a composer and to find my own musical voice. Two talented poets — Niall Campbell and David Thorley — allowed me to set their work within this portfolio; Thorley provided me with two fantastic, specially-commissioned works, 'Santy Anna' and 'Philae's Landing'.

Members of my extended family have provided me with support and encouragement in lots of different ways during the course of my studies: my heartfelt thanks go out to Rosalind Cave and Lucy Jenkins, Dr James Corbett, David, Glynis, Jo and Will Ellis, and to Bill and Anne Cave.

Lastly, and most importantly, I'd like to acknowledge the support of those whose love has sustained me even through the toughest parts of the PhD process, and to whom this portfolio as a whole is dedicated: Bethan Ellis, and Astrid and Ambrose Cave.

## **Catalogue of Scores and Recordings**

The scores and recordings are listed in the order in which they are discussed in the commentaries.

### *Latrabjarg* (2014)

(A3 score and USB, File 1, concert video): Chris Mullender (electric cello), James Cave (countertenor), University of York Chamber Ensemble and Chamber Choir, conducted by Jon Brigg, York Spring Festival of New Music. Recording: Ben Eyes. Video editing: Chris Leedham. (Please note: my contributions are credited to James Cave-Browne-Cave, the full version of my surname that I use occasionally for professional purposes.)

### *God's Keyboard* (2015)

(A3 score and USB, File 2, live recording): Simone Ibbett-Brown (mezzo-soprano), x24, Zamar, University of York Chamber Ensemble, conducted by James Whittle. Recording: Katharine Ambrose.

### *Returns* (2015-18)

(A3 score and USB, File 3, concert video): Teit Kanstrup (baritone), James Cave (countertenor), CN Lester (mezzo-soprano), Returns Ensemble, conducted by Jon Brigg. Video courtesy of Second Movement Opera. This video documents a performance of the opening 17 minutes of the opera at Rough for Opera 13, Cockpit Theatre, November 2015. The remainder of the work is unrecorded.

*Ave Maria* (2016)

(A4 score and USB, File 5, studio recording): York Minster Choir, conducted by Robert Sharpe. Studio engineer, Gary Cole. Recording used by kind permission of Regent Records.

*Ubi Caritas* (2015)

(A4 score): Worcester Cathedral Choir, conducted by Peter Nardone. No recording available.

*Magnificat* (2016)

(A4 score): King-Cave Project. No recording available.

'Santy Anna' and 'The Day the Whales Beached' from *Seaside Songbook* (2015) (Two A4 scores and USB, File 6, live recording). Cantores Olicanae, and the Robert Sudall Trio, conducted by Jonathan Brigg. Recording: the composer. (Please note: in performance the choir preferred to perform only a brief section of 'Santy Anna', due to the constraints of rehearsal time. The Robert Sudall Trio performed ad libitum, except in 'The Day the Whales Beached').

*Philae's Landing* (2015)

(A4 score and USB, File 7, live recording): Ebor Singers, conducted by Paul Gameson. Recording: David Rose.

*Hardingfele Carols* (2016)

(A4 score): Vocalis, conducted by Tim Ferguson. No recording available.

## **Author's Declaration**

This portfolio is my own work and it has not been submitted for examination at this or any other institution for another award. All sources have been acknowledged as references.

The soundscape element of Latrabjarg was realised by Chris Mullender: his contribution has been credited in the score and accompanying video. God's Keyboard incorporates a recording of and text from Martin Luther King's speech, The American Dream, and a brief quotation from Duke Ellington's Black Brown and Beige suite: both of these sources are referenced in my resource list. The text of Returns is used by kind permission of the Joshua Casteel Foundation. Texts for 'Santy Anna' and Philae's Landing are used by kind permission of David Thorley; that for 'When The Whales Beached' is used by kind permission of Niall Campbell. The recording of Ave Maria is used by kind permission of Regent Records.

## Introduction

The word 'curate' derives from the Latin verb *curare*, meaning 'to care'; historically, a curator has been thought of as 'one who cares for a collection' (Graham and Cook, 2010, p.10). More recently, there has been a dramatic expansion in the range of activities undertaken by curators; the term 'curate' is being used in more and more contexts, and an increasing number of people are referring to themselves as 'curators', as will later be discussed (Graham and Cook, 2010).

My portfolio, which comprises four separate composition projects, three essays and a series of commentaries, considers whether the concept of curating is applicable to composition. I have focussed on this concept in two distinct ways. Firstly, considering the role of 'curator-as-archivist', I have explored the ways in which archives of sounds, texts and images can act as the basis for musical compositions. Secondly, thinking about 'curator-as-historian', I have explored the idea of curating as a particular mode of engagement with history, in which the past is encountered as an array of fragmentary materials rather than as a unified narrative (curators do, of course, use historical narratives, both implicit and explicit to shape their practice; but, I suggest, there is something important and discursively 'open' in the way in which curation establishes and enables relations between different items.) These two paths of inquiry are distinct, yet linked: thinking about archives has shaped my compositional thinking, and working with archives made up of actual texts, sounds and pictures has help to ground my theoretical exploration of the idea of history-as-archive.

In the spirit of curatorship, my portfolio is itself conceived of as a kind of archive, made up of a series of projects that each engage with my central theme in a different way. There is no strict linear narrative running through

the essays, compositions and commentaries that make up this portfolio, but, taken together, these projects form a cumulative argument about curating and its relevance to the work of the composer. In order to identify clearly the links between each of these projects and the core research questions underlying the entire portfolio, I have included paragraphs at the start of each essay or commentary which make these links explicit, and summarise the key conclusions for each section of this thesis.

It is important to note that whilst a number of the projects included in this portfolio are to some extent collaborative – most notably *Latrabjarg* and *Seaside Songbook* - overall I have found curating to be a more pertinent paradigm through which to evaluate my own creative practice than collaboration. Curating is a practice that includes not just the relationships between different creative practitioners, but also those between different artworks, historical situations and modes of expression: within the framework of this thesis, it is easiest to think of collaboration as a subset of curating, which is a somewhat broader discourse.

The first three projects are essays. The first, 'Curating', traces the key current debates in the field of curating, particularly in view of the emergence of a plethora of new forms of media, and considers whether the boundaries between 'curating' and 'creating' have become irrevocably blurred. In this essay, I give particular attention to works by two preeminent twentieth-century philosophers — Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* and Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* — which have influenced my thinking about history and my creative practice (Derrida, 1993; Benjamin, 1982). Both authors offer accounts of the ways in which historical experience can be thought of as fragmented, rather than linear; these accounts are, I argue, relevant to recent developments in curating, and to the idea of 'composer-as-curator'.

The second essay, 'Voodoo Tradition?', uses as its departure point an essay by the American composer, Morton Feldman 'The Future of Local Music' (Feldman, 2000, p.172). Feldman criticises the approach taken by the French composer Pierre Boulez, in appropriating elements from an earlier piece by Webern (Feldman, 2000, p.172). He proposes his own approach to the manipulation of musical materials in composing, which, I argue, bears some resemblance to curating. Drawing on Feldman's essay, an analysis of his piece *Coptic Light*, and his friend John Cage's theory of the 'coexistence of dissimilars' as outlined in his work *Silence*, I propose an approach to composition that respects the integrity of and historical and personal baggage attached to individual musical materials, and views the musical text as a kind of 'theatre of memory', formed by the memories and experiences of the composer and their audience (Feldman, 1986; Cage, 1961).

In the third essay, 'The Idea of History as Archive', I argue that, far from being a recent, 'postmodern' phenomenon, the roots of scepticism about the idea of a historical 'grand narrative' can be traced as far back as the work of Dante. I discuss the idea of teleology — that everything naturally tends towards its appropriate end or purpose, revealing an order inherent in nature — with particular reference to Aristotle, and show how Dante's *Inferno* initiates a mistrust of teleology that is echoed in the work of many later writers, artists and philosophers. Returning to ideas initially explored in the first essay, I will suggest that this scepticism enabled many later thinkers and artists — amongst them Walter Benjamin — to see history not as a continuous narrative, but as an archive of events and 'materials', a perspective that paved the way for new forms of artistic expression.

A number of research questions underpin the essays, the compositions and the commentaries:

- *Can creative practice be used as a form of historical enquiry?*
- *Conversely, how can historical enquiry inform creative practice?*

- *What might it mean to think of the composer as the curator, rather than the author, of his or her musical materials?*
- *Does the notion of composer as curator rather than author also undermine the idea of composer as solitary practitioner? Is the composer always essentially engaged in an act of collaboration, either with other living artists, or with the originators of the other texts that inform his or her work?*

The remainder of my portfolio submission consists of four projects, each made up of a substantial composition and an accompanying commentary. The commentaries explore and elucidate technical aspects of the composition of each work, as well as developing themes and ideas outlined in my opening chapter. The first of these projects, *Latrabjarg* (2014), is a 30-minute concert work for electric cello, countertenor, choir, chamber ensemble and fixed media, commissioned by Terry Holmes for the York Spring Festival of New Music. The piece is a response to Iceland's natural ecology — specifically, the vast colony of sea-birds at Latrabjarg — and its cultural ecology, represented in the work by folk-melodies and saga texts. In composing this work I addressed two of the research questions above:

*-Does the notion of composer as curator rather than author also undermine the idea of composer as solitary practitioner?*

- *Can creative practice be used as a form of historical enquiry?*

I developed the work in conjunction with Chris Mullender, who composed the fixed media aspect of the piece. Each of us worked with similar basic materials: we selected a number of recordings and scores of Icelandic folk-songs in the *rimur* style, and agreed that different sections of the work would emulate different kinds of natural phenomena. We composed the two scores, fixed media and notation, separately from one another, in an attempt to create two independent 'walks' through the same cultural and environmental landscape. In rehearsal we juxtaposed the two

scores, creating a relationship between the notated and fixed media aspects of the work that was dynamic and non-hierarchical.

In the commentary for this project, I consider the differences between an approach to archival materials grounded in the idea of *re-contextualisation* and one founded upon the idea of *dialogue*. Addressing the second of my two research questions, I argue that composition can act as a form of creative enquiry into past cultures, but such a form of enquiry can only ever be a dialogue between the composer's cultural context and the context of the archival materials that he or she is exploring.

The second project, *God's Keyboard* (2014) is a 15-minute concert work for mezzo-soprano soloist, chamber choir, gospel choir, and chamber ensemble. Its composition was supported by the Jack Lyons Memorial Award, which enables a composer to create a musical response to the psalms. Rather than compose settings of psalm-texts, I instead decided to trace the influence of the psalms upon the religious life and worship music of the United States. In so doing, I was again addressing two of my key research questions:

- *Can creative practice be used as a form of historical enquiry?*
- *What might it mean to think of the composer as the curator, rather than the author, of his or her musical materials?*

In composing this work, I selected three materials that, I argue, are each heavily informed by the psalms: a hymn taken from the collection *The Sacred Harp*, 'Hallelujah', the text of a speech by Martin Luther King, entitled *The American Dream*, and a melody excerpted from Duke Ellington's suite *Black, Beige and Brown*, 'Come Sunday' (White and King, 1860 p.146; Incognito, 2007; Ellington, 1958). Each of these texts expresses a desire for liberation, and each employs rhetoric that recalls the language of the psalms. By juxtaposing two texts, by King and Ellington, that speak to the struggle for African-American liberation with a hymn-tune drawn from *The Sacred Harp*, a

hymnody rooted in the worship traditions of the American South, I intended to draw my audience's attention to the correspondence of meaning between these different items, without making any definite political point about their relationship.

The third project, *Returns*, is a one-act opera of around 85 minutes, based on the play of the same title by Joshua Casteel, scored for six singers (bass, bass-baritone, tenor, countertenor, mezzo-soprano and treble) and an ensemble of ten players (clarinet/bass clarinet, horn in F, percussion (2 players), harp, mandolin, violin, viola, cello, and double bass).

In this work I addressed all four of my key research questions:

- *Can creative practice be used as a form of historical enquiry?*
- *Conversely, how can historical enquiry inform creative practice?*
- *What might it mean to think of the composer as the curator, rather than the author, of his or her musical materials?*
- *Does the notion of author as curator rather than author also undermine the idea of composer as solitary practitioner? Is the composer always essentially engaged in an act of collaboration, either with other living artists, or with the originators of the other texts than inform his or her work?*

Joshua Casteel (1979-2012) was a veteran of the Iraq War who later became a celebrated peace campaigner and playwright. In his play *Returns* (2007), Casteel addressed the subject of his own experience of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a condition that caused the fragmentation of his memories and consciousness, as well as an obsessive reexamination of these shards of recollection. The play's five characters — three veterans, a platoon commander, and an Iraqi detainee — each represent elements of a single shattered consciousness, engaging in a series of confrontations, interrogations and rituals as they attempt to reunify wartime memories into

a coherent narrative. The play is, in essence, a series of actions in search of a plot.

Collaborating with Opera North director Rosalind Parker, I aimed to tackle the compositional challenges — both structural and idiomatic — inherent in creating an appropriately traumatised sound world. In order to ensure that my compositional practice was grounded in an understanding of war trauma, I read up-to-date research on the psychological and physiognomic impact of trauma, particularly Bessel van der Kolk's recent work, *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014); I also became interested in the ways in which memories may become distorted or even superimposed in an attempt to create a coherent narrative, drawing particularly on Sigmund Freud's classic essay 'Screen Memories' (van der Kolk, 2014; Freud, 1962). To create a sonic counterpart to the protagonist's fractured consciousness, I drew on aspects of ritual theatre, as well as rhythmic principles drawn from my studies of Hindustani and Persian classical music at the Banff Centre, Canada.

The fourth project is a collection of choral works: *Ave Maria* (commissioned by the Dean and Chapter of York Minster for York Minster Choir), *Ubi Caritas* (commissioned by Thomas Murgatroyd for Worcester Cathedral Choir), two pieces, 'Santy Anna' and 'When the Whales Beached' from *Seaside Songbook* (commissioned by Cantores Olicanae), *Magnificat* (commissioned by Chris and Rachel Little for King-Cave Project), *Philae's Landing* (commissioned by the Ebor Singers) and *Hardingfele Carols* (commissioned by Vocalis Choir, Norway)

In this multi-work project, I sought to address the challenges of setting text to music, in particular the question: in a piece of vocal music, how exactly does the sound of the music 'echo' or enhance the sense of the text?

These works reflected the research question:

- *Does the notion of author as curator rather than author also undermine the idea of composer as solitary practitioner? Is the composer always essentially engaged in an act of collaboration, either with other living artists, or with the originators of the other texts than inform his or her work?*

Some of these pieces — *Ubi Caritas*, *Magnificat* and *Ave Maria* — were settings of well-worn, canonical, liturgical texts, commissioned for particular occasions. Each of these texts had been set to music numerous times; I argue that these texts are like palimpsests, overwritten with layers of meaning and performance history. The challenge, therefore, was to engage afresh with these texts whilst also recognising the musical tradition attached to each. The composer is, in this scenario, still a collaborator, but a collaborator who is engaging with a range of authors, each of whom has shaped the source-text in some way. *Hardingfele Carols*, a commission from the Norwegian choir, Vocalis, presented me with the challenge of arranging a set of three Norwegian carol melodies; these melodies were very well-known to the choir — a palimpsest source-text, in the terms outlined above — but not at all familiar to the composer. I decided to embrace this challenge by refracting the music of the carols through the prism of another Norwegian musical ‘artefact’, the *Hardingfele* or Hardanger fiddle, using the choir to evoke the drones and harmonic overtones associated with this instrument.

*Philae’s Landing* and *Seaside Songbook*, were, in contrast, collaborations with two contemporary poets, David Thorley and Niall Campbell. I worked closely with David Thorley to create new responses to two time-worn lyrical forms: the Cecilian Ode and the sea-shanty. *Philae’s Landing* was commissioned by the Ebor Singers for their St Cecilia’s Day concert. Inspired by a news story about Philae, a European Space Agency probe that had vanished after landing on a comet, I commissioned Thorley to use this story

as the basis for a new 'Cecilian Ode' reworking the time-worn trope of 'celestial music'.

*Seaside Songbook* was commissioned by Ilkley-based choir, Cantores Olicanae. The choir commissioned Jon Brigg and me to create a work that would explore the cultural history of the British seaside from many perspectives: fishing, tourism, entertainment, and so on. Jon and I worked independently on 15-minute sections of the piece, combining our scores to create a single half-hour portmanteau work, of which my section is included in this portfolio. Whilst Jon focussed on the rich heritage associated with the British summer holiday, I explored maritime history, commissioning David Thorley to write some contemporary sea-shanties, using Cecil Sharp's *English Folk-Chanteys* as a model; I also included another text, 'When the Whales Beached' by Niall Campbell, a poet with whom I'd previously collaborated (Sharp, 1914; Campbell, 2013).

## **Essay I: Curating**

In this essay, I address the notion of curating in detail, discussing the recent expansion in the range of contexts in which the term 'curator' is used, and consider its relevance as a paradigm for understanding the composition process, with particular reference to my own creative practice. I draw on a number of examples taken from the world of visual art of creative artists - Jeremy Deller and Grayson Perry - who have employed elements of curating in their work. With reference to the work of the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, I also introduce the idea central to my thesis that historical experience is akin to an archive of fragmented materials, and that this can be fertile territory for the creative artist.

I have particularly addressed the following research questions:

- *Can creative practice be used as a form of historical enquiry?*
- *Conversely, how can historical enquiry inform creative practice?*
- *What might it mean to think of the composer as the curator, rather than the author, of his or her musical materials?*
- *Does the notion of composer as curator rather than author also undermine the idea of composer as solitary practitioner? Is the composer always essentially engaged in an act of collaboration, either with other living artists, or with the originators of the other texts that inform his or her work?*

In 1987, the curator Jonathan Watkins wrote a short polemic in *Art Monthly* in which he argued that curating was itself a form of art. Watkins argued that through 'manipulation of the environment, the lighting, the labels, [and] the placement of other works of art' the curator creates a kind of bricolage — an

artwork made up of other artefacts — in the spirit of Marcel Duchamp's 'Ready-mades' (Watkins, cited in Rugg and Sedgwick, 2007, p.21).



(Image 1: Duchamp, M. (1921). *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Selavy?*. [Sculpture]. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art.)

Watkins was arguing for a substantial expansion of the role of the curator. The original definition of the term 'curator', derived from the Latin verb *curare*, was 'one who cares'; as Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook have

argued, traditionally a curator has been thought of as 'one who cares for a collection' (Graham and Cook, 2010, p.10). Watkins, in contrast, was viewing the curator as a *creator*, someone who makes important decisions about how and where artworks are displayed, and who places the items in his or her care into new relationships and contexts. By choosing to place, for example, a Monet next to a Mondrian, the curator is asking the viewer to compare the two works. In so doing, argues Watkins, the curator is creating a new artwork that comprises both of these works, as well as the new relationship between them.

Watkins was not simply suggesting that curators should be accorded the same respect as artists. He was also suggesting that curators play a crucial role in generating meaning within the exhibition-space. As Paul O'Neill notes, Watkins is building on an argument first put forward by Oscar Wilde in his essay 'The Critic as Artist' (Wilde, 1913). In this essay, Wilde argued that it is not the artist but the viewer's critical faculty that creates the work of art; it is at the moment that the viewer makes a critical judgement about the object that the artwork is created (O'Neill, cited in Rugg and Sedgwick, 2007, p.21). Watkins further develops Wilde's argument by suggesting that the curator, too, has a role to play in creating the artwork: by choosing the manner of the artefact's presentation, the curator shapes the way in which the viewer interprets it. By creating an exhibition from a range of artworks, the curator is making something entirely new, an overarching piece of art than contains other works within it.

In 1987, this may have seemed like a radical departure from conventional curatorial practice. However, in light of the seismic changes in how the term 'curator' is used which have been ushered in by the development of digital and online culture, Watkins' argument now seems highly prescient. The number of contexts in which the term 'curator' is used has greatly expanded, as has the range of tasks undertaken by curators.

Joseph Doubtfire and Giulia Ranchetti note in a recent article entitled 'Curator as Artist as Curator' that:

The term 'curator' has moved beyond any singular definition and now occupies a much broader sphere of activities, practices and professions. The curator, as a caretaker-like figure, once functioned solely within the museum, and as such, would often have been entrusted with the overseeing of a particular collection or display. In a move far beyond the museum, curatorial practice now not only exists in relation to art, but also encompasses a panoply of occupational contexts. (Doubtfire and Ranchetti, 2015)

The term is now freely employed in many different professional contexts, amongst them journalism ('curator of content'), the performing arts ('curator of a performance') and events management ('event curator'). The term is particularly prevalent in social media, to refer to someone who selects and manages content on a particular Twitter or Facebook 'feed'. In 2015, Twitter even launched a new piece of software called Twitter Curator, better to enable 'media organisations [to] search, filter and curate Twitter content' (Dennebaum, 2015).

Alongside this expansion in different forms of 'curating', there has been a transformation of the ways in which people experience culture. As Charlie Gere notes, digital and online culture, which has emerged since the early-1990s, has had a major impact on the ways in which people experience space. Public and private realms have been conflated (Gere, 2004). Where once the home might have provided a refuge from public life, now domestic experience is 'permeated by a vast simultaneous crowd of ghostly verbal, aural, and visual images existing in cyberspace's simulacrum of presence' (Miller, cited in Gere, 2004). The spaces in which people engage

with culture have also been altered. Works of art have long been available in reproduction, bringing images from the art gallery into the home; with the emergence of new forms of online art, works are now being created that exist only in cyberspace, rendering the distinction between 'original' and 'reproduction' invalid.

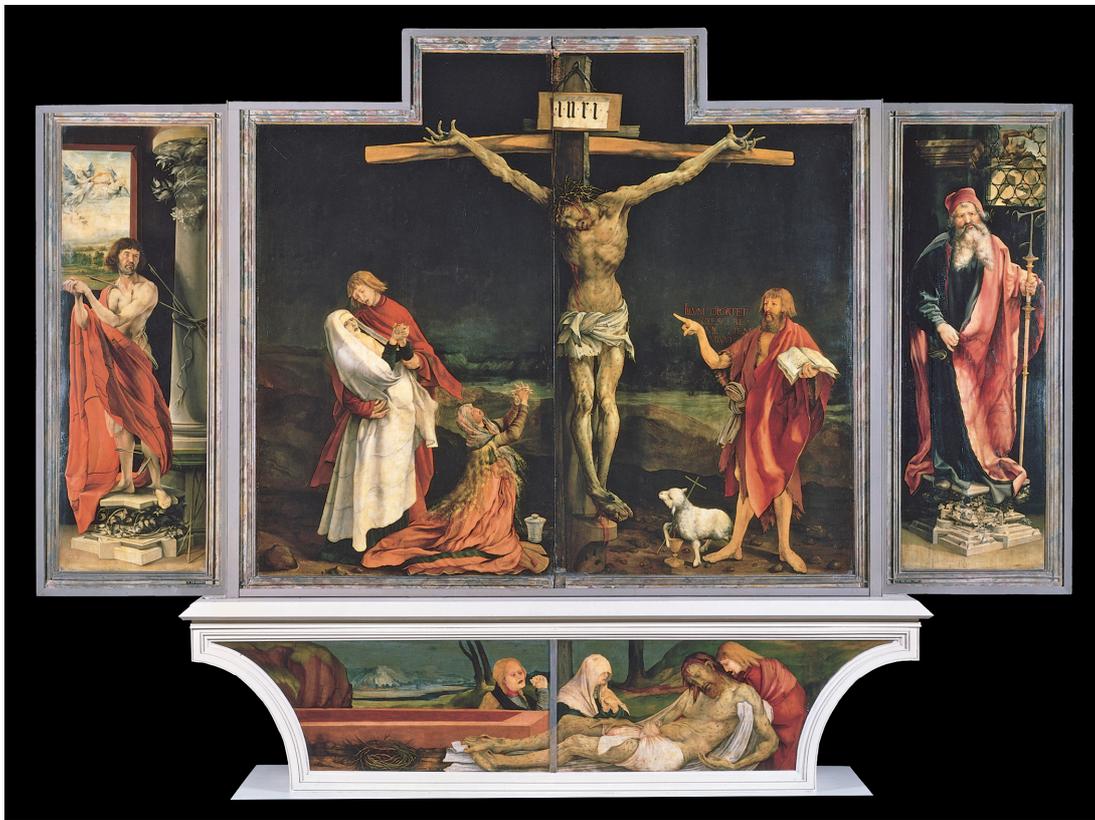
Some artists and curators have attempted to translate the concepts of 'art gallery' and 'exhibition' to the online environment, creating 'virtual galleries' which mimic the presentation style of their physical counterparts (Graham and Cook, 2010, p.65). Others, however, have used the internet as a way of shifting attention away from the idea of the autonomous artwork, presented in space, towards the notion of online discourse itself being a form of artwork. Such projects posit a new way of thinking about art as essentially collaborative, widely distributed in space and time, and as being 'composed almost entirely of interconnections in a network' (Graham and Cook, 2010, p. 65).

These new forms of online art have blurred the boundaries between artist, curator, and audience, and have transformed our sense of how art is made and where it is encountered. However, whilst this blurring of boundaries in cyberspace has had substantial implications for the ways in which artists, curators and art-galleries operate in physical space, it has not led to the end of the 'cult of the artist'. Rather, galleries have responded to the emergence of new hybrid forms of artistic activity by promoting the idea of the 'artist-as-curator'. There are, of course, many instances throughout the history of art of artists promoting and curating exhibitions of their own work or their contemporaries. For instance, in 1855, the French painter Gustave Courbet famously set up an exhibition of his own work entitled *Le Pavillon du Realisme* across the road from a much larger State-sponsored exhibition at which, he claimed, his work was presented carelessly (Filipovic, 2013).

Recently, however, a substantial number of exhibitions have been presented in major galleries which have employed a well-known contemporary artist as a 'celebrity curator'. In the case of a 2014 exhibition *Love Is Enough* at Modern Art Oxford, it was the personal taste of the artist-curator Jeremy Deller that was presented as the unifying link between the two artists featured, William Morris and Andy Warhol (Deller, 2014). The promotional website for the exhibition mentions a number of possible parallels between the two artists; both made use of printmaking in their work, and were frequent collaborators with other artists. But it is the fact that 'Turner Prize-winning artist Jeremy Deller ... cites Morris and Warhol as his two greatest artistic influences' that is identified as the primary justification for this 'unconventional combination' of artists (Modern Art Oxford, 2014). Another Turner Prize winner, Grayson Perry, was employed by the British Museum as the 'artist, curator and guide' responsible for overseeing a 2011 exhibition bearing his name: *Grayson Perry: The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* (British Museum, 2011). As with the exhibition curated by Deller, it is Perry's personal taste — his 'unique eye' — that is used as the primary justification for the presentation of an 'eclectic group of objects ... selected and juxtaposed ... in a way that none of those of us working [at the British Museum] would ever have conceived' (British Museum, 2011).

At one level, Deller and Perry are enacting the kind of 'artistic curation' envisaged by Jonathan Watkins: by placing artworks and artefacts in new and unusual relationships with one another, one might argue, they are revitalising the art exhibition by using it as a means of artistic expression. And it is no coincidence that both of these artists frequently rework images and ideas from history or from other artists in their own work, often making use of striking and unexpected juxtapositions of style and media: they instinctively cultivate a curatorial strand in their own creative practice. Deller, in his 2001 performance work *The Battle of Orgreave* worked with

battle reenactment society the Sealed Knot to recreate a violent clash between miners and police from the 1984 miner's strike (Deller, 2001).



(Image 2: Grünewald, M. (1516). *Isenheim Altarpiece*. [Altarpiece]. Colmar: Unterlinden Museum)

In his 2012 work *The Agony In The Car Park*, Perry reworked Matthias Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece*, a 16<sup>th</sup>-century painting depicting the crucifixion, as a tapestry depicting a nightclub singer serenading two adoring fans (Perry, 2012; Grünewald, 1516). It is interesting to note, however, how far this personality-led 'artist-curation' is removed from the more collaborative and diffuse forms of online creativity referred to earlier. Both approaches blur the boundaries between *curation* and *creation*, and yet one approach is highly personalised, the other highly depersonalised.



(Image 3: Perry, G. (2012). *The Agony In The Car Park*. [Tapestry].

London: Victoria Miro Gallery)

### **i. Composer as curator**

As a composer, I am excited and inspired by the creative possibilities presented by this expansion of the term 'curator'. I recognise that, whilst composers work with sounds rather than physical objects, there are many ways in which they are comparable to curators. Composers often draw inspiration, consciously or subconsciously, from earlier composers, and may make reference to them in their own works, either through direct quotation, or by drawing on aspects of their style and technique. And, in the act of composing a particular piece, a composer may draw upon a wide range of different pieces of earlier music, freely juxtaposing elements of many different works and musical styles. Considered in this way, one might suggest that the contemporary composer's imagination functions as a kind of exhibition-hall, in which musical objects taken from the archive of his or her memory are presented in an eclectic relationship with one another. Polyphonic textures taken from a mass by Palestrina may co-exist with the brass arrangements from an album by Duke Ellington; a passage of plainsong notated by Hildegard von Bingen might be heard alongside an

extract from a Bartok string quartet. Further, one might suggest that such juxtapositions are particularly possible at this moment in history because of the technological advancements that have enabled the free reproduction and dissemination of musical scores and recordings: we are free, if we choose, to encounter Hildegard, Ellington or Bartok ahistorically, listening to their works simply as sonic experiences rather than as contributions to the 'grand narrative' of the Western classical tradition.

But, a critic of this argument might object, shouldn't the composer strive for originality? By searching his or her memory for traces of other composers' music, doesn't the composer run the risk of pastiche at best, and plagiarism at worst? In answering this objection, the curation analogy is again appropriate. As Watkins argued in his polemic, a curator, by choosing the objects and by determining the relationship between them in the exhibition, is creating something new. A Ming vase, when placed next to, for example, an empty WW1 shell-casing, is transformed: though the one is a priceless objet d'art, the other a simple receptacle for gunpowder, both are revealed to be containers, each with a particular historical context. The composer, like the curator, is responsible for an act of *synthesis*, to create something new from disparate elements. By thinking as 'curator' as well as as 'artist', the composer may seek to preserve a sense of the integrity and history of the materials on which he or she draws.

I argued above that, in recent years, two distinctive strands of discourse have emerged, each of which present the idea of 'artist-as-curator'. One was the model of online collaborative practice, in which the artwork is, in effect, generated through an act of curation, as a widespread network of individuals work together to create art 'composed almost entirely of interconnections in a network'. The other was the notion of the celebrity 'artist-as-curator', where it is the artist's own personal taste that is the

defining factor in determining how an exhibition will be curated. Both of these models have inspired my work in this portfolio.

Whilst I have not employed online media in my compositions, I have made use of collaborative approaches in all of my compositions. In composing *Latrabjarg*, I collaborated with the cellist and electroacoustic composer Chris Mullender, using a common starting point to create two distinct scores, one notated, the other in fixed media, which were then superimposed in performance. My opera, *Returns*, was conceived as a large-scale creative collaboration with a number of practitioners in different media, amongst them the director David Gothard and the theatre designer Anthony Lamble. The work was also developed as an international partnership between a number of supporting organisations and charities, including the Joshua Casteel Foundation (US), the Mahler-LeWitt Studios (Italy) and York Minster (UK). The choral work *Seaside Songbook* was conceived as a portmanteau collaboration between myself, the composer Jon Brigg, the choir Cantores Olicanae, and the Robert Sudall Jazz Trio. Jon and I composed independently, but the structure and narrative of the work was conceived collaboratively. I worked with the poet David Thorley to create the choral work *Philae's Landing*. In the pieces that comprise the remainder of my portfolio — *God's Keyboard*, *Ave Maria*, *Magnificat*, and *Ubi Caritas* — I did not work directly with another artist, but instead used my experience of collaborative practice to inform my engagements with a series of texts and materials. I viewed these compositions as collaborations with the authors of these texts and materials, and with the histories that have shaped their transmission.

In a number of my compositions, I aimed to emulate 'artist-curators' like Grayson Perry and Jeremy Deller, selecting, assembling and re-contextualising various archive materials, and using them as the basis for further creative work. In *Latrabjarg*, I drew on three different kinds of

'archive' — a volume of Icelandic *rimur* folksongs, provided by the Arni Magnusson Institute, a selection of recordings of birdsong from the British Library Sound Archive, and a selection of Icelandic texts, most of them taken from *Egil's Saga*. I used these archive materials as musical material, and to provide an overarching narrative for the piece. In composing *God's Keyboard*, I selected four archive materials, a hymn taken from the hymnal *The Sacred Harp*, 'Hallelujah', a melody by Sibelius, 'Aus Banger Brust', which the African-American singer, Marian Anderson, sang to the composer at his home, the text of a speech by Martin Luther King, entitled 'How Long? Not Long!', and a melody excerpted from Duke Ellington's *Black, Beige and Brown* suite, 'Come Sunday' (White and King, 1860 p.146; Sibelius, 1907; Incognito, 2007; Ellington, 1958). These disparate materials were used in my piece to evoke obliquely the struggle for civil rights in America. In composing *Returns*, I worked with an archive of materials about Joshua Casteel's life and work, provided by David Gothard, in order to gain a better understanding of Casteel's literary influences and experiences as a soldier. Drawing on the work of various experts in the field of post-traumatic stress, including Bessel van der Kolk, I also interpreted the text of *Returns* as an extensive, yet jumbled memory-archive, in which Casteel's own memories became intermingled with those of his friends and acquaintances in order to create the narrative of the play. *Returns* is a non-linear, fragmentary narrative; in trying to make sense of the play, audience members need to pick their own interpretative path through the at times disorientating landscape of the drama, like visitors in an exhibition of unusual artefacts. In turn, I attempted to create a sonic landscape that would mimic the archival nature of the text.

Whilst I have been inspired by new developments in the field of curating, I have also been particularly influenced by two philosophers who both tackled the subject of historical experience, Jacques Derrida and Walter

Benjamin. I will outline in detail some key arguments from the two works by these authors — Derrida's

*Spectres of Marx* (1993) and Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* (1982) — that have most influenced me in the third essay in this portfolio, which addresses the idea of historical narrative and fragmentation. At this point, it is, however, worth noting that both of these writers took exception to the idea that history is constructed like a conventional story, with a beginning, middle and end, and a clear sense of progress and structure. Both Derrida and Benjamin argued that historical experience is essentially discontinuous, and that ideas, images and memories appear and reappear without a clear sense of order or design. As such, history itself is a form of archive, albeit a very unstable and fragile one; the question of who gets to appoint themselves to the role of curator of the archive can be, they both argue in different ways, one of the major grounds of political conflict. This view of history has informed my approach to composition throughout my course of study

## **ii. Liquid modernity**

If history is an unstable and precarious archive, then this precarious ground is, I argue, fertile territory for creative practice. Music is an art-form particularly suited to the presentation of a wide variety of discrete ideas; from Tallis' *Spem in Alium* through to Cage's *Songbooks*, composers have long been inspired by the challenge of creating a large-scale structure from many diverse parts. For a piece of music to simulate a record of historical experience — a biography, diary or saga — is, of course, a form of deceit. There are, invariably, aesthetic concerns that underpin the distribution of the various elements that make up a musical composition; a piece of music may emulate history's messiness but not precisely embody it. Nonetheless, in the

compositions that make up this portfolio, I have sought to engage with the challenge of using music as a means of representing historical experience.

This approach to composition is, I suggest, artistically rich but also timely. In a key essay on the role of art in contemporary culture, 'Liquid Arts', the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman discusses the work of three artists, Jacques Villegle, Manolo Valdes and Herman Braun-Vega, whose works are particularly timely, because, he argues, they exemplify the idea that 'history is a factory of waste' (Bauman, 2007, p.119). These artists create artworks that are deliberately fragile and temporary, and are grounded as much in a sense of their own impending destruction as in the moment of their creation.

Villegle's works depict disintegrating tapestries of tattered street-posters; Braun-Vega's paintings are allusive artistic 'mash-ups' in which for example, a 'Velasquez nude [might be] in the company of Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*' (Bauman, 2007, p.120). They are described by Bauman as:

... impossible encounters [which] are composed of fragments; well-known fragments but taken at random, almost, from all sorts of historical eras and put together in quite a comfortable cohabitation. It is very much like the entry to the new shopping malls in Leeds, where you rub shoulders with a mass of people of all sorts of shades and forms ... (Bauman, 2007, p.120).

These artists speak forcefully to the present, because, Bauman suggests, they speak to a condition of social experience in which a sense of historical progress and historical permanence has dissolved: he calls this condition 'liquid modernity'. It is a state in which 'time flows, but no longer marches on. There is constant change, but no finishing point [in] ... a sequence of incessant new beginnings'; 'liquid modernity' is characterised by '[a] cacophony of sounds and the hubbub of sights — a kaleidoscope of constant change – [where] there is no centre around which things could condense,

solidify and settle' (Bauman, 2007, p.121). It is 'a condition in which the distance, and the time span, between novelty and waste, between the origin and the dumping ground, have been drastically shortened' (Bauman, 2007, p.122).

The expansion of 'curating' that I described earlier is, I suggest, a response to what Bauman terms the condition of 'liquid modernity'. Curating is a way of responding to this condition of continuous impermanence, a means of filtering, selecting and recontextualising the flotsam and jetsam of contemporary culture, a culture that is constantly in flux. Curation has moved on from its original definition of 'one who cares' because so much of contemporary culture is fragile and impermanent; it has become instead a form of creative activity, a mosaic made from tiles that are constantly shifting and changing.

Bauman's concept of 'liquid modernity' may sound pessimistic, but it is not, I think, intended to be. At the end of his essay, Bauman draws a distinction between the creation of art-works, to be housed in museums which are like 'graveyards' and the experience of everyday life, which is the new 'site of aesthetics', typified by patterns of shifting attention, fluidity and 'chain[s] of action' (Bauman, 2007, p.125). The art of 'liquid modernity' — Villegle, Valdes, Braun-Vega — is of interest because it speaks to this condition of everyday experience, not to the requirements of the art gallery. Similarly, in the works that make up this portfolio, I have endeavoured to work resolutely and optimistically in this spirit, staging confrontations between radically different forms of archive material, in order to capture the quality of historical experience.

In this essay I have discussed the idea that 'curating' is a term that has come in recent years to be applied to an ever-expanding range of different practices, and I have identified examples of creative practice from the world of visual art - the work of Deller and Perry - in which the boundaries

between creativity and curation are blurred. I have argued that this approach is comparable to my own creative practice, as demonstrated by the works in this portfolio, and, with reference to the work of Zygmunt Bauman, I have argued that the fragmentary nature of historical experience can be fertile territory for the creative artist.

## **Essay 2: 'Voodoo Tradition': Composer as Curator**

In this essay, I consider the ways in which the notion of curating can be directly applied to the practice of composition, with particular reference to the music and writings of Morton Feldman, the writings of John Cage and the theory of poetic language advanced by the poet J.H. Prynne. I discuss how, in his writings, Feldman opposes his own creative practice, which draws inspiration from artisanal traditions such as Coptic rug-weaving, and in which musical ideas are described as being like 'children...yearning for attention, to the approach of Pierre Boulez, which, for Feldman, adopts a predatory attitude towards musical history. I use Prynne's analysis of the ways in which sound is central to the meaning of poetic language as a means of elucidating the difference between Boulez and Feldman's approaches. The essay concludes with a brief analysis of Feldman's work *Coptic Light* (1986), as an example of his compositional theories in action. In this essay, I do not attempt to draw substantial links between Feldman's practice and my own: rather, the conclusions I draw here are intended to serve as context for the discussion of my own works later in this thesis.

The issues discussed in this essay are of particular relevance to the following research questions:

- *Can creative practice be used as a form of historical enquiry?*
- *Conversely, how can historical enquiry inform creative practice?*

- *What might it mean to think of the composer as the curator, rather than the author, of his or her musical materials?*

In Morton Feldman's essay 'The Future of Local Music', Feldman accuses Pierre Boulez of adopting a disrespectful attitude towards the work of earlier composers:

I got a copy of Boulez's first sonata and the slow movement is just two pages and there were different attacks there, and it looked familiar ... About three years later I'm looking through scores and there is a religious song of Webern, also two pages. And I look at it and I get a pencil and I get the Boulez, and I mark the attacks ... and then I took the Webern, the kind of attack was exactly the same. So, evidently, that was no accident, so evidently Pierre felt that if he had the distribution of those kind of attacks in a short piece of approximately the same duration as Webern, he had, almost in a kind of voodoo, it's not normal, it's *spinnst*, the voodoo kind of sucking the blood of the enemy, you see, you are going to get a strength, that's essentially what it is. And isn't that tradition, if we suck out the blood and the knowledge of the past, we are going to get its strength, it's what they refer to in Reagan as voodoo economics? This is voodoo tradition. Maybe there is some kind of primeval hangover? Let us talk about these things. We are not talking about history, we are talking about a few people that are history. We are not talking about all the *kinder* hanging around Darmstadt (Feldman, 2000, p.172)

Feldman here is imputing to Boulez a form of artistic appropriation. Boulez' actions are manipulative because, in using articulations from Webern's song to lend structure to his sonata, Boulez is acting with insufficient responsibility towards the earlier work: he is effectively 'exsanguinating' the earlier piece to give life to his own. He is creating a kind of palimpsest, in which the structural outline of Webern's music is overwritten, but remains unacknowledged, a skeletal remnant of the original piece entombed within the new musical form. Such a compositional process also implies a certain kind of listener, one enough attuned to the forceful economy of Webern's use of structure to appreciate the power of Boulez' musical gesture without requiring the borrowing itself to be acknowledged. As such, Feldman suggests, Boulez' actions are elitist, because he is operating within the context of a competitive version of music history in which a pantheon of 'great' composers are locked in artistic struggle with each other, with an audience of informed listeners in eager attendance. His actions are also reductive, Feldman argues, because this artistic struggle is itself sealed off from a wider historical context, and is inaccessible to an 'uninformed' listening public. This is what Feldman means by 'we are not talking about history, we are talking about a few people that are history.'

For Feldman, it is not simply that Boulez has misappropriated Webern's work; he is also concerned with the idea that the compositional materials themselves have been misused. Feldman's use of the word *kinder* in the phrase 'we are not talking about all the *kinder* hanging around Darmstadt' is significant in this regard. It picks up on an earlier section in the same essay, in which Feldman outlines an alternative ethics of composition:

I see ideas as a bunch of children in the house all yearning for attention: 'Change my diaper, change my diaper! ... I want my Coca-Cola now! ... These three

notes have to be done this way now! Really. That's the way I see it. Like a bunch of *kinder* vying for attention. (Feldman, 2000, p.171)

In contrast to the Darmstadt *kinder* — for which we can read Boulez and Stockhausen — who vie for attention with each other, and 'suck the blood' of earlier composers in order to advance their own struggle for power, here it is the musical material itself that is given agency. The composer is cast in the role of a parent, deciding how best to allow each idea to thrive. Feldman uses a domestic metaphor, invoking something *heimlich* (homely) in opposition to the sense of the *unheimlich* (uncanny) suggested by the use of the term 'voodoo' to describe Boulez' process. In Feldman's ethics of composition, it is the role of the composer to enable sonic materials to actualise themselves, and, in so doing, to establish productive relationships between different materials within the musical text as a whole.

Boulez' process, on the other hand, is highly directive: in cannibalising Webern's materials to serve his own compositional ends, Boulez simultaneously establishes an unequal power-dynamic between the two composers, and impedes the establishment of dynamic relationships between the musical materials themselves. Feldman relates another memorable anecdote earlier in this essay which restates this point:

Stockhausen asked for my secret: 'What's your secret?'  
And I said 'I don't have any secret, but if I do have a point of view it's that sounds are very much like people. And if you push them, they push you back. So if I have a secret: don't push the sounds around.  
Karlheinz leans over to me and says: 'Not even a little bit?' (Feldman, 2000, pp.157-8)

Feldman's contention in 'The Future of Local Music' — that sounds have a life and history of their own, and that this life and history need to be

respected by the composer — is also one of the central areas of focus of my PhD portfolio. Like Feldman, I am wary of the notion that the history of music is a closed space, inhabited only by a select group of ‘great composers’, and that its vocabulary of sounds can be manipulated without consideration of their historical context. As a composer, I want to recognise the authors of sea-shanties, spirituals and work-songs as my musical confreres, as well as composers of ‘art-music’ like Boulez, Stockhausen and Feldman. Whilst, like Feldman, I consider composition to be in this sense a ‘broad church’, I also want to acknowledge and respect the histories of particular sounds and musical materials. It isn’t that I’m averse to innovation, or that I think that one shouldn’t present musical gestures, instruments, or materials in bold new contexts. Rather, I suggest, to think of sounds — following Feldman — as *kinder*, is to acknowledge that sounds have a past that merits understanding and that they have a future beyond the confines of any particular piece of music, or any particular moment of performance, a future in which their meaning will expand and develop further. Taking this idea further, I want to suggest that composition is more an act of *curation* than *creation*: a composer positions musical materials in new relationships in order to create an interesting dialogue between them, just as a museum curator places artefacts in new relationships within an exhibition.

But, a reader, echoing Stockhausen, might object: ‘Isn’t it the right — or even the responsibility — of the composer to push sounds around a little bit?’ After all, sounds aren’t actually *kinder*: they have a history, but to pay too much attention or respect to this history reduces composition to an act of *interpretation* rather than *creativity*. A composer’s responsibility isn’t to *understand* the language within which he or she works, but to *revitalise* it. To answer this concern — and to grasp the exact nature of Feldman’s objection to Boulez’ practice of compositional appropriation — one needs to develop a

rudimentary working theory of the way in which musical language operates as a system-of-meaning. If musical language is essentially a closed, stable system, in which individual gestures convey more-or-less fixed meanings, the extent to which an individual composer can 'push these sounds around' is limited. Boulez may appropriate Webern's attacks for his own purposes, but these attacks retain the same function in Webern's piece — and subsequently in Boulez' new piece — that they always did: their function and value is not changed. To go to the opposite extreme, if musical language is a highly unstable system, in which the relationship between gesture and meaning is not firmly fixed, the potential for the manipulation of gestures is also limited. Boulez takes Webern's attacks, but they mean something radically different in the context of his piece than they do in the original, so much so that the gestures are essentially different from one another.

Feldman's suggestion is, I think, that musical language exists at neither of these extremes, that the ebb and flow of meaning within music is actually a far more subtle process, shaped not only by the interactions between composers and their sound-materials, but also by other, far wider, historical processes. Feldman's thinking here, which weaves together history, utterance, and the idea of artistic community, is, I suggest, more easily apprehended here with reference to the field of poetics than the fields of linguistics or musicology. The poet J H Prynne, in his monograph *Stars, Tigers and The Shape of Words* grapples with a similar set of problems to Feldman. The primary focus of this essay is ostensibly the problematic relationship between the meaning of words and their sound (Prynne, 1993, p. 1). Prynne quotes the following lines by Alexander Pope to demonstrate that this problem has presented a persistent challenge to poets:

True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance  
As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.  
'Tis not enough no Harshness gives Offence,

The Sound must Seem an Eccho to the Sense.

(Prynne, 1993, p.3).

This apparently simple problem, the idea that ‘Sound must ... Eccho ... Sense’, has, Prynne argues, presented a challenge not only to poets, but also to such finely-honed philosophical minds as those of John Locke and Ferdinand de Saussure. Locke, Prynne notes, held to the notion that social convention - ‘common acceptation’ — bound together individual words, their sounds, and the idea that they conveyed; this relationship was, however, ‘[a] perfectly arbitrary Imposition’. Prynne argues that Saussure, too, draws a clear distinction between the historical formation of any given language through the action of particular social processes, and its relationship to the idea of language abstractly considered ‘as a system of signs and signifying relations’. The important thing for the student of language, Saussure would argue, is not to understand the culture which has formed a language, but the way in which its systems can be understood as typical of language-in-general. Like Locke, Saussure therefore concludes that individual signs — and the sounds attached to those signs — are essentially arbitrary (Prynne, 1993, pp.4-5).

Prynne takes the bold step of questioning both of these conclusions by conducting close readings of two highly familiar poems, ‘Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star’ and Blake’s ‘The Tyger’. In these readings, he teases out the nuances of poetic meaning both by exploring the very *non-arbitrary* ways in which within both texts sound functions as a way of drawing together the meanings of different words, and acts as an entry-point into the different historical contexts through which both adult and child readers may have come to form their understanding of these texts (Prynne, 1993, pp.8-17, 21-35). Prynne notes that, whilst literary texts foreground effects such as echo, repetition, and rhyme, that ‘seem conspicuously arbitrary’, their

distinctively literary nature [mark them] for reading with a heightened sense of the accumulated layers and aspects of association which form the signficatory resonance of previous usage ... to the functions of language as code and framework have been added those of depot-inventory and memory-theatre (Prynne, 1993, p.18).

To paraphrase the minute subtleties of Prynne's readings of these texts would both be foolhardy and highly time-consuming, but it is reasonably straightforward to grasp his overarching conclusion: that poets use language, including its sonic and gestural properties, in ways that are both identifiably *non-arbitrary* and that resonate with the composite 'memory-theatres' of the communities within which their poems are read. He concludes his essay by noting that

Nursery rhymes, like popular hymns, train their readers and hearers to learn quickly how to grasp their recognisable structures and features, to fix a word like 'star' into its appointed place (Prynne, 1993, p.35).

So, the sound of the word 'star', and its assonant relationship to 'are', 'far', and 'bar', is as much part of its meaning as the idea of a 'celestial body' that we attach to it.

Prynne's image of 'nursery rhymes' that 'train their readers and hearers' is not far removed from Feldman's idea of sounds as '*kinder ... yearning for attention*'. Sounds and rhymes demand our attention, as composers, poets, readers or listeners, because they contain within them links to larger 'language processes' and to wider social and historical contexts. Within this way of thinking, to act as Boulez does is to distort such relationships. He recognises the power of Webern's articulations, but he is, to Feldman's mind, being dishonest about the context within which they are

supposed to operate. It is not so much that Boulez is drawing on Webern's articulations; more that, for Feldman, he is claiming to be their sole author. The author — or authors — of 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star' would not claim to be the inventors of the word 'star', but, in Feldman's view, this is precisely what Boulez is trying to claim to do: to be the innovator of a brand new language.

Prynne argues convincingly for the non-arbitrary nature of the relationship between individual words and their qualities of sound and gesture. To apply his thinking to music is to reverse the problem: to argue for the non-arbitrary nature of the relationship between sounds and any semantic 'meaning' that they might be thought to possess. Further, the 'meaning' of music, it can be argued, is essentially transactional. As Roland Barthes argues in *Image, Music, Text*, music involves a set of complex transactions between the body, the score, and the instrument played, and between listening and performance (Barthes, 1977, p.149). To identify exactly where it is that music 'resides' is difficult: sound requires a source, certainly, whether that source be the human voice, a piano, or a computer, but the sound that constitutes the music cannot easily be said to be embodied within that source in the same way that, for example, a painting is embodied within canvas and paint. Understanding the relationships between individuals, items of technical apparatus, and the activity of sound-waves — a set of interactions that, in their totality, we might call *music* — is further complicated by the actions of individual cultures in ascribing particular value judgments to these interactions.

In a polemical 1982 essay, 'On Being Tasteless', William Brooks addresses a key problem faced by musicologists that is in many respects akin to the kind of challenge faced by many curators in deciding how to arrange objects in relation to one another: the difficulty of having to consider the nature of 'music in general' through the lens of a language of musicology

heavily inflected by the study of art music. Whilst, as Brooks attests, it may be possible to discern 'key principles underlying human musics which are independent of the idiom used and of personal taste', the study of these principles is typically approached by way of the rarefied form of musical language employed by composers such as 'Beethoven or Schoenberg' rather than 'on the basis of what one hears people ... hum, or whistle, or dance to' (Brooks, 1982, p.17). Such judgements of taste on the part of musicologists are obfuscatory, because they exclude from consideration a large part of the language of music. To make such an exclusion, Brooks suggests, is similar to attempting to study an ecosystem only by observing a handful of species: one may be able to make some general observations about the properties of certain creatures, but it will be impossible to understand the familial and evolutionary links between these animals, just as it will be impossible to understand how they exist within a wider ecology (Brooks, 1982, p.18).

Tastelessness, for Brooks, is a strategy that can be employed in order to enable researchers to access this wider musical 'ecology'. Suggesting that tastelessness is a critical attitude that allows musicologists to see all music as equally valuable — or, indeed, as 'rubbish' — his argument takes a striking turn (Brooks, 1982, p.13). Brooks proposes a musicology in which researchers employ non-evaluative criteria, however seemingly arbitrary in order to trace a path through the flotsam and jetsam of musical history. To isolate a sample set of musical works by choosing them according to rules such as 'those records that made *Billboard's* Top Ten lists between 1945 and 1955, or only the records owned by my grandfather' is still to make an *a priori* decision about what to include and what to exclude from the field of study, but to do so is at least a way of 'limiting the visibility' of the researcher (Brooks, 1982, p.15).

The intellectual lineage of Brooks' argument can be traced back to the work of another writer-composer, Morton Feldman's close friend John Cage.

Brooks' concern for the way in which musical language, considered as a whole, is immersed within and is shaped by a wider set of social practices, and functions itself as a kind of community of musical materials calls to mind a series of remarks made by Cage in his work *Silence* (Cage, 1961). In the essays 'The Future of Music: Credo' and 'Experimental Music' Cage outlines the principles of a new kind of music, in which conventional principles of harmonic organisation are rejected in favour of the 'coexistence of dissimilars':

For this music is not concerned with harmoniousness as generally understood, where the quality of harmony results from a blending of several elements. Here we are concerned with the coexistence of dissimilars, and the central points where fusion occurs are many: the ears of the listeners wherever they are. This disharmony, to paraphrase Bergson's statement about disorder, is simply a harmony to which many are unaccustomed (Cage, 1961, p.12).

The music that Cage envisages is one in which no sound is excluded *a priori*, in which 'dissonances and noises are welcome ... but so is the dominant seventh chord if it happens to put in an appearance' (Cage, 1961, p.11). There is a clear equivalency here between the dissimilarity of sounds and the dissimilarity of listeners, and the ways in which those listeners hear: a 'community' of disparate sounds necessitates a community of disparate listeners capable of experiencing those sounds in a range of different ways. Interestingly, whilst in the essay 'Experimental Music' Cage's overall emphasis is on heterogeneity, in 'The Future of Music: Credo' Cage gestures towards a form of music in which, following the principles of his composition teacher Schoenberg, musical materials are 'integrated' into a 'society' organised along more egalitarian lines:

NEW METHODS WILL BE DISCOVERED, BEARING  
A DEFINITE RELATION TO SCHOENBERG'S  
TWELVE-TONE SYSTEM

Schoenberg's method assigns to each material, in a group of equal materials, its function with respect to the group. (Harmony assigned to each material, in a group of unequal materials, its function with respect to the fundamental or most important material in the group.) Schoenberg's method is analogous to a society in which the emphasis is on the group and the integration of the individual in the group (Cage, 1961, p.5).

In his own increased focus on the use of 'chance procedures' and other non-aesthetic schemes to determine the choice of musical material, it is clear that Cage increasingly tended towards the 'coexistence of dissimilars' rather than Schoenberg's integration of tones. It is interesting, however, that this tension between two radically different visions of musical order exists within Cage's writings; and it is arguably in the spirit of this debate that Brooks sets out his programme of 'musicological tastelessness' in the essay 'On Being Tasteless'. Brooks recognises that researchers will always employ methods of defining a course of study that imply some kind of value-judgement about the materials under consideration, even as those methods aim to integrate these materials into a clearly defined 'field of study'. But, Brooks suggests, if such methods are determined by chance or according to some other apparently arbitrary scheme, a researcher may be able to isolate a range of musical objects more akin to Cage's notion of coexistent dissimilarity (Brooks, 1982, p.18).

Feldman's concept of 'sounds as *kinder*'; Prynne's view of poetic language as 'depot-inventory and memory-theatre', Cage's notion of

'coexistent dissimilarity': each of these concepts speak to the idea that artistic materials have a life of their own and must be treated with respect. How might the composer put this abstract concept to practical use? A number of Morton Feldman's late works provide a possible answer to this question. In a programme note to his chamber orchestra piece *Turfan Fragments* (1980) Feldman describes how the idea of the archaeological excavation of carpet fragments acted as the metaphorical starting-point for a work in which the history of composition is itself excavated:

A series of archaeological expeditions to East Turkestan, conducted by Sir Aurel Stein in the early part of this century, unearthed several fragments of knotted carpets dating from the third and sixth centuries. Though these fragments were too small to indicate either its design or provenance, they did convey a long tradition of carpet weaving. This is to a large degree the extended metaphor of my composition: not the suggestion of an actual completed work of 'art', but the *history* in Western music of putting sounds and instruments together (Feldman, 1980, p.i.).

Carpet-weaving was, for Feldman, a particularly potent way of understanding musical creativity. The appreciation of a rug, or a fragment of a rug, resides neither in the identification of the work of a particular craftsman, nor in the acknowledgement of technical virtuosity or perfection, but in the way in which the whole history of the 'long tradition of carpet weaving' can be glimpsed in a carpet's design and execution. Imperfections in patterning or weaving, as well as the fragmentation and discolouration of ancient carpets, are as significant for Feldman as artistic accomplishment, because they foreground the essential vulnerability of the tradition at work. Elsewhere, Feldman draws an explicit parallel between the idea of the

historical persistence of the tradition of carpet-weaving, and the variation of sound materials over time in large-scale orchestral composition. In his programme note for the orchestral work *Coptic Light* (1986), a piece inspired by an exhibition of early Coptic textiles at the Louvre, Feldman reiterates the metaphorical linkage of carpet-weaving and ‘the history ... [of] Western music’ established initially in *Turfan Fragments*:

what struck me about these fragments of coloured cloth was how they conveyed an essential atmosphere of their civilisation. Transferring this thought to another realm, I asked myself what aspects of the music since Monteverdi might determine its atmosphere, if heard 2000 years from now (Feldman, 1980, p.i.).

Feldman then implicitly links this metaphorical relationship of weaving and musical traditions to the way in which sonic materials are transformed in orchestral composition:

an important technical aspect of the composition was prompted by Sibelius’ observation that the orchestra differed mainly from the piano in that it has no pedal. With this in mind, I set to work to create an orchestral pedal, continuously varying in nuance (Feldman, 1986, p.i.).

An examination of the score for *Coptic Light* enables a better understanding of how this web of metaphorical relationships is developed in practice (Feldman, 1986). Each page is bisected vertically by an empty column, creating two panels of eight bars each. Whilst much of the piece is in 8/8, towards the end the time signature shifts between 8/8, 5/8, 4/8 and 7/16, undermining the relationship between score-space and piece-time. The score is divided into 32 staves, the top 16 of these being made up of paired wind, brass and harps; this symmetry is undermined in the bottom half of

the score by the introduction of single tuba, timpani, viola and cello lines. In every orchestral score there is an implied relationship of this kind between unfolding piece-time (the 'horizontal axis') and sonic density (the 'vertical axis'). The difference in the case of *Coptic Light* is, I would argue, that Feldman is subtly foregrounding this relationship through his draughtsmanship. Individual musical gestures are typically repeated, at least to the end of each panel, although this patterning is occasionally undercut by slight variations in particular parts. To observe that Feldman has modelled the visual layout of the score on a Coptic rug is perhaps banal. What is more remarkable is the way in which he has used the visual aspect of the composition process as a aid to the creation of an 'orchestral pedal': by allowing his piece to proceed through minute variations in repeated figures, in combination with the careful management of orchestral density, Feldman simulates the decay of a single *tutti* figure over the course of half an hour (Feldman, 1986). Indeed, as Kyle Gann has noted, Feldman discernibly uses pagination as a way of managing compositional variation in a range of works, including *Crippled Symmetry* and *For Samuel Beckett*:

Through some passages of Feldman's late works, it is remarkable – too remarkable for mere coincidence – how often his textures change at the end of a page ... It is almost as though he treated the page visually, as a whole, and every time he turned to a new page, thought, 'Now for something new' (Gann, 2007).

Thinking about music in the mode adopted by Feldman in *Coptic Light* — as a kind of multi-dimensional palimpsest in which aspects of the history of music, or, indeed, the history of sound become present to the listener — necessitates, I would argue, a radically different approach to the composition and study of music from the rigidly hierarchical method imputed by Feldman to Boulez and the 'Darmstadt *kinder*'. Such an approach would

need to acknowledge and incorporate the singular histories of composer, performer and listener, whilst also recognising the ways in which the composition, performance and reception of music bring to light the ghostly presence of a wide range of cultural and musical practices lying beyond the edge of the musical text at hand. To experience *Coptic Light*, Feldman is suggesting, one does not need a detailed knowledge of Coptic weaving practices, or of western art music 'since Monteverdi' or of the orchestral method and handling of sonic emergence of Sibelius, although all of these forms of knowledge are at play within the piece. Rather, these different forms of historical knowledge [are variously aspects of the 'light' that illuminate the aural experience of the work; the full experience of the work is determined by the interaction between this knowledge, and the performers' and listeners' own memories and experiences.

I have reflected at length upon Feldman's essay and composition practice, setting this discussion in the context of the poetics of J H Prynne, and the musicologies of William Brooks and John Cage, because I want to suggest that Feldman provides a particularly inspiring role model for any composer seeking to reach beyond the notion of the closed art-work towards an idea of the composition as a way into the '*history in Western music of putting sounds and instruments together*' (Feldman, 1980, p.i). Whilst none of the compositions in this portfolio sound — to my ear — *like* Feldman, I have aimed to imbue each of them with the spirit of his essay and approach, in attempt to move beyond 'voodoo tradition' and towards a new kind of engagement with history in the act of creating music.

I identified the following research questions as central to this particular essay:

- *Can creative practice be used as a form of historical enquiry?*

- *Conversely, how can historical enquiry inform creative practice?*
- *What might it mean to think of the composer as the curator, rather than the author, of his or her musical materials?*

I argue that Feldman's approach to composition is heavily grounded in the idea of composition as a form of 'historical enquiry': he demonstrates a keen interest in his writings in longstanding craft traditions - particularly rug-weaving - as models for composition, and thinks of composition as comparable to an attempt to give voice to the concerns of members of a society. Feldman does not use the term 'curator' but, in reference to *Turfan Fragments* (1980), he does refer to archeology as a metaphor for composition. As such, I suggest, his compositional approach is akin to the curatorial model I am advancing in this thesis.

### **Essay 3: The Idea of History as Archive**

In this essay, I address the ways in which a number of different authors and philosophers - most prominently Dante, St Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle and Alasdair Macintyre, Walter Benjamin, and Jacques Derrida - have conceptualised history, and have thought about the ethics of history-writing. I explain how, in Dante's *Inferno*, the poet presents a narrative - based on a series of encounters with isolated historical and fictional characters - that begins to subvert the idea of historical teleology: the idea that ultimately there is a sense of order and purpose underlying events. I show how Dante's poetry represents a departure from the philosophical teleology of Aristotle and St Thomas Aquinas, and the idea that being able to remember and interpret events is an essential part of an ethical life. I also look at some more recent examples of philosophers who have explored the idea of the fragmentation of historical narrative, reaching very different conclusions: Alasdair Macintyre, Walter Benjamin, and Jacques Derrida. I draw clear links between the work of these philosophers and my own compositional approach, showing how in my works I often make use of archive materials, musical quotations, or non-linear texts to create a sense of the fragmentary nature of history.

In this essay I focus primarily on my first two research questions:

- *Can creative practice be used as a form of historical enquiry?*
- *Conversely, how can historical enquiry inform creative practice?*

One of the most famous works of European literature, Dante's *Inferno*, opens with the image of a traveller lost in a deep forest:

In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to  
myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost.

Ah, how hard a thing it is to say what that wood  
was, so savage and harsh and strong that the  
thought of it renews my fear!

It is so bitter that death is little more so!

(Dante, 1996, p.27)

As the poem proceeds, the protagonist, guided by the poet Virgil, journeys further and further into the depths of Hell, where he meets a series of historical characters, thrust from their own places and times into the abyss. The critic Robert Durling, in the introduction to his translation of Dante's *Inferno*, has suggested that these encounters with notable figures from the past are a means of staging and interrogating different methods of interpreting history. He suggests that one of Dante's intentions was to uncover the ways in which 'the great cosmic and historical drama of God's creation of the world, man's fall, and humanity's redemption from sin is visible in history and in his own personal experience' (Dante, 1996, p.3). Whilst Dante held that providential order must exist, as a divine narrative underpinning the events both of one's times and also one's life, the political foment of his age — caused by competition between city-states and the increasing politicisation and corruption of the Church — suggested to Dante that this divine narrative was becoming increasingly obfuscated (Dante, 1996, p.4). According to Durling, a tension therefore exists within the text between literary devices and structures that support the idea of a higher order — including an abundance of imagery drawing on the Neoplatonic idea of the 'great chain of being' — and those that suggest the contrary (Dante, 1996, pp.18-20).

Clearly, a wide range of readings of Dante's complex poem is possible. One might take the optimistic view that *Inferno*, with its organised structure, rhyme-scheme, and systematic ascent from Hell to Purgatory, ultimately supports the idea of discernible truth and intelligible order. Alternatively,

one might argue, more pessimistically, that Dante, by intermingling history and fantasy, and by dramatising the ways in which the actions of many notable historical characters have led ultimately to eternal punishment, is staging the triumph of sin and chaos over not just the denizens of his *Inferno*, but over the possibility of historical and personal enlightenment itself. This Dantean attitude towards history — characterised by subjectivity, interlocution and evanescence, as opposed to objectivity, permanence and the sense of a ‘grand narrative’ — resonates strongly, I suggest, with a substantial philosophical tradition about history and memory that emphasises these same qualities. I am not suggesting that *Inferno* is as seductive a model for philosophers as it has been — and continues to be — for creative artists, but that *Inferno* is an eloquent articulation of a crisis-point within the tradition of the philosophy of history whose reverberations can then be heard throughout the works that follow in that tradition.

Reading *Inferno* and thinking about the ways in which Dante’s poem has helped to shape attitudes towards history and memory over many centuries has greatly informed my own creative practice. On first reading the poem, I was struck by the image of the lone traveller, attempting to make sense of history and the events of his own life through a series of encounters with historical and literary figures; I have tried to embrace a Dantean spirit of historical enquiry in composing the works that make up this portfolio.

Each of the three long works in my portfolio draw on this archetype in different ways. In composing *Latrabjarg*, I wanted to create an imaginative journey through the environmental and cultural heritage of Iceland, structuring the work around a series of encounters with fragments of Icelandic folksong, birdsong and saga-texts. As a non-Icelander, I was not attempting to create an ‘authentic’ piece of Icelandic art, but rather to allow my composition to be shaped by my responses to these fragments, as the Dante-narrator responds to the different characters he encounters in *Inferno*.

*God's Keyboard* was conceived as a 'processional' for two choirs and ensemble, in which a number of different 'events' — a performance of a hymn, *Hallelujah*, a recital given by the contralto Marian Anderson at Jean Sibelius' home, Ainola, and the famous Civil Rights march to Selma led by Dr Martin Luther King — are presented to the viewer as a series of vignettes, in the manner of the Dante-narrator's encounters. In my opera *Returns*, it is the central character, James, a soldier recently returned from Iraq, who finds himself in this position. The narrative of the opera is constructed from a series of bizarre tableaux, in which the characters act out a series of incidents, some comic, others tragic, exchanging roles and personality-traits as they do so. As the work unfolds, it becomes clear that all of these incidents are in fact taking place within James' own mind; the reason that his memories are unfolding in such a disordered and fragmentary fashion is that he is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. In this instance James — as Dante-narrator — has been plunged into an *Inferno* comprised of his own experiences.

Whilst I found the narrative arc of Dante's *Inferno* inspiring as an archetype upon which I could base the structure of a number of large-scale works, I also became interested in the way in which — according to Durling — Dante's poem represents an artistic response to a perceived breakdown in the intelligible order of history. I therefore wanted to find out where the philosophical roots of Dante's scepticism lay: why should history be thought to have a underlying order and sense of narrative at all?

The origins of Dante's interest in historical causality — as we might call this sense of an underlying historical 'order' — appear to lie in his own philosophical education. As Robert Hollander has noted, Dante refers to his own training in scholastic philosophy in his work *Convivio*:

I began to frequent the places where she [Philosophy]  
was truly revealed, namely to the schools of the

religious orders [Dominicans at Santa Maria Novella, Franciscans at Santa Croce] and to the disputations held by the philosophers, so that in a relatively short time, perhaps two years and a half, I began so to feel her sweetness that love for her dispelled and erased every other thought (Dante, 2008).

It is this tradition, particularly the strain of scholasticism that was heavily influenced by Aristotle, that informs much of the moral argument of the *Divine Comedy*, even as it calls many of its basic tenets into question (Hollander, 2009, p.575, p.578).

One of the defining characteristics of Aristotle's philosophy — and of the scholastic tradition as a whole — is its emphasis on *teleology*. Teleology is, in essence, the idea that actions, people and even nature itself all tend towards specific ends. Just as the laws of physics describe a universe ordered according to certain principles and acting towards particular objectives, so too in teleological ethics people have a set of principles according to which they need to act in order properly to realise their individual nature. One of the central preoccupations of Aristotle's major ethical work, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is, according to the philosopher Alasdair Macintyre, the 'contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realised-his-essential-nature', with ethics being 'the science [enabling] men to understand how they make the transition from the former state to the latter' (Macintyre, 1981, p.52). Man, as a fundamentally rational animal, has a responsibility to cultivate those aptitudes or 'virtues' that best enable him to realise his potential. This approach also necessitates a particular attitude towards experience and recollection: it is the individual's responsibility to develop through one's own experience and the observation of the experiences of others a sense of practical judgement or *phronesis*; Aristotle writes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that

a young man of practical wisdom cannot be found. The cause is that such wisdom is concerned not only with universals but with particulars, which become familiar from experience, but a young man has no experience, for it is length of time that gives experience (Aristotle, 2014a).

Whilst Aristotle does not outline a systematic approach to the study of history in this work it is reasonable to argue that, following the principle of *phronesis*, historical study ought primarily to be considered as a means of analysing particular events according to whether or not they represent a successful compliance with virtuous principles. The causal logic inherent in Aristotle's teleological thinking dictates that bad circumstances will necessarily arise from a failure of virtue, good circumstances from a success of virtue.

In his monumental survey of the philosophical tradition of thinking about history and memory, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, the philosopher Paul Ricoeur notes that, although Aristotle himself does not explicitly link the practice of remembering to the cultivation of the virtues, St Thomas Aquinas, the foremost of the Medieval scholastic philosophers who influenced Dante, makes this leap on his behalf. St Thomas Aquinas does this in a commentary on Aristotle's short treatise on memory, *On Memory and Reminiscence* (Ricoeur, 2004, p.63). Aristotle's original treatise, in line with the teleological bent of his other philosophical works, focuses primarily on the causal relationships between the perception of objects, the formation of memories through sense-impressions, and the means by which memories can be remembered (Aristotle, 2014b). However, St Thomas in his commentary on this text lists the practice of memory not only as one of the five parts of rhetoric to be mastered by every scholar, but also as part of the virtue of prudence (or practical reason), one of the four moral virtues alongside

justice, courage and temperance (Ricoeur, 2004, p.64). St Thomas therefore is making explicit what is arguably implicit in both *Nicomachean Ethics* and *On Memory and Reminiscence*: that the correct cultivation of memory is a key part of the development of practical reason or *phronesis*. To remember effectively is part of what it means to be a virtuous human being.

In a complex turn of argument Ricoeur then relates this moralisation of remembering to Dante's poetic practice in writing the *Divine Comedy* by reading this text through the prism of St Thomas' *Summa Theologica*. In the *Summa*, Ricoeur argues, St Thomas outlines the ways in which the assimilation of various systems of knowledge through the practice of memory can lead to personal beatitude and a union of reason and faith (Ricoeur, 2004, p.64). St Thomas, according to Ricoeur, illustrates this practice by describing how 'Hell, Purgatory and Paradise ... [are] ... places in which vices and virtues are inscribed, memory places, in the strong sense of the word' (Ricoeur, 2004, p.64). One might argue that the ultimate destination of the soul therefore depends on the extent to which one's memory-practice has been correctly cultivated, and by observing, through the power of the imagination, the activities of souls in these three locations, one can learn how better to develop this particular virtue.

For Ricoeur, Dante's work provides the supreme illustration of this principle: 'the places visited under Virgil's and then Beatrice's guidance form so many way-stations for a meditating memory, which unites the recollection of exemplary figures, the memorisation of the major teachings of the tradition, and the commemoration of the founding events of Christian culture' (Ricoeur, 2004, p.64). Ricoeur's reading of the *Inferno* is therefore somewhat different from Durling's. Ricoeur reads Dante's poem as a dramatisation in poetry of the practice of 'meditating memory' for the purpose of gaining personal salvation, whereas Durling reads it as a critique of this practice. Nonetheless, both critics essentially concur in arguing that it

is Dante's reading of scholastic philosophy that provides the underpinning for the quest at the centre of his poem. Whether one reads *Inferno* as an affirmation of Thomist memory-practice, or a critique of it also in part depends upon whether or not one reads *Inferno* in the context of the *Divine Comedy* as a whole. In the latter context, *Inferno* is seen merely as the first stage in a stately ascent of the spirit from the *selva oscura* in which Dante finds himself at the work's opening. Read in isolation however, *Inferno* assumes a different character: whilst the work's various tableaux certainly are, in Ricoeur's terms, 'memory places' in which 'vices are inscribed', the overwhelming tone of the work is moral uncertainty: by empathising with the inhabitants of Hell, do we secure salvation, or instead risk taking their place (Ricoeur, 2004, p.64)?

Each of these readings appealed to me, both as researcher and as composer, and I wanted to make use of the ideas of 'memory-practice' and 'memory-place' in my large-scale compositions. Of the three long works that make up my portfolio, *God's Keyboard* is perhaps the most optimistic embodiment of these ideas. The three events that make up the piece's narrative — the performance of *Hallelujah*, the recital at Ainola, and the march to Selma — are, on the surface, unrelated: what could they possibly have in common? But, by reflecting on each of these incidents in turn, in the context given by the others, the audience member may, if they choose, begin to trace some implicit links between them. The hymn, *Hallelujah*, forms part of a collection, *The Sacred Harp*, first published in 1844 by White and King, which, in turn, gave its name to a style of church music, 'Sacred Harp singing' (White and King, 1860 p.146). This 'Sacred Harp singing' was distinguished both by the physicality of its performance — characterised by loud, nasal, straight-toned vocalisation and an emphatic *tactus*, demonstrated by waving of the arms — and by the simplicity of its notation, using shaped note-heads to make the system intelligible for those with little

musical training. This was music for communal singing that also, I suggest, helped to give the nascent farming communities of the American South a sense of unity and identity following their independence from Britain, a theme that I will return to in the detailed commentary on this work.

Marian Anderson's performance at Ainola was an assertion of independence in a different way. Anderson was one of the most prominent African-American classical musicians of her day, and, like Paul Robeson, became a prominent civil rights campaigner. Her performance at Sibelius' home near Helsinki was, it seems, an event of great personal significance for both parties: according to Anderson's accompanist Kosti Vehanen, Sibelius' 'expressed his enthusiasm with many kind words of praise' on hearing her perform his songs 'Aus Banger Brust' and 'Slandan', and unusually, called for a bottle of champagne to be opened rather than the customary coffee (Vehanen, 1941, p.28). During Anderson's lifetime, African-American performers faced multiple barriers to acceptance within the classical mainstream; I argue that this performance, at the home of one of the leading exponents of European classical composition, represents a challenge to this form of cultural exclusion on the grounds of race (Vehanen, 1941, p.228).

The march on Selma is, of course, a well-known public assertion of independence in the face of oppression; in the section of my piece modelled on this work I used words from King's own speech to the Selma marchers, 'How Long, Not Long?' juxtaposed with an African-American spiritual, 'Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho' quoted in this speech, to stage a musical reenactment of this event. In my version, a solo voice — like Marian Anderson, a mezzo-soprano — is joined first by a classical choir, entering part-by-part, and then by the ensemble and gospel choir. Different musical ideas jostle up against each other like participants in the march, as the crowd grows in size and intensity; at the end of the piece, these various ideas are

directly juxtaposed one-on-top-of-other, to riotous effect.

I describe the piece as a 'processional' because I wish to suggest that the different events of the piece's 'narrative' are glimpsed in passing, but with a sense of underlying, continuous momentum, in the same way as one might experience a carnival procession made up of different floats or troupes of performers, for instance. The word 'processional' also situates the piece in a liturgical context. 'Processional hymns' are sometimes used at the start or finish of church services, and many of the materials used in the piece — the Sacred Harp hymn, the quotation from Ellington, and King's speech in particular — are religious in character. While there are some implicit links between the different events in the piece, there is no easy way in which we can turn them into a comprehensible 'story'. Instead, the audience member is free to trace their own path through the listening experience, drawing musical and historical links between the piece's texts and sonic devices as he or she sees fit. The different historical events depicted within the piece are intended to act as 'memory-places' to borrow Ricoeur's term, but without any implied sense of moral 'ascent' or 'discovery'. Indeed, the final section ends as it begins, with a solitary voice, this time repeating the unanswered question 'how long?', suggestive of an overall lack of closure at the piece's end.

Dante's *Inferno* resonated powerfully with me because of its memorable central archetype of the author-narrator as a traveller through a landscape populated with historical figures. Having discovered the roots of Dante's own attitude towards history and memory through an examination of the arguments of the philosophers who influenced him, I also became interested in tracing the legacy of Dante's historical attitude in the work of later writers. The work of the neo-Aristotleian philosopher, Alasdair Macintyre, was

particular helpful in enabling me to do this. MacIntyre opens his highly influential 1981 work *After Virtue* with the following bleak scenario:

Imagine that the natural sciences were to suffer the effects of a catastrophe. A series of environmental disasters are blamed by the general public on scientists. Widespread riots occur ... books and instruments are destroyed. Finally a Know-Nothing political movement takes power and successfully abolishes science teaching in schools and universities, imprisoning and executing the remaining scientists. Later ... enlightened people seek to revive science, although they have largely forgotten what it was. But all they possess are fragments ... nonetheless these fragments are reembodyed in a set of practices which go under the revived names of physics, chemistry and biology.

(MacIntyre, 1981, p.1).

MacIntyre subsequently explains that this scenario is analogous to the fragmentation of discourse that, in his view, has characterised the practice of moral philosophy for centuries (MacIntyre, 1981, p.10). For MacIntyre, Aristotle's system of virtue-based ethics, grounded in teleology, represents an ideal, because of the extent to which this system recognises that moral decisions have value only within the context of a community that ascribes to a clear set of founding values. The undermining of this system by various sceptical moral philosophies, particularly during the Enlightenment, has resulted in what he describes as a pervasive 'emotivism', a state in which incompatible elements of different moral systems are thrust together in ethical debate, on the basis of feeling, rather than a sense of their relative value or historical context.

MacIntyre's argument is partly a powerful riposte to post-modernism, an argument for coherence and context as opposed to philosophical montage and the free play of ideas. But it also acts as an historical account of the move away from teleological thinking in philosophical ethics. On reading *After Virtue*, I was struck by the parallels between MacIntyre's argument about the decline of teleological thinking in philosophical ethics, and Durling's argument about Dante's attitude towards the historical figures depicted in the *Inferno*. For MacIntyre, a departure from an ethics based on a clear, commonly-agreed set of desirable ends has resulted in moral discourse becoming an emotivist potpourri (MacIntyre, 1981, p.10). For Durling, in the *Inferno* Dante is attesting to the importance of being able to discern a clear ethical pattern in the events of one's own life and in history, an order that is ultimately grounded in the customs of one's community and in the will of God, whilst at the same time voicing an anxiety about the extent to which this pattern is readily discernible (Dante, 1996, pp.3-4). In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre inscribes this anxiety into the history of philosophical ethics itself, suggesting that the abandonment of teleology leads to philosophical discourse as perverse, wilful and circular as the actions of the tormented souls in Dante's abyss (MacIntyre, 1981).

As I discussed above, scholastic philosophy emphasised the importance of the practice of memory as part of the development of the virtue of practical judgement, making explicit an association between memory and virtue that was already implicit in Aristotle's writings. Without reflecting on the moral successes and failures of one's own life and those of others, and the ways in which these reveal an underlying order within history and the cosmos, it might be said to be impossible to become a truly virtuous individual. We might therefore reasonably expect that historical moments of great turbulence, those that most acutely call into question the notion of underlying order, place the greatest strain on this kind of ethical thinking.

Correspondingly, a number of the key philosophers of the 20th century, in seeking to reconcile an enduring concern for the ethical practice of memory with an acknowledgement of the apparently tragic indecipherability of the century's most cataclysmic events, have employed modes of argument which foreground the fragmentary, subjective and mediated nature of historical experience, even as they argue strongly for the necessity of preserving its artefacts. In particular two major 20th-century philosophical works, Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* (2002) and Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (1993), follow this agenda in strikingly different ways, employing very different literary and philosophical techniques. Both of these works proved highly influential in the composition of the works that make up my portfolio, and so I will describe both of them in outline here.

Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* (2002) is the single most potent articulation of this historical program. Left incomplete at Benjamin's death in 1940, the work is ostensibly a history of nineteenth-century Paris, focusing particularly on its elaborate network of shopping arcades; but to describe the book in this way is to downplay the complex relationship between its theme and its radical method. Benjamin intersperses his own critical reflections on subjects as varied as 'Iron Construction', 'Prostitution' and 'The Commune' with an extraordinary range of literary fragments, placing 19th century writings — amongst them journal entries and shopping lists — alongside the work of contemporaries such as Jung and Proust (Benjamin, 2002, p.150, 489, 788). This technique, which Benjamin describes as 'literary montage' is partly an imaginative means of evoking the experience of wandering through a vanished city; the book's construction encourages the reader to browse freely amongst the multiplicity of texts, like a window-shopper evaluating the goods on display in neighbouring boutiques (Benjamin, 2002, p.460). But it is also an attempt to give literary instantiation to a new form of historical

enquiry that departs radically both from conventional teleology-orientated historiography, and also departs from the historical method that Benjamin describes as 'historical materialism' (Benjamin, 1999, p.248).

For Benjamin, both of these forms of historical enquiry were flawed inasmuch as they were characterised by the imposition of narratives of decline or progress. Marx's approach to the analysis of history did involve a heightened sensitivity to the dialectical processes through which social realities were shaped, but its emphasis on class struggle still, for Benjamin, implied a type of progress-narrative, and therefore an over-estimation of the 'perceptibility of history' (Benjamin, 2002, p.461). Elsewhere, in his essay 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', Benjamin suggests that progress-narratives of this type are invariably shaped by history's 'victors': those who assume positions of authority also assume the power of determining which types of experience have lasting significance (Benjamin, 1999, p.248). In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin attempts to subvert this hegemony by using montage to articulate the momentary experiences of a vast range of historical actors. Whilst there is a degree of artifice in the work's juxtapositions and thematic groupings of materials, there is no attempt to differentiate between artefacts of high or low culture, or between the author's own observations and those of others. Kevin McLaughlin and Howard Eiland in the introduction to their translation of *The Arcades Project* describe this process in the following way:

The transcendence of the conventional book form would go together, in this case, with the blasting apart of pragmatic historicism — grounded, as this always is, on the premise of a continuous and homogeneous temporality. Citation and commentary might then be perceived as intersecting at a thousand different angles, setting up vibrations across the epochs of recent history,

so as to effect 'the cracking open of natural teleology' (Benjamin, 2002, p.xi).

This 'cracking open of natural teleology' is also achieved through the foregrounding of subjectivity. Drawing on Baudelaire's concept of the 'flaneur' — a sophisticated observer of urban life — Benjamin invites the reader of *The Arcades Project* to stroll freely through his assemblage of texts and images, according to his or her whim rather than any linear narrative. To describe this reading experience as akin to reading *Inferno* would be perhaps to stretch my thesis about the persistence of Dante's archetype too far: Benjamin's reader-flaneur is fundamentally a solitary figure, unaccompanied by any Virgil, and his or her reading experience is much less linear than the orderly progression made by the reader of *Inferno* through the various circles of hell. I would, however, suggest that there is a distant echo of Dante's text within Benjamin's. His *Arcades* are, in some respects, what remains of the imaginative landscape of *Inferno* once linear structure and teleological ethics are removed. Benjamin does not wish the reader to think of the Paris that he evokes as either a Heaven or Hell, but simply as a teeming world in which a wide range of characters and experiences may be encountered: any ethical observations about this world are purely subjective.

Benjamin's *Arcades Project* was written — or, perhaps more accurately, *assembled* — over the period of the rise of Nazism: the emphasis it places on the minutiae of lived experience is in part a strong riposte to the idea of a fascistic grand narrative based on the will to power. Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* is, like Benjamin's work, an attempt to present a philosophy of history in response to a defining historical moment that acknowledges its indebtedness to Marx even as it moves beyond the confines of his historical materialism. In Derrida's case, the moment in question was the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the subsequent unravelling of Communism throughout the former Eastern bloc and is in part a response to Francis

Fukuyama's 1989 essay 'The End of History', later expanded into the book *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). In this essay Fukuyama offered a critique of the dialectical model of history developed by both Hegel and Marx, and asserted that the collapse of communism marked the *telos* of the development of political systems, a point from which liberal democracy would continue to proliferate throughout the world without further development. According to Fukuyama, this also marked the end of historical development: individual events would no longer have significance within the framework of a grand narrative of historical evolution (Fukuyama, 1989, p.3). In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida offers a repudiation of Fukuyama's argument. Just as Benjamin eschewed narratives of decline or progress in *The Arcades Project*, Derrida argues against Fukuyama's teleology-orientated historiography, strikingly reinterpreting Marx's philosophy of history in light of the events of 1989.

Derrida's argument is characteristically complex, and is closely bound up with his highly performative prose style: any attempt to summarise his thinking is of necessity powerfully reductive, so I will focus here on two key passages of his work which illuminate the key strands of his thinking. In the first chapter of *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida uses a reading of Act I Scene V of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a departure point for a consideration of the 'spectral' quality of history, the way in which, in considering a past event or object, we are drawn into contemplating that which is simultaneously there and not-there, a 'revenant' that is both present to us and also constantly in the process of returning. Encountering the ghost of Hamlet's father near the start of the play, Marcellus and Barnardo claim to have seen 'the thing [that] appear'd again tonight', and at the same time have 'seene nothing' (Derrida, 1994, p.5). Derrida suggests that, in attempting to engage with the past, we are drawn into apparently paradoxical gestures, which have many of the characteristics of mourning: in lamenting the dead, we may return to the

resting-place of their body (or in Hamlet's case address the skull of a departed friend), but we retain an awareness that the remains and the person themselves are not the same.

The acknowledgement of this paradoxical absent-presence not only creates a sense of temporal disjunction — of 'time being out of joint', in Hamlet's words — but also calls into question the efficacy of conventional philosophical discourses, which tend to be grounded in a reasonable stable metaphysics of being or *ontology*, of one kind or another. As Derrida puts it, 'all ontologization, all semanticization — philosophical, hermeneutical or psychoanalytical — finds itself caught up in this work of mourning'. In place of ontology, Derrida therefore proposes a new kind of metaphysics, or 'hauntology'. (The use of a punning near-homophone in French — in this case '*ontologie*' and '*hauntologie*' — is typical of Derrida). 'Hauntology' is for Derrida a potent response to Fukuyama's 'end of history' because it is a mode of historical experience that, because it implies a constant state of returning, contains 'eschatology and teleology themselves' (Derrida, 1994, p. 9-10).

How would this 'hauntology' operate in practice? Derrida provides a partial answer to this question later in *Spectres of Marx*, in a critical reading of a number of passages from Marx's essay 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis-Napoleon' (1852), which documents the rise to power of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, the nephew of Napoleon I. Marx's essay is, in essence, a reflection on Hegel's observation that history is both cyclical and inherently dramatic, its events possessing initially a tragic character and, later, a farcical one. Derrida focusses on passages in which Marx identifies the transformative power during periods of revolution of historical role-playing. He seizes, for example, upon Marx's critique of the way in which Louis-Napoleon's 1848 coup drew for its rhetorical force upon the revolution of 1789, which had itself invoked earlier images of imperialism:

thus Luther donned the mask of the Apostle Paul, the revolution of 1789 to 1814 draped itself alternately as the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and the revolution of 1848 knew nothing better than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionary tradition of 1793 to 1795 (Marx, cited in Derrida, 1994, p.137).

Marx identifies a distinctly linguistic quality within this role-playing:

in like manner a beginner who has learnt a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he has assimilated the spirit of the new language and can freely express himself in it only when he finds his way in it without recalling the old and forgets his native tongue in the use of the new' (Marx, cited in Derrida, 1994, p.137).

Derrida largely concurs with Marx's analysis of the semantics of revolutionary myth-making and role-playing, but he questions Marx's causal logic. For Marx, the way in which the content of revolutionary symbols from former ages dissolves in the foment of the present revolutionary moment is a necessary part of the process of political change, just as the language-learner comes to forget his mother tongue in acquiring the new language: the unfolding of the *spirit* of revolution necessitates the forgetting of its *spectres*, in Derrida's terms. For Derrida, the logic of the revolutionary moment is reversed. Derrida argues that, because the time of political upheaval is manifestly one in which 'time is out of joint', this upheaval can only make itself manifest through anachronism, and through the reworking and recapitulation 'of antique costumes and phrases' (Derrida, 1994, p.139).. There can be no 'forgetting' of the ghosts of previous revolutions, because these will always reassert themselves at times of crisis. The ultimate 'ghost-in-the-machine' of Derrida's argument is, of course, the spectre of Marx

himself. Marx might be thought to be an anachronism in post-Berlin Wall Europe, but it is precisely his status as a thinker 'out of time' that means that his ideas will continue to haunt Western political discourse, particularly at times of crisis.

My reading of Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* and Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* strongly influenced the composition of the works in my portfolio, particularly my exploration of Icelandic culture and ecology *Latrabjarg*, and my opera *Returns*. Whilst the influence of both writers can be seen in both of these works, I would suggest that the former is more obviously modelled on *The Arcades Project*, and the latter on *Spectres of Marx*. Like Benjamin, I was keen to evoke a specific culture — and, in my case, an ecology — through the presentation of an array of different archive materials. My score for *Latrabjarg* is a through-composed work, but the electroacoustic score, realised by my collaborator, Chris Mullender, is in essence a *bricolage*. In creating his score, Chris started by compiling an array of archive sound-fragments: snatches of birdsong taken from the British Library Sound Archive, recordings from the Sidney Cowell collection of Minnesotan Icelanders singing *rimur* folksongs, and phrases taken from the solo cello and countertenor parts of the score recorded in sessions that took place during the composition process. Chris then created a series of sound-collages from these fragments, drawing inspiration from the same bird-behaviours that informed the composition of my score: flocking, migrating, nesting. In performance the two scores were juxtaposed, with the electroacoustic score diffused through six speakers scattered throughout the ensemble. The overall effect was to create a constantly shifting array of archive sounds, which interacted in the first performance with the through-composed score in striking, unpredictable ways. We recognised too that in additional performances, this unpredictability might be retained by creating alternative realisations of the electroacoustic score. The audience-member was situated in a position

similar to Benjamin's *flâneur*, a wanderer through Icelandic culture and ecology, baffled and beguiled by the fragments that they encounter.

In *Returns*, on the other hand, the central point-of-view belongs to James, the protagonist, rather than the audience. In Joshua Casteel's original performance directions for the play, he indicates that James is 'held captive ... in the eternal present' by post-traumatic stress disorder (Casteel, 2007, p. 3). In his traumatised state, James is fated to relive events from his war-service and life in Iowa over-and-over in intense detail, but without a sense of narrative order. Following Derrida, we might say that James' experiences are *spectral*; in his memory, they recur again and again, but with a clear sense of absence as well as presence. The events themselves are past, and (in many cases) the other actors in these events are departed, and James has no ability to influence or — in many cases — interpret them accurately. *Returns* also holds true to Hegel's observation, referenced by Marx and Derrida, that history is cyclical, with events returning in different dramatic registers. Events from James' past, particularly tragic ones, frequently recur but with roles or perspectives shifted, often creating a parodic relationship between the original incident and its dramatic representation. A key example of this is the representation of the character, Dhahur, the little boy whom James fears that he has killed. In the original play, Dhahur is both played and voiced by the same actor who plays Ahmed, the Iraqi James interrogates. This dramatic technique is disorientating and ambiguous. It confuses our sense of perspective — we do not know whose recollection of events are we witnessing, James' or Ahmed's — and it also marks out the sections of the play involving Dhahur as clear parodies of the original events they represent. In my operatic version, I employ a different technique, using an offstage boy treble to voice Dhahur, while using the performer portraying Ahmed to perform his actions. Whilst the technique employed is slightly different from the original play, the parodic effect is, I argue, similar.

Benjamin's ghostly Parisian arcades; MacIntyre's post-apocalyptic wilderness of fragmented discourses; Derrida's spectral pageant of revolutionary symbols: all of these philosophical landscapes, like Dante's *Inferno*, have strongly influenced the composition of the works that comprise my portfolio. These texts strongly resemble each other, even as their authors retain marked differences in political emphasis. Benjamin argues that his pointillist historiography is the only adequate response to grand narratives of progress and decline that are the preserve of history's victors; MacIntyre suggests that a return to teleology-based virtue ethics is the only way of restoring coherence to moral philosophy; Derrida suggests that periods of historical upheaval will always be characterised by the recurrence of the symbols and ideas of former ages. That these philosophical discourses can retain a 'family resemblance' of this kind, despite their differences in conclusion, is evidence of the extent to which these texts are themselves haunted by earlier thinkers, Aristotle, Aquinas and Dante amongst them.

In this essay I focussed primarily on my first two research questions

- *Can creative practice be used as a form of historical enquiry?*
- *Conversely, how can historical enquiry inform creative practice?*

By linking my close readings of Dante, Aristotle, Aquinas, Macintyre, Benjamin and Derrida to my use in my compositions of historical vignettes, archive materials, fragmentary narratives and musical quotations, I have demonstrated that, for me, composition is closely linked to historical enquiry, and that my composition practice has been strongly informed by these readings in the philosophy of history.

## **Commentary I: 'Towards the Unknown Region' : the idea of cultural memory in *Latrabjarg***

In this commentary, which focusses on my piece *Latrabjarg*, I focus particularly on two of my research questions:

- *What might it mean to think of the composer as the curator, rather than the author, of his or her musical materials?*
- *Does the notion of composer as curator rather than author also undermine the idea of composer as solitary practitioner? Is the composer always essentially engaged in an act of collaboration, either with other living artists, or with the originators of the other texts that inform his or her work?*

I discuss the ways in which Iceland has long fascinated creative artists, making particular reference to the work of Thomas Weelkes and Roni Horn. I discuss how, in composing this piece, I wanted to evoke both the richness of avian life at the bird-cliff, *Latrabjarg*, and also the rich literary heritage of Iceland, in particular its saga tradition. As such, I acted both as curator and collaborator: I selected a range of archive materials - fragments of folk-song, and sections of saga-texts and poems - and used them as the foundation of my piece, and I also worked with the sound-artist Chris Mullender to realise a soundscape, based on bird and folksong recordings, that would coexist with my written score. Again, thinking as a curator, my intention was that the two scores - written and electroacoustic - should not be closely aligned, but in performance should stand in relation to one another like exhibits in an exhibition.

Iceland, with its vast glaciers, iceberg lagoons, and ill-slumbering volcanoes, has long fascinated and inspired poets, artists and composers. In 1600, the

composer Thomas Weelkes set as a six-voice madrigal the following unattributed text:

Thule, the period of cosmographie,  
Doth vaunt of Hecla whose sulphurious fire  
Doth melt the frozen clime and thaw the sky;  
Trinacrian Etna's flames ascend not higher.  
These things seem wondrous, yet more wondrous I,  
Whose heart with fear doth freeze, with love doth fry.  
(Weelkes, 2012)

'Thule' was a term commonly used in Weelke's time to refer to 'the region of the far north'; 'the period of cosmographie' simply means 'the edge of the map' (Padel, 2007, p.39). The unknown author of this text, however, grounds the cartography and the imaginative *locus* of Thule more precisely by referring to 'Hecla' in the second line. 'Hecla', or 'Hekla', a volcano in southern Iceland, erupted for over six months in 1597; its invocation here would have carried a strong contemporary resonance as well as an imaginative charge for sixteenth-century Britons (Padel, 2007, p.39). In the rest of the stanza, the poet unfolds a metaphysical conceit: 'neither Hekla, nor its Sicilian rival, Etna, can compete with the pangs of love that I now feel.' The lens of the lyric's imaginary camera moves over a vast frozen region, focussing closely on the awesome power of a volcanic eruption, before zooming in on the lover's palpitating heart. The poet Ruth Padel suggests that Weelke's musical setting of this text both develops and undercuts this conceit, by displaying a heightened awareness of the conventions of Elizabethan word-setting (Padel, 2007, p.39). Whilst Weelkes does employ rapid scalic figuration to evoke lava, a conventional gesture, he at times composes against expectation, at one point setting the phrase 'ascend not higher' to a clearly descending figure (Padel, 2007, p.39).

There are strong reasons for Iceland's attractiveness to Weelkes' imagination, in addition to its extreme northernness. Its geological newness and variety, and its resultant abundance of highly-active volcanoes, glaciers, and geysers, makes it easy for Iceland to be seen as a synecdoche or microcosm not just of the frozen north but, by extension, of the inner realm of the imagination itself. Volcanoes, glaciers and a starkly forbidding interior might indeed be 'wondrous', but not, a poet might argue, as wondrous as the inner reaches of the heart. Even today, Iceland remains a country settled only at its margins, with a single major peripheral road encircling the island. Its inhospitable interior therefore remains attractive to explorers, whether on foot or in the mind. It is a landscape that points up the complex relationship between our perception of the environment, and our perception of our own interiority.

Clearly, Elizabethan conceptions of the self and the imagination differed considerably from those that prevail today. The notion of 'self-discovery' as a metaphorical journey into an unknown region, concluding only when the inner terrain has been successfully charted, is a concept that has undergone substantial transformation since Weelkes' time, with Freudian thinking a particularly potent agent of change. The visual artist Roni Horn has worked and exhibited in Iceland on-and-off for more than thirty years, and her Iceland-related work *To Place* — an ongoing collection of illustrated books — presents a contemporary, post-Freudian account of the relationship of self to landscape in all its complexity. Horn notes that:

After completing the sixth volume, I felt more comfortable with the term 'encyclopaedia', which was intended in its most literal sense, as a collection of knowledge. I titled the work 'To Place' because I think of Iceland as a verb rather than a noun, in the sense of

an active thing, be it geographically, meteorologically, historically, experientially and so on. Each volume is a dialogue between Iceland and myself, the view and the viewer; I see the series structure as a metaphor for the fluidity of identity, since each book alters the meaning of the previous ones (Horn, 1997).

*To Place* is, then, both an 'encyclopaedia' and a journal, documentary evidence of an ongoing encounter that points to both past and future. Horn tellingly refers to Iceland as a 'verb rather than a noun ... an active thing', implying that the country has a dynamic power limitlessly to transform itself and others. (The front of each volume is simply embossed ISLAND, Iceland in Icelandic, but also an indication that Iceland is *the* island par excellence) (Horn, 1994). In another Horn work, *Library of Water* at Stykkisholmur in the western part of Iceland, the country's capacity for change is explored in a more elegiac manner (Horn, 2007). The installation is comprised of a series of glass columns, each filled with water from one of Iceland's glaciers or glacial rivers, surrounded by floor-mounted words in Icelandic and English describing the local weather. At one level, the work celebrates environmental and cultural regeneration: it is housed in the town's old library building, doubles as a community centre, and is intended as a space for reflection and study. As ice melts into water, so, it is suggested, communities and community-buildings also take on new forms and functions. But it is also an archive and a mausoleum. Iceland's glaciers are melting at a disturbing rate; these columns of water entombed in glass are, on one level, the relics of a dying ecology.

The presence of Icelandic words within Horn's installation also points to an analogous concern for the country's threatened cultural ecology. Icelandic has a small linguistic population base — around a third of a million people speak the language worldwide — and the challenge of preserving its

rich literary and folk traditions is pressingly real. Internet archiving offers a means of preserving key artefacts and texts, and Icelandic universities and libraries have been particularly swift to archive their collections in this way, but artefacts and texts have to be read and interpreted in order to retain their value. Archives are no use, it might be argued, without the creative and hermeneutic traditions which shape them.

The historian Pierre Nora has commented on the way in which the proliferation of archives within a society may be precipitated by a lack of regard for practices of memory grounded in tradition, experience of place and lived experience. In a key passage in his work *Realms of Memory*, Nora develops a distinction between modern and traditional practices of memory. So-called 'modern memory', he argues, is centred on the production and accumulation of mass archives, personal memoirs and fragments of culture, a practice that insistently converts memory into history, translating as it does the experiential into the material (Nora, 1996, p.5). Traditional practices, in contrast, are glimpsed only 'in gestures and habits, unspoken craft traditions, intimate physical knowledge, ingrained reminiscences and spontaneous reflexes' (Nora, 1996, p.5). He further draws a distinction between 'modern memory' as 'psychological, individual and subjective' and 'traditional memory' as 'social, collective and all-embracing' (Nora, 1996, p.5).

At first glance Nora's distinction seems a little opaque: surely, if there is such a thing as cultural memory it must be grounded in textual transmission? The important thing to note is that Nora's concept of 'traditional memory' is essentially experiential, rather than material. Whilst memory thus considered originates in actual events, it is endlessly shaped and revealed through our ongoing encounter with significant places within our environment — so-called 'lieux de memoires' - and each other. It is telling that Nora denotes 'modern memory' as individual and 'traditional

memory' as social, suggesting that archival practices result in a fragmenting of social experience.

Nora is primarily a scholar of French history, and his theories demand to be read within the context of French class politics and a tradition of philosophical enquiry into memory that flourished with Bergson and strongly informed the late work of Paul Ricoeur. But, moving beyond this context, his arguments powerfully illuminate the predicament of the viewer of Horn's *Library of Water* (2007). Is the library a 'lieu de memoire', or an archive? Is it a space of social participation or isolation?

I have outlined Weelke's use of Iceland as a metaphor for poetic endeavour and romantic love, Horn's extended exploration of Iceland's cultural and ecological disintegration, and Nora's concept of 'lieux de memoires' in detail, because reading these texts and engaging with Horn's art-works strongly informed the background thinking for my composition *Latrabjarg*. My work draws inspiration from Latrabjarg, a cliff in Iceland, home to one of Europe's largest bird-populations. The bird life at Latrabjarg is extremely diverse, and extremely noisy, and since different species live in regimented strata up-and-down the half-kilometre of the cliff's face; the resultant soundscape of birdsong is densely textured and varied.

My work also explores the distinctive Icelandic folksong tradition, *rimur*. *Rimur* is a highly distinctive folk-style: *rimur* are narrative poems that were intoned by a single performer as a form of entertainment in traditional Icelandic farmsteads (Olafsdóttir, 2008, p.105). *Rimur* melodies tend to be simple and diatonic, and are set to alliterative texts with short stanzas of two to four lines (Olafsdóttir, 2008, p.105). Although a large number of *rimur* have been transcribed — particularly during the nineteenth century — it remains primarily an oral tradition. *Rimur*-singing has recently reached a larger global audience through the work of Steindor Andersen, the fishing-boat captain who is the primary living exponent of the tradition, and who

has collaborated with the Icelandic rock band, Sigur Ros (Sigur Ros and Andersen, 2001).

Birdsong and folk-song: both bird-cliff and folk-tradition seemed precarious to me, threatened by global warming and globalisation respectively. Both were, also, in Nora's phrase, 'lieux de memoires', means by which Icelanders had formed their sense of identity over time, one a physical place, the other an oral tradition grounded in community. Whilst their sonic richness might act as the departure point for an extended composition, by weaving fragments of both 'ecologies', cultural and natural, into my score, I also hoped to explore the way in which cultural memory is formed, and what it means to experience such cultural memory as an outsider, informed by my knowledge of Horn's and Nora's work. My own experience of Icelandic culture must of necessity be partial and external; in no way could my composition lay any claims to be an authentic representation of Icelandic culture, or an authentic interrogation of Icelandic cultural memory practices. Instead, I wanted to present my work as a journey into this culture and to foreground the essential subjectivity of my position within the piece itself. But how to do this effectively without my composition becoming highly self-referential?

The answer lay in a short passage from *Egil's Saga*, one of the traditional sagas of Iceland's heroic age, a text that I encountered in the course of my research. At one point in the narrative Egil, a warrior-poet as skilled in lyric verse as he is fearsome in battle, leaves Iceland to visit King Athelstan. But whilst he is sailing past Orkney, a mighty storm arises, and he is eventually run aground at Humber-mouth on the East Yorkshire coast. Yorkshire at this time was ruled by Egil's arch-nemesis, Eric Bloodaxe. Egil travels to York to seek the advice of his friend Arinbjorn: should he hide, or confront the king directly? Arinbjorn advises the latter option, but, on presenting himself to Eric, Egil is immediately imprisoned. Egil may escape death only on one

condition, that overnight he compose a poem beautiful enough to allay the wrath of the king. Egil attempts to rise to the challenge, but is repeatedly distracted by a small bird, in reality a shape-shifting spirit, that chirps and chatters outside his window. However, creativity overcomes distraction, and Egil manages to write the poem that secures his freedom (Thorsson, 2000, pp. 109-113).

Egil's journey is, like mine, a journey of creativity occasionally thwarted by distraction, but is also that voyage's inverse, a passage from Iceland to York rather than from York to Iceland. I determined therefore to use this as the frame-narrative for my piece, as a metaphor both for the literal journey that had inspired the work, and also for the personal journey into Iceland's culture and ecology that it represents. In my work, the story is broken down into three sections: the storm, the audience with the king, and Egil's presentation of his poem. This trisected frame narrative is interspersed with sections in which fragments of *rimur*, birdsong and a number of other Icelandic texts and melodies are developed both within my written score and also within the fixed media component of the work, realised by Christopher Mullender. Just as, at Latrabjarg, it was the stratified variety of the bird-sounds that inspired my composition, so, in our compositional practice, Chris and I explored processes of layering and accumulation, emulating the motion and distribution of the cliff-birds.

There are numerous ways of conceptualising the function of an electroacoustic element within a mixed-media piece: as an archive of sounds, as special effect, as bricolage, as the incursion of an 'other' into the musical score, and so on. Both Chris Mullender and myself were keen to avoid an obviously hierarchical relationship between the two musical elements, instead considering the two musical strata to be coexisting and freely interacting within the space and time of the performance, rather like different species of bird occupying the same environment. This isn't to

suggest, however, that these two musical levels are not compositionally related. At the early stages of composition, I provided Mullender with sketches of *rimur*-based material, as well as diagrams of the proposed structure of the work, which inspired his own composition. Listening to draft versions of Mullender's work then helped to shape later sections of the written score, in an organic flow and exchange of ideas. There are some parallels in our method of working with Finnish composer Einojuhani Rautavaara's technique in his 1972 work, *Cantus Arcticus*, which he described as a 'concerto for birds and orchestra' (Rautavaara, 1972). In Rautavaara's score, the tape element of the work is simply notated, with a small number of text indications at key points encouraging imitative interaction with the tape by members of the orchestra (Rautavaara, 1972). In the work's introduction, for instance, the woodwind motifs employed by Rautavaara are clearly inspired by birdsong, but are not related in any overly prescriptive way to the recorded birdsong on the tape. Where our approach differs substantially from Rautavaara's is in the complexity of the fixed-media element, which includes folk-song fragments, as well as snippets of the solo countertenor and cello parts, producing a less naturalistic effect than Rautavaara's recorded birdsong.

In keeping with the simplicity of *rimur* melodies, much of Latrabjarg's generative material is simple. The work opens with the alternation of two ideas based on very basic melodic cells; the two solo parts present material derived from different pitch-sets, the electric cello's based on A-C-D Flat — F sharp, and the countertenor's limited to A, B and C Sharp:

(Image 4: Cave, J. (2014). *Latrabjarg*, p.1, bars 1-5)

The countertenor's material is derived from a *rimur*-melody contained within a folksong collection, *Íslenzk þjóðlög*, provided to me electronically by Rosa Thorsteinsdottir, a research fellow at the Arni Magnusson Institute in Reykjavik (Þorsteinsson, 1906, p.847).

(Image 5: Þorsteinsson, B. (1906). *Íslenzk þjóðlög*, p.847)

Throughout the first section of the piece — from the opening to rehearsal mark A — flourishes on the solo electric cello, and fragments of the opening of the saga-text in the countertenor part are interspersed with wordless interjections from the chorus, doubled by the tuned percussion. Complementing the simple pitch-sets which define the music of the electric cello and the countertenor, the chorus' material is underpinned by a diminished triad (A-C-Eflat), upon which a series of 7th and 11th chords are built (A7 — C7 — Eflat11) (see bars 14-18). The music builds to a climax at figure B, followed immediately by a brief cadenza for the solo electric cello,

in which these three sets of generative material — initially heard on cello, countertenor, and chorus — are each alluded to:

The image shows a musical score for three electric violas (Elec Vc.). The top staff is labeled 'A7 (chorus material)' and 'C7 (chorus material) and A-C-Dflat-Fsharp material combined'. The middle staff is labeled 'A-B-Csharp countertenor material'. The bottom staff is labeled 'A-B-Csharp countertenor material'. Dynamics include p, mf, mp, f, and pp. The score features various time signatures and musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

(Image 6: Cave, J. (2014). *Latrabjarg*, p.7, bars 30-41)

I had two primary motives in employing an underlying economy of material in this movement, and throughout the work as a whole. Firstly, I wanted to create motivic cells that would complement the simplicity of the *rimur* material. *Rimur*, like many types of folksong, is a strophic song-form; in performance, a *rimur*-singer unfolds a narrative over many verses, each set to the same simple, unvarying melody. The melody binds together the narrative, and, because *rimur* melodies are in general extremely simple, they can be inflected with new meaning each time they appear by the text to which they are set. Similarly, it was my intention that the pitch-set that dominates the electric cello's material should be simple enough to be employed to different dramatic ends — by turns plaintive, strident, urgent and reflective — at the key points at which it returns throughout this movement. Secondly, I wanted to create an 'ecology of material' comparable to the highly-organised bird-ecology found at Latrabjarg. At Latrabjarg, different types of birds — puffins, northern gannets, guillemots and razorbills amongst them — are free to interact with each other, yet occupy

clearly stratified sections of the cliff. Different bird-calls interpenetrate with each other, but remain distinct within the cliff's overall soundscape. In the same way, I wanted the materials ascribed to countertenor, electric cello, chorus and ensemble to interact freely to generate an overarching sonic complexity, and density, yet to retain a distinctive simplicity.

It was my intention, therefore, that whilst these motivic cells would be subject to elaboration, alteration, and, in some cases, would be able to interpenetrate with one another, they would nonetheless remain identifiable. This principle is illustrated in the remainder of the first movement. At rehearsal mark B (bar 42) cello and countertenor present material which, in each case, elaborates that presented at the start of the movement.

The image shows a musical score for three parts: Countertenor, Violoncello, and Cello. The Countertenor part is in 3/4 time with a tempo marking of quarter note = 40. The Violoncello part features a melodic line with a slur and a triplet. The Cello part starts with a dynamic marking of *mp* and includes the lyrics: "Si gi du fy rir nort than Ork ney jar". The Cello part ends with a dynamic marking of *p*. The Violoncello part also ends with a dynamic marking of *p*.

(Image 7: Cave, J. (2014). *Latrabjarg*, p.8, bars 42-47)

The cello's material departs substantially from the initial A-C-D flat — F sharp pitch set, hinting in bar 44 at the E flat 11 chord heard in the chorus part at bar 18. The countertenor's phrase recalls the contour of their first statement in bar 4, but in a minor rather than major form, and also echoes the oscillating A-C-A-C figure heard in the cello at bar 3. This motif is heard again in the soprano and alto chorus parts in bars 48-49 and 52-53. Clearly there is cross-fertilisation between the three different sets of material here. But the call-and-response pattern introduced at the start of the movement —

in which a statement on the cello is followed by responses from the countertenor and chorus — is preserved both at rehearsal mark B, and at the close of the movement (rehearsal mark D to the end).

This balance between a small number of sets of basic material that begin to echo and influence each other, and a call-and-response pattern that holds them in sequence, is the underlying structural principle of this movement, and of many other sections of the work. Consider, by way of comparison, the start of the second movement, 'Flocking'. Here, the same call-and-response framework is preserved, but incorporates the electroacoustic score as well as the notated score. The bird-sounds, heard at bar 1, are followed immediately by a *tremolando* figure in the viola that recalls the A-C-A-C alternating pattern heard in the electric cello at the very start of the work (bars 2-3). This, in turn, is followed by a *rimur* recording; the three-element sequence is then repeated before the first statement by the chorus at rehearsal mark A. There are further references to the idea of a three-part sequence in bars 26-29, and also in the closing section of the 'Flocking' movement in bars 39-53. In both cases, a sequence is presented consisting of a *tremolando* pattern heard in the strings, followed by a timpani roll, and then a tam-tam roll. A modified version of this pattern is also heard at the start of the fourth movement, 'Nesting': in this case the timpani and tam-tam rolls are followed by the *tremolando* patterns, scored on this occasion for the harp and vibraphone (bars 1-5).

In creating this interplay of motifs and sequences, my intention was to create a sense of departure and return running through the entire work. Like a traveller returning to a familiar location, only to find it altered, a listener to *Latrabjarg* might identify a link between the three-part sequences which open 'Prologue' and 'Flocking', but at the same time experience a sense of incredulity on finding the second of these sequences slightly altered. This technique was informed by Pierre Nora's concept of 'lieux de memoires',

which I mentioned above. Nora contrasts 'traditional' memory practices — where memory is passed down through 'gestures and habits' — with 'modern' practices, which are grounded in textual transmission (Nora, 1996, p.5). I was informed by both types of memory practice. The recurring call-and-response patterns are intended to be heard as gestures rather than as texts, in Nora's sense of these terms; I wanted to inculcate subconsciously a sense of the meaning of these patterns in the listener over the course of the work, so that they were experienced as 'lieux de memoires' or 'memory places'. Counterbalancing this use of a kind of gestural memory, I used distinctive motifs, in some cases based on actual archive materials, to create a more easily discernible thread of continuity running through the work, in line with Nora's 'modern memory' concept.

In movements four and five ('Nesting' and 'Tolf Synir') I made use of another simple motif-based technique, the *idée fixe*. In 'Nesting' a *rimur* melody heard first in bars 15-24 is then repeated a number of times on different solo instruments, and in different keys, accompanied by a variety of instrumental textures. After its initial appearance on flute and clarinet, the melody is passed to the oboe (bars 25-32) and then to the French horn (bars 36-39), before its presentation on pizzicato cello and double bass (bars 41-45). The melody remains relatively unaltered in these different presentations, undergoing only slight shifts in rhythmic emphasis, register and key. The textures which accompany it are, however, markedly different from one another. The passages given to the oboe and French horn are accompanied by highly atomised, disjointed textures reminiscent of *klangfarbenmelodie*, whereas the pizzicato cello and double bass presentation of the melody is accompanied by florid arpeggiated gestures in the upper strings suggestive of a Viennese waltz. This rapid interplay of different styles is deliberate: in keeping with its title, 'Nesting' articulates the weaving-together of assorted

fragments of material, through which the *idée fixe* runs like a constant thread binding together the whole.

Like 'Nesting', 'Tolf Synir' sets a recurring folk-melody to a variety of different textures. 'Tolf Synir' is an arrangement of an Icelandic folk-melody — not, in this case a *rimur* melody — taken from the collection *One Hundred Folksongs of All Nations*, edited by the composer Granville Bantock (Bantock, 1911, p.104). Initially presented in largely homophonic form for tenors and basses alone at rehearsal mark A, the melody returns in an eight-part choir version at rehearsal mark C, before reappearing at rehearsal mark E as a brief mensuration canon. In this final section, versions of the melody appear at different speeds in the second soprano, second tenor and bass parts (bars 55-60). It is worth noting that the literal meaning of the text of 'Tolf Synir' remains obscure: the translation provided by Bantock relates does not appear to relate closely to the original Icelandic, and I was unable in the course of my research to find a more accurate translation of the original. Rather than reject the use of the melody, however, I decided instead to embrace the obscurity of the text: the interpretative challenge it presents is emblematic of the overall theme of the work, the disintegration of natural and cultural ecologies.

In using *idée fixe* melodies, I was applying the same principle as that employed in my use of recapitulated call-and-response patterns in other sections of the work, the idea of creating a sense of constant return to a supposedly familiar musical 'location' now changed. The concept of change has an ambivalent status in *Latrabjarg*: whilst it is variation and the emergence of new textures that gives the work its momentum, the work is also haunted by the spectre of ecological and cultural collapse. The archive materials — folksong melodies, birdsong recordings, saga texts — that run throughout *Latrabjarg* are enhanced by the work's instrumental and choral textures, but also, at times are submerged and transformed by them.

In the notated score I managed structure through the careful distribution of basic sets of material and call-and-response patterns, using the idea of 'lieux de memoires' to create a constant sense of departure and return. The relationship between the electroacoustic and notated scores was organised somewhat differently. Neither Chris Mullender nor I wanted the relationship between the two scores to be too prescriptive. Rather, we wanted the scores to represent two individual 'walks' through the same 'landscape'. Both composers would start with a number of common ideas, and would agree on a basic outline and structure for the work; we also agreed to draw inspiration from a number of common archive materials: recordings of birdsong, exemplifying the different types of birds found at Latrabjarg taken from the British Library Sound Archive and recordings of *rimur* taken from the Sidney Cowell collection at the Library of Congress. (It is worth noting that the details of Mullender's soundscape — including the precise samples used, and the technical manipulations performed — are considered outside the remit of my research, and hence are not included within this portfolio.)

Mullender and I were both interested in bird-behaviours: we chose a number of basic behaviours and natural processes — a storm at sea, nesting, flocking, and migrating as starting points for each movement. We didn't create detailed graphic scores for each movement — instead we decided to work semi-independently, sharing information about the length of each movement, and taking inspiration from the natural processes under exploration but not micro-managing the interaction between the two scores. Our intention was to create an environmental relationship between the elements of the piece: in the same way that birds share a common environment at Latrabjarg, yet occupy distinct cliff-strata, so too would these scores interact within a shared sonic space, whilst remaining distinct in their

process of composition. There are some points of coordination — in the opening sections of ‘Flocking’ and ‘Nesting’ for instance — but the scores were developed separately up until the start of the rehearsal process.

In so doing, we were informed by Cage’s concept of the interpenetration of sounds. In *Silence*, Cage describes interpenetration as a process of placing ‘each thing and each being at the centre’ in a state of ‘non-obstruction’ (Cage, 1961 p.36). What Cage wished to avoid was the arrangement of musical materials into hierarchical or dualistic formations. Instead, Cage wanted simply to allow sounds to interact freely with one another in a shared acoustic space. Our intention was not identical to Cage’s — the two scores do, for instance, share common territory in the use of overarching shared structures, and the use of birdsong and *rimur* motifs — but, nonetheless, we were interested in allowing the two scores simply to coexist within a common acoustic environment without creating a hierarchical relationship between them. This desire was also reflected in the arrangement of the performers and speakers within the ensemble. In performance, an eight-speaker Genelec system was interleaved into the ensemble in an irregular pattern, suggestive of a forest. By positioning the speakers in this way, we wanted to enable the performers to respond freely to the electroacoustic score, and to create a richly textured, rather than clearly delineated, soundscape for the listener.

The final defining structural element of *Latrabjarg* is its narrative. In addition to the closing folksong, ‘Tolf Synir’, *Latrabjarg* makes use of two texts, the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Icelandic saga, *Egil’s Saga*, and a fragment of a poem, ‘Hrafnsmal’, by the 9<sup>th</sup>-century poet, Þorbjörn Hornklofi. As I outlined above, the section that I used from *Egil’s Saga* was of value to me for two reasons. Firstly, it provided a dramatic structure for two key sections of the work, describing Egil’s voyage across the sea and his trial at the court of Eric Bloodaxe in York, around which I could then construct the layout of the rest

of the piece. Secondly, Egil's journey — from Iceland to York — also resonated strongly with the meta-narrative of the work's composition, in which a fruitful visit to Latrabjarg had subsequently led to the work's development and performance in York. I used the Hornklofi text as an interlude between the two extracts from Egil's saga. The stanza that I extracted from Hornklofi's poem describes the unsettling appearance of ravens after battle to feast on the corpses of dead warriors:

What is the matter with you, ravens? From where have you come with gory beaks at break of day? Flesh hangs from your claws; the stench of carrion comes from your mouths; I think you lodged last night near where you knew corpses were lying' (Whaley, 2012, p.97).

In using the Hornklofi text, it was my intention both to create a minatory, uncanny atmosphere, in advance of the following section of *Latrabjarg* detailing Egil's sojourn in York, and also to add an additional layer to the ambiguity with which birdsong and bird-imagery are used elsewhere in the work. Whilst birds are associated with the idea of loss throughout the work — the loss of habitat, and cultural and ecological diversity — they are also associated with the idea of death, and the end of poetic inspiration. The sinister ravens that appear in 'Flocking' prefigure the shape-shifting trickster bird who attempts to distract Egil, and hasten his death at the end of the 'Egil in York' section. In the complete version of *Egil's Saga*, we learn that Egil successfully completes his poem, and earns his freedom. But in *Latrabjarg*, Egil's fate is left unresolved; the work closes with the instrumental 'Nesting' and the choral 'Tolf Synir'. We are unsure whether the closing choral movement represents Egil's composition, or instead acts as a kind of elegy for him.

*Latrabjarg* therefore initially unfolds what appears to be an heroic narrative, only for that narrative to be truncated at the end of the third

movement. I wanted the work to defy narrative expectation, because to present a story of 'triumph-over-adversity' would suggest that the environmental and cultural challenges at the heart of the work are easily overcome. By leaving Egil at the moment he begins his poem, I wanted to suggest rather that the work presents no straightforward answers to these challenges. Whilst Egil may look to poetic inspiration for his salvation, there is no such easy artistic response possible to the challenges presented to Iceland's cultural and environmental heritage by the ravages of globalisation and climate change. *Latrabjarg* presents one possible artistic response to Iceland's fragile grandeur, but, I suggest, such a response can serve only to highlight the country's fragility and beauty, rather than preserve it. Like Weelkes and Horn before me, I wanted to comment in *Latrabjarg* on the way in which Iceland with its awe-inspiring landscapes of ice and fire can come to represent the realm of artistic inspiration itself. And, by presenting the idea that the shape-shifter might succeed in stemming the flow of Egil's poetry, I wanted to suggest that the possibility of Iceland's demise carries within itself the spectre of the death of imagination itself.

In this commentary I have addressed two of my core research questions:

- *What might it mean to think of the composer as the curator, rather than the author, of his or her musical materials?*
- *Does the notion of composer as curator rather than author also undermine the idea of composer as solitary practitioner? Is the composer always essentially engaged in an act of collaboration, either with other living artists, or with the originators of the other texts that inform his or her work?*

By detailing the ways in which I selected archive materials in developing the work, used them to generate structure, and collaborated closely with Chris Mullender to realise the electroacoustic component of the work, I have demonstrated how curatorship and collaboration are key elements of my compositional practice.

## **Commentary 2: God's Keyboard: a processional**

In this commentary, which focusses on my piece *God's Keyboard*, I explore two of my key research questions:

- *Can creative practice be used as a form of historical enquiry?*
- *What might it mean to think of the composer as the curator, rather than the author, of his or her musical materials?*

As in my work, *Latrabjarg*, in *God's Keyboard* I acted as curator, selecting a number of archive materials - a Sacred Harp hymn, a song by Sibelius, a speech by Martin Luther King, and a quotation from Duke Ellington - to form the basis of my piece. More so than any other work in this portfolio, *God's Keyboard* is a work of historical enquiry: I wanted to evoke a number of different vignettes from American history - the performance of Sacred Harp music in farming communities, a performance by the opera singer Marian Anderson at Jean Sibelius' house, and the civil rights march to Selma led by Martin Luther King - and in so doing sketch the outline of the history of civil rights in America. I also discuss the way in which the work is imbued with the language of the psalms, and offers a contemporary take on the central psalm-narrative of social and spiritual liberation.

Every man from a treble white to a bass black is significant on God's keyboard, precisely because every man is made in the image of God. One day we will learn that (King, 1965a).

*God's Keyboard*, a 20-minute concert work for two choirs, ensemble and mezzo-soprano soloist takes its title from a sermon, 'The American Dream',

preached by Dr Martin Luther King at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia in July 1965. It was composed with support from the Sir Jack Lyons Celebration Award. Sir Jack Lyons, a businessman, arts patron, and major benefactor of the University of York Music Department, was a particular fan of Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* (1965); this award provides an annual opportunity for a postgraduate composer to create their own musical response to the Book of Psalms.

Bernstein's work provided me with an initial stimulus. I've always been struck by the way in which Bernstein generates a festal, clamorous tapestry of infectious rhythms from the prosody of his Hebrew texts, particularly in the opening Psalm 100, in which the metre of the opening lines 'Hari'u l'Adonai kol ha'arets / Iv'du et Adonai b'simḥa' establishes a 7/4 pattern, subdivided into four and three beats, which underscores the movement (Bernstein, 1965, p.3):

3

Allegro molto  $\text{♩} = 120(♩ = 2)$

1. 2. Trp. 1. 2. Trb. Perc. Harp 1 Harp 2 Chor.

1. 2. Vi. 1. 2. Vi. Vc. Cb.

Allegro molto  $\text{♩} = 120(♩ = 2)$

Illa - ri - a - l'A-

(Image 8: Bernstein, L. (1965). *Chichester Psalms*, p.3, bars 1-4)

Particularly striking, for me, was the difference between Bernstein's treatment of the prosody of his Hebrew texts, and the way in which the English translations of these same texts are sung on a daily basis within Anglican liturgy. Consider the following example of an Anglican psalm-chant:

228 Francis Jackson

1 Be joyful in the LORD, all you lands; \*  
 serve the LORD with gladness  
 and come before his presence with a song.

2 Know this: The LORD himself is God; \*  
 he himself has made us, and we are his;  
 we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.

3 Enter his gates with thanksgiving;  
 go into his courts with praise; \*  
 give thanks to him and call up on his Name.

4 For the LORD is good;  
 his mercy is ever-lasting; \*  
 and his faithfulness endures from age to age.

(Image 9: Wyton, A. (1987). *The Anglican Chant Psalter*, p.21)

The text here — Psalm 100 — is the same as in Bernstein’s setting, but in an English translation. Each line is divided up into metrical feet — three feet alternating with four — using a system known as ‘pointing’. Whilst psalms are typically sung in the appropriate speech rhythm, they are conducted by the director of music, creating a form of choral speech. The harmonies are typically four-part, and are usually predominantly diatonic, with minor chromatic departures from the basic tonality at key points of metrical stress. (The example above, by the former Director of Music at York Minster Francis Jackson, is a case in point, with its movement towards E major at the end of the third quarter of the chant, and emphatic return to G major by way of E7 and A minor at the end of the fourth quarter.) Interestingly, whilst the setting above employs, like Bernstein, a metrical division into three and four, the rhythmic effect is entirely different. Bernstein’s subdivided 7/4 pulse generates forward momentum, whereas, I would suggest, Jackson’s chant setting is always moving towards closure at the end of each pair of verses.

At its best, Anglican chant-singing can evoke the drama of the text with great precision, variety and power, underscoring shifts in mood and meaning with shifts in key, tempo, dynamic and organ registration; at worst, the form can suffer from a lack of harmonic and rhythmic variety, underpinned by a fundamental consistency in metrical division.

In my response to the Psalms, I wanted to make use of the rhythmic energy generated from prosody employed by Bernstein in his setting of Psalm 100, without the harmonic and rhythmic inevitability of some Anglican chant-singing. Initial attempts at setting actual texts yielded results that, in one way or another, tended towards the latter rather than the former. A potential answer to the problem emerged in the form of a musical text taken from an entirely different worship-music tradition, the Sacred Harp singing of the southern United States.

As Kiri Miller notes in her survey of the Sacred Harp tradition and its contemporary manifestations *Travelling Home: Sacred Harp Singing and American Pluralism*, shape-note singing (of which Sacred Harp is one strand) has a 'rich and varied history' which can be summarised as '[a movement with] New England origins, [which endured] persecution by the nineteenth-century "better music movement", [and achieved] preservation and historical continuity in the South' (Miller, 2008, p.6). Shape-note singing takes its name from its distinctive notation system, first used by Little and Smith in their book *The Easy Instructor* (1801), in which 'four shaped note heads [were used] to represent the four-syllable British solfege system, which designated the major scale with the syllables Fa-Sol-La-Fa-Sol-La-Mi-Fa' (Miller, 2008, p.5). There were numerous collections of shape-note hymns and anthems in the nineteenth century; the most successful of these was White and King's *The Sacred Harp*, (1844) from which the singing 'movement' subsequently took its name (Miller, 2008, p.5).

As Miller notes, the 'singing-school movement', which eventually gave birth to Sacred Harp singing, began in the late eighteenth century in order to challenge low levels of musical literacy and psalm-singing practices of the day (Miller, 2008, p.7). As such, this movement was highly didactic in its manner of operation, with strict rules governing the spatial distribution of singers; a group of singers would be 'referred to as a class', and the act of leading the group in song was referred to as 'giving a lesson', conventions that persist in contemporary Sacred Harp singing (Miller, 2008, p.7).

Miller further notes that a crucial element in the development of text-setting and singing within Sacred Harp was the widespread dissemination of the poetic versions of the Psalms by the English hymn-writer Isaac Watts amongst rural communities. Watts' *The Psalms Imitated in the Language of the New Testament and Applied to the Christian State and Worship* (1719), which presented versions of the psalms in contemporary language and in a variety of metres, was often used along with his other writings as a source of lyrics for the compilers of shape-note collections, who would often set these texts to 'dance tunes' (Miller, 2008, p.8).

Sacred Harp singing, which has its roots in a reformed version of psalm-singing practice and the reimagined psalms of Isaac Watts, but was also employed as a means of shaping communities within the emerging American South, seemed to me an intriguing alternative to the kind of psalm-singing with which I was familiar from the Anglican choral tradition. By employing Sacred Harp practices within my composition, I aimed to explore and evoke psalm-singing from a different cultural perspective. One Sacred Harp tune in particular, 'Hallelujah', a melody which is among the most frequently sung of all those in *The Sacred Harp*, but which was unfamiliar to me, seemed to be an excellent resource for my composition practice (White and King, 1860, p.146).

The text of this hymn, which is by Charles Wesley, is not a direct reworking of a psalm-text, but in its preoccupation with images of arrival, deliverance, and transcendence, it calls to mind many of the key tropes of the psalm-sequence. This represented, for me, a way of using a psalm-inflected text without falling into the pitfalls of Anglican psalm-setting. Similarly, the musical setting of this text by the composer William Walker, with its rolling 6/4 rhythmic scheme, plangent harmonies based around open fourths and fifths, and melody in the tenor, in the manner of a faux-bourdon, seemed to me a powerful antidote to the sometimes anodyne four-part writing found in Anglican chant (White and King, 1860, p.146).

But how best to employ this musical 'found object'? Would it be best, in the manner of Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* — discussed earlier in this submission — to present a series of fragments of 'Hallelujah', in order to evoke the spirit of Sacred Harp singing through a kind of bricolage? Or, following the example of William Duckworth in his composition *Southern Harmony*, would it be more effective to subject this music to a kind of minimalist deconstruction, constructing extended choral structures from limited material (Duckworth, 1999)?

In the event, I decided to use the text and music of 'Hallelujah' as the departure-point for an evocation of both the sound-world and the cultural practice of Sacred Harp performance. In the opening section of *God's Keyboard*, I frequently evoke Walker's harmonies through the use of parallel fourths, fifths and octaves, and the doubling of the melody in the tenor and soprano parts, and Wesley's text is presented both set to the original melody and also to entirely new music. In addition, I wanted to employ elements of Sacred Harp performance practice in my work. As can be seen in footage from the 1982 Holly Springs Sacred Harp Convention, shot by the ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax, Sacred Harp singing is defined by a clear set of performance conventions (Lomax, 1982). The group leader — the person

‘giving the lesson’ — initiates the singing of a particular melody by first instructing the group to turn to the relevant page and then intoning the tonic or ‘fa’. Each of the other singers gradually find this unison, and then a first reading of the melody follows, with the singers using sol-fa syllables rather than words. The tempo is set by use of a *tactus*: members swing their arms in imitation of the leader.



(Image 10: White, B. F. and King E.J. (1860). *The Sacred Harp*, p.146)

At the very opening of *God's Keyboard*, an evocation of the beginning of a Sacred Harp ‘lesson’ is combined with music that calls to mind the image of an battered church harmonium wheezing into life. The music is marked ‘like a machine, coming to life’; a quotation from Simon Armitage’s poem, ‘Harmonium’, placed as an epigraph at the head of the score, describes how ‘Sunlight ... had aged the harmonium’s softwood case / And yellowed the fingernails of its keys ... But its hummed harmonics still struck a chord ...’ (Armitage, 1993). In the opening bars, snare drum and sleigh drums

combine with unpitched breath-sounds in the sopranos, trombones, and with bass clarinet multiphonics, to evoke the bellows of the antique instrument slowly filling with air (bars 1-12). These sounds are gradually combined with the sounds of the main choir gradually attaining a unison G — emulating the action of the Sacred Harp leader in ‘teaching’ the tonic to her class - whilst the upper voices sing ‘sol-fa’ material in G Lydian (bars 8-12). The ‘sol-fa’ material builds through polyphonic development to a climax at rehearsal mark C, which heralds two unexpected interruptions.

A second choir — the University of York’s gospel choir, Zamar, in the first performance — enters for the first time, singing the ‘Hallelujah’ melody in unison, with a markedly different vocal timbre. The score indicates that the gospel choir’s singing should be ‘worshipful’: the impassioned and reverent delivery typical of gospel groups is very much intended here (bars 30-36). But this more reverent mood is itself rapidly subverted by the incursion of a band of circus musicians into the imaginative landscape of the movement: at rehearsal mark E, a *pesante* quadruplet figure — marked ‘heavy; intrusive’ — is thrown between the contrabassoon, piano, and toy piano, with accompanying punctuation from alto, tenor and bass trombones. Above this *pesante* figuration, the cornet and flugelhorn play a ‘schmaltzy’ melody in thirds, whilst the clarinet and bass clarinet pass back and forth a ‘sardonic’ figure that shifts between quadruplets and the prevailing 12/8 time-signature (bars 37-41).

The reasoning behind these interruptions is partly structural and partly conceptual. *God’s Keyboard* is subtitled ‘a processional’: the overarching formal conceit of the work is that it gathers momentum through the addition of discrete elements, just as a procession or march might slowly grow in size through the addition of marchers. The term also carries a liturgical connotation: a ‘processional hymn’ may be sung at the start or close of a church service. (The link between this formal conceit and the historical

march from Selma and Montgomery, Alabama, led by Dr Martin Luther King in 1965, is explored in detail below.) As such, I was interested in exploring the collision and interaction of different kinds of musical materials as a structural principle. Rather than presenting my ideas in clearly demarcated sections devoted to, for example, subject and countersubject as one might do in classical sonata form, I instead wanted my ideas to overlap, interact and coexist in potentially unpredictable ways. Whilst my piece is completely scored and through-composed — there is no attempt at, for instance a Cageian *interpenetration* of sounds, as in *Latrabjarg* — the idea of the generation of momentum through collision is the guiding principle throughout its three movements.

This interest in the collision of different musical materials corresponds to my other intention for *God's Keyboard*: to present an 'alternative history' of the civil rights movement in America, by staging a series of historical vignettes which each have some bearing on the issue of the struggle for civil rights. *God's Keyboard* is not a narrative work: rather the vignettes that it presents coexist like artefacts in an exhibition. The listener is free to interpret and connect these vignettes as they wish. I also wanted the work to reflect critically upon the concept of 'civil rights' itself, and upon the way in which historical artefacts come to acquire different layers of meaning in different contexts. For instance, the first movement, 'Harmonium', evokes a Sacred Harp meeting; as I have argued above, rural communities in the American South appropriated what was originally a form of singing from New England, and used this performance style as a means of defining their own cultural identity. This is in itself a kind of struggle for independence. But, I would suggest, considered in the context of slavery and segregation in the same region, Sacred Harp singing, which thrived amongst white settler communities in the Southern United States, might also be seen as an emblem of the oppression meted out by white communities upon African-Americans.

A listener might therefore ask the question: is the Sacred Harp melody 'Hallelujah' to be heard in this work as a symbol of oppression, or of liberation? By resisting the presentation of a simple narrative running through *God's Keyboard*, in favour of a more complex interplay of different musical materials, I wanted to open up the possibility of multiple interpretations of the work, and of multiple answers to the question: 'what constitutes liberation'?

The 'alternative history' presented in *God's Keyboard* is underpinned by three vignettes. In 'Harmonium', a Sacred Harp meeting is interrupted firstly by distant strain of a wheezing harmonium or reed organ — perhaps being practised in an adjoining room? — and secondly by the sound of the band of a travelling carnival outside. The latter distraction (bars 37-47) results in the singers getting out of time with each other (bars 48-59), and so, reflecting this the melody of 'Hallelujah' returns in canon. Finally, the clamour of the carnival procession, the initial harmonium material in G Lydian, and the zeal of the singers combine in a brief canon in which the various strands of material are juxtaposed, punctuated by rhythmic interjections from the gospel choir (bars 65-72).

The central movement of *God's Keyboard*, 'Ainola' stages an even more diverse imaginative 'scene', by juxtaposing two historical events separated by over three decades and several thousand miles. The first of these events was a visit made by the African-American contralto, Marian Anderson, to the composer Jean Sibelius at his house, Ainola, in 1933. The visit took place whilst Anderson was on tour in Finland with her Finnish accompanist, Kosti Vehanen. The meeting was apparently extremely cordial; Anderson and Vehanen performed four of Sibelius' songs, prompting the composer, impressed by their interpretation, to offer his guests champagne rather than the more customary coffee (Vehanen, 1941, p.28). Anderson later became an important figure in the civil rights movement. Her 1939 performance to

75000 people at Washington's Lincoln Memorial — a performance arranged following her disbarment from appearing at another venue on grounds of race — prefigured a later appearance at the Memorial in 1963, as part of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom at which Dr Martin Luther King gave his famous 'I Have a Dream' speech (Arsenault, 2009, p.2). In 'Ainola' I wanted to trace the historical thread between Sibelius' endorsement of Anderson as a musician and the public endorsement of Anderson as a spearhead of the civil rights movement at her Lincoln Memorial appearances. I took as my starting point two archive materials: a song by Sibelius, 'Aus Banger Brust', performed by Anderson at Ainola, and the text of a speech by Martin Luther King, *How Long? Not Long* (also known as *Our God Is Marching On*) (Sibelius, 1907; King, 1965b). Whilst 'How Long? Not Long' was not the speech performed by King at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, I preferred this text to the more famous 'I Have a Dream' speech, because of its distinctive rhetorical patterns and intertextual allusions. (I will discuss these features in greater detail below.)

The movement is therefore conceived as a stylistic dialogue between late romantic, Sibelius-like, austerity on the one hand, and a modal jazz idiom, representing the world of King's speech, on the other. Whilst the melody of Sibelius' 'Aus Banger Brust' appears only once, on solo bassoon (bars 73-81) I wanted to evoke the spirit of Sibelius in other ways in the movement. The opening section (bars 1-24) obliquely recalls the opening of Sibelius' tone poem *The Swan of Tuonela*, pitting a solo instrument — in this case a cornet, rather than a cor anglais — against slow-moving chorale-like textures (Sibelius, 1901). The harmonic language in this opening section owes as much to jazz as it does to Sibelius' late romanticism, but my intention was to evoke the austerity of Sibelius' work, albeit using a different harmonic palette. At rehearsal mark A, the solo cornet presents an angular unaccompanied melody, making prominent use of descending augmented

fourths, and an upwards leap of a ninth (bars 16-19). Almost immediately, a mezzo-soprano soloist responds to the cornet, with a figure that inverts the cornet's descending augmented fourths (bar 25), a figure that was first heard in the clarinet at the very start of the movement (bar 1). The mezzo-soprano's question — 'how long?' — taken from King's speech, is immediately answered both by the chorus ('not long') and by the solo cornet, echoing the mezzo-soprano's material (bars 27-29).

In composing this movement, as in creating the work as a whole, I was particularly inspired by watching a video recording of a section of King's original speech; in particular, I was struck by King's speech patterns, and the way in which his rhetorical flourishes are echoed by the crowd (Incogito, 2007). (In the first performance of *God's Keyboard*, this short speech-extract was played to the audience just before the performance of the work.) King's delivery is sonorous, with substantial gradation of the melodic contour of his phrases. Typically, King's sentences rise substantially in pitch towards the middle of the phrase, and fall towards the end, but the effect is highly varied, rather than monotonous; at different points in this speech-extract, in addition to pitch modification, he employs techniques such as glissandi, vibrato and grace-notes, which constantly challenge the listener's expectation of how the speech is to be delivered. King also makes substantial use of pauses and changes in tempo during this speech-extract. By increasing the pace of his delivery at key moments, King lends his speech increased momentum, and by pausing or slowing the pace at other times, he gives certain phrases greater rhetorical emphasis, and gives his audience the opportunity to respond. Careful listening reveals a variety of different audience interjections, including cheering, laughter, repetitions of King's phrases ('How long? ... how long?') and answering statements ('How long? Not Long') (Incogito, 2007). Such opportunities for audience participation are key to the overall rhetorical effectiveness of the speech. By giving the audience

the opportunity to engage with his text in this way, King enables them to feel that, in addition to marching with him, they are also helping to create the text of his speech. The speech is also full of intertextual allusions, drawn from texts including Julia Ward Howe's 'Battle Hymn of the Republic', James Russell Lowell's poem 'This Present Crisis', and the spiritual 'Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho' (King, 1965b). Individual audience members may, of course, have recognised some, all or none of these references; more important is the fact that these texts all exist within the collective memory of the audience, binding together King's speech, but also enabling his audience as a whole to recognise the fragments from which it has been assembled.

King was Minister of a Baptist church in Alabama for six years from 1954 to 1960; many of the rhetorical devices employed in the writing and performance of his speech were presumably honed during time spent preaching, finding techniques to engage the attention of congregation, and bind them together into a unified community with a shared sense of purpose. Some of King's rhetorical devices are mirrored in the compositional techniques employed in *God's Keyboard*, particularly in 'Ainola' and the final movement 'How Long? Not Long?' In 'Ainola' the mezzo-soprano soloist represents both Marian Anderson and King: throughout the movement, she presents a series of statements drawn from King's speech, which are then 'answered' by the chorus, echoing the response patterns of the audience of the original speech. In bars 69-74, for example, the chorus lag slightly behind the soloist, responding to her statements with supportive affirmations ('Yes sir! Speak sir!'). The cornet, too, performs an echoing role at the opening and close of the movement, shadowing the mezzo-soprano's augmented fourth material. In bars 94-101, the cornet is itself echoed by solo flugelhorn, an echo of an echo that ushers in the close of the movement.

The final movement 'How Long! Not Long?' also sets sections of King's speech, and uses the idea of a 'processional' or 'march' as its underlying

structural principle. The movement starts with a solo voice — the mezzo-soprano soloist — gradually adding singers and instrumentalists, to give the sense of a crowd swelling in number. The soloist's melody, entirely in B flat Aeolian (bars 1-14), is elaborated polyphonically at rehearsal mark A by the first choir, and swiftly gives rise to a brief quotation from another musical work, 'Come Sunday' from Duke Ellington's *Black, Brown and Beige Suite* (bars 19-22) (Ellington, 1958). Ellington described his work as 'a parallel to the history of the American negro', conceiving the piece as a symphonic work with a programmatic structure, outlining the experience of African-Americans under slavery, their involvement in the civil war and the 19th century struggle for emancipation, and their impact on the cultural life of early-20th century Harlem (Pierpont, 2010). The theme of Ellington's work resonated in some respects with the ambition of my own work, and the quotation from 'Come Sunday', with its psalm-like invocation of a 'God of Mercy, God of Love [who will] look down and see my people through', is an acknowledgement of this (Ellington, 1958). In addition, the line-up of Ellington's big band served as a partial inspiration for the line-up of my ensemble. Although my ensemble, unlike Ellington's, includes such instruments as cornet, flugelhorn, harmonium, and bassoon, my inclusion of piano, percussion, double bass, and a trio of trombones was an attempt to evoke some elements of his trademark sound.

This movement then proceeds through a series of layering effects, as the procession accumulates musical material and gains momentum. In bars 23-27, the gospel choir present material first heard in 'Ainola', and this material is repeated, against the mezzo-soprano's Aeolian melody (bars 27-36). Following rehearsal mark C, the tempo accelerates; the ensemble presents some increasingly elaborate, largely homophonic material which oscillates between Gflat major 7 and Adim7/F chords, whilst the upper voices of the first choir, and the soloist emphasise the psychological and

physical cost of the marchers' struggle: 'some of our faces have been burned by the outpourings of the sweltering sun/some have slept in the mud ...'. The music reaches a climax; then at rehearsal mark D, three different types of music are juxtaposed: the spiritual 'Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho' sung by the soloist and the gospel choir, the combined Aeolian/'Come Sunday' material, sung by the first choir, and a syncopated march, presented by the ensemble, who are instructed to play in 'New Orleans-style ... like a jazz band spinning out of control.' My intention here was to evoke the coming-together of three disparate communities of marchers, each marching to a slightly different rhythm, to create a rhythmically complex, pulsating tapestry of sound. Yet the piece ends on a plaintive, rather than triumphant note; at rehearsal mark E, the march stops abruptly, heralding a brief coda. Here, the upper voices restate the soloist's opening four-note motif, but this time to the words 'How Long?', gradually dying away to leave only one solo soprano, over a sustained G flat major 11 chord in the piano, and sustained notes in the winds and brass, which gradually shift towards un-pitched breath tones, recalling the opening of 'Harmonium'. The piece ends, therefore, with a question, rather than an unambiguous conclusion, suggesting that the civil rights for which King and others marched in 1963 may not yet have been attained.

The overarching harmonic schema of the work is also to some extent circular; the G flat major 11 chord on which the work ends is heard as an interrupted cadence — rooted on the sixth degree of the scale — within the context of this movement's overarching B Flat Aeolian tonality. Yet G Flat major 11 can also be felt as a semitone-lower transposition of the G Lydian tonality which dominates the opening movement 'Harmonium'. Is the narrative of the work therefore circular — suggesting that, for all of the work's narrative of struggle, we have simply reached the harmonic location

of the opening, once again — or progressive, the semitone shift from G to G Flat Lydian indicating movement *away from* the opening tonality?

The psalm-sequence is an expression of the desire for spiritual, personal and communal liberation. At one level, the psalms document the relationship between a complex subject and a constantly-changing God; considered in another light, the psalms allude to the troubled history of the tribe of Israel in exile. The psalmist moves from despair to hope, from desire to fulfilment, from doubt to acclamation. Like the biblical psalm-sequence, *God's Keyboard* is an amalgam of a wide range of texts, written at different points in history, including hymns of praise, accounts of struggle and deprivation, and emotional appeals for deliverance. In attempting to create a work that would resonate strongly with the rhetoric of the psalms, I wanted also to acknowledge the fact that the psalms retain emotional currency today precisely because they speak to a world in which civil liberation has not fully been achieved. Like the psalms, which conclude with Psalm 150's exhortation to 'praise [God] with the sound of the trumpet ... [and upon] the psaltery and harp', *God's Keyboard* sounds a powerful note of jubilation in its final movement (King James Bible, Psalms, 150: 3). Yet the note of questioning sounded in its coda is intended to indicate that King's march must continue, that the place of freedom has not yet been reached.

### **Commentary 3: ‘Begin again, shall we?’: composing an operatic version of Joshua Casteel’s *Returns***

In this commentary, which focusses on my opera *Returns*, I address all four of my core research questions:

- *Can creative practice be used as a form of historical enquiry?*
- *Conversely, how can historical enquiry inform creative practice?*
- *What might it mean to think of the composer as the curator, rather than the author, of his or her musical materials?*
- *Does the notion of author as curator rather than author also undermine the idea of composer as solitary practitioner? Is the composer always essentially engaged in an act of collaboration, either with other living artists, or with the originators of the other texts than inform his or her work?*

Whilst, in this work, I do make limited use of archive materials and musical ‘found objects’, my primary focus in this work was on creating a dramatic narrative that itself explored the idea of historical enquiry, and that used this idea as its guiding structural principle. Joshua Casteel’s play *Returns*, which centres on the struggle of a traumatised soldier to recover and organise his memories of what happened to him in Iraq, proved ideal for this task. Casteel’s text, which consists of a single act in which a series of vignettes, provided me with the opportunity to create a structurally coherent work comprised of short fragments drawing on a range of different musical styles, including elements of Persian and Indian music. In addition to an analysis of the key musical elements of the work, I also consider the challenges of

setting Casteel's allusive, non-linear text, thinking of this as a 'collaboration' with an absent writer.

They say that salvation is living in eternity. I heard though that eternity might also be like living fully present. Fighting for that present is the battle of the return. Sometimes you go forward, and sometimes behind.'

(Casteel, 2007, p.5)

On the evening of June 18th 2006, a fair-haired man in his mid-twenties, boyish and bespectacled, stood up on stage at the Royal Court Theatre in London, in front of an audience including the playwrights Harold Pinter, Vaclav Havel and Tom Stoppard and the actors Sinead Cusack and Jeremy Irons, and read the following words (Vasquez, 2012; Casteel, 2008):

Questions. Now, of course, questions must be asked.  
We're going to have to talk about a great many things  
... I *want* you to know that I'm here for the long haul.  
I'm not backing down. I'll keep on asking until there's  
simply nothing left to ask. So, where to begin? Begin  
again, shall we? Why don't you tell me what it was you  
were doing before we arrested you? No? Don't like that  
idea? Don't want to tell me that? (*Pause*) If you've done  
nothing wrong, you've nothing to fear. Nothing to hide.  
But, you do have something to fear, don't you? Don't  
you? (Casteel, 2007, p.10)

The author (and performer) of this powerful piece of writing – an extract from a longer play, *Returns* – was Joshua Casteel, a veteran of the Iraq War and graduate of the MFA Playwriting programme at the University of

Iowa. Casteel grew up in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, a city in some respects emblematic of the American Midwest. The area was once a vast expanse of rolling prairie. Even now, it's a deeply evocative, resonant landscape: drive 90 miles out of the city and you can encounter hundreds of Native American burial mounds, in the form of birds, bears and other animals, rearing out of the land (National Park Service, 2017). Grant Wood, painter of *American Gothic*, that iconic image of Midwestern American life in which an austere couple stare forbiddingly at the viewer, framed by a white, wooden house and a pitchfork – lived in Cedar Rapids (Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, 2007).

Like many other Iowan teenagers, Casteel enlisted in the Army Reserves at age seventeen. A talented linguist, Casteel subsequently joined the 202nd Military Intelligence Battalion of the U.S. Army as an Arabic translator and interrogator; he was eventually posted to Baghdad's infamous Abu Ghraib prison (Casteel, 2006, p.11). Whilst at Abu Ghraib, an encounter with a 22-year old Iraqi detainee precipitated a transformation of Casteel's perspective on the war and an abrupt shifting of his moral compass. Casteel described this encounter in the following words, when interviewed in the documentary *Soldiers of Conscience* (2007):

He then started talking about Jesus, that I wasn't fulfilling the call, to turn the other cheek, to love one's enemies. I took a little bit offence to this comment, because it came from the mouth of a self-proclaimed jihadist who told me that he would kill me if he had the chance. But something had definitely occurred within me. When posed with that kind of challenge, I had nothing I could say to him. I absolutely agreed with him. My position as a U.S. Army interrogator

contradicted my calling simply as a Christian  
(Weimberg and Ryan, 2007).

Casteel was subsequently honourably discharged from the army as a conscientious objector. His newfound commitment to pacifism subsequently found articulate expression in a series of plays and non-fiction texts written whilst studying at the University of Iowa. At Iowa, one of the most prestigious schools of creative writing in the United States, Joshua received tuition from the theatre director David Gothard and the playwright Naomi Wallace, who helped Joshua to develop his creative vision.

When I first read the script for *Returns* – provided to me by Gothard - I was gripped by the play's energy, and its centrifugal force: written in one continuous act, without scene-breaks, the play derives its sense of structure from repetitions of key motifs, tropes and phrases, which return over and over again, often as ironic or parodic versions of their previous iterations. This choice of dramatic method was rooted in Casteel's own experience: he wrote *Returns* whilst suffering from post-traumatic stress, and one of the symptoms of this condition is the fragmenting of memory and personality. The central character, James – whose voice you heard in the extract at the start of this commentary – interacts with an Iraqi detainee, Ahmed, a childhood friend and fellow soldier, Mark, and a senior officer, Sergeant Patrick. The play revolves around his attempts to answer the impossible question asked of many soldiers returning from war: 'what was it like?'. For Casteel, this need on the part of a soldier's friends and family to capture their authentic experience is heightened within a media culture in which images of war are both mined for entertainment and rendered banal through over-repetition. In an essay about the popular war-themed video-game *Call of Duty*, Casteel noted that

[my young students] with their ever-expanding libraries of shoot-'em-ups like *Call of Duty* ... cared deeply ... about discovering "what's really going on." Maybe they could intuit the vacuity enveloping them, just not diagnose it. All that realism crowding out reality. You were there ... what was it like? they'd ask (Casteel, 2010).

The soldier's predicament is, Casteel suggests, an unenviable one on two separate counts. On the one hand, the version of war that he or she might present to their eager audience will inevitably fail to live up to the sanitised, heroic version depicted in films, video games and news reports. On the other, the soldier may themselves have difficulty unifying their memories into a single coherent narrative due to the dissociative and fragmenting effects of trauma. As the psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk notes in his recent work *The Body Keeps The Score*, post-traumatic stress disorder is primarily a somatically and neurologically grounded condition; trauma can cause significant impairments not only to memory function, but also to the way that the body's key sensory perceptions operate (van der Kolk, 2014, pp. 89-90, 175-6). Because, van der Kolk argues, post-traumatic stress disorder is primarily a physical rather than a mental disorder, the most promising approaches to tackle trauma will be those that engage with the body, rather than those which focus primarily on mental experience (van der Kolk, 2014, pp.207-8).

Reading van der Kolk's work gave me a means of understanding the conflicts that generate the momentum of Casteel's play. In *Returns* it becomes increasingly clear as the play progresses that the other characters are all aspects of James' own fragmented conscious; the action unfolds in a range of bizarre tableaux through which James attempts to piece together his sense of himself and of his past. The play is haunted by the figure of a little boy,

Dhahur; James is not sure whether he played a part in the boy's death, and obsessively counts the shells in his gun to establish whether or not he fired the lethal round. James' attempts to understand the events that befell him in Iraq play out as a series of interactions between action and recollection: the drama of *Returns* juxtaposes intense physical activity – interrogations, drinking competitions, and mock-religious rites – with static passages of soliloquy focussed on the attempt to remember particular events. Following van der Kolk it might therefore be argued that the physicality of Casteel's play is in part a response to the inadequacy of thought alone as a means of ordering and coming-to-terms-with traumatic memory. The play is, in essence, a series of actions in search of a narrative coherence only glimpsed at in its many reflective passages.

Van der Kolk's approach had given me a way of understanding how the experience of post-traumatic stress disorder had shaped *Returns* at a structural level. I became aware, too, that if the play was a tragedy, it was uniquely a tragedy of my generation. I was a young adult and a recent graduate in 2003, and, with millions of others participated in the Stop The War March that year. The head-rush of popular protest swiftly turned to the hangover of political disenfranchisement when Tony Blair took Britain into the war against the wishes of a substantial percentage of the population, a decision that has recently been called into question by the Chilcot enquiry (Chilcot, 2016). More importantly, the advent of the war placed thousands of men and women of my age into the frontline with – as Chilcot as shown – an inadequate level of equipment and confusion around military objectives, and caused very substantial levels of civilian casualties (Chilcot, 2016). There are many forms of casualty in war: those who are not broken in body on the field of conflict may be broken in spirit and mind on their return from battle, a fact that Casteel documents eloquently.

Whilst the play's content and context represented something of a burden of responsibility for me as a composer, its idiom and structure presented an enticing challenge. Casteel's prose is intrinsically musical: it is densely rhythmic, with a powerful sense of dramatic counterpoint and tempo. Yet, as I outlined above, the work has no linear narrative – its story proceeds through accumulation, rather than direction – and the play is cast as a single 75-minute act, with no obvious scene changes or breaks in the action. How best to reflect this structure in music? Casteel's play makes extensive use of repeated motifs as an organising principle; one of the most prominent of these is the phrase 'what was it like?', mentioned above. Casteel re-inflects this and similar motifs with different layers of meaning by passing the phrase between different characters, changing the pace, volume and tone of delivery. In so doing, Casteel illustrates the experience of trauma — the thwarted attempt to order and interpret memories by constantly revisiting them — but also enables his audience to perceive an underlying structural order within the play. The experiences of James, the protagonist, resist order; paradoxically, it is this resistance that gives the play its structure.

The following passage — from the start of the play — illustrates Casteel's approach to reworking a motif:

*James and Mark interrogate Ahmed, Jonathan is interpreting (repeating in English everything James and Mark ask Ahmed), SGT Patrick stands guard.*

JAMES: What was it like?

*Ahmed is silent.*

MARK: What was it like?!!

*Ahmed stoops his head.*

JAMES: Keep your hands at your side, and your eyes on that darkness on the wall. That darkness is all you are permitted.

*Ahmed follows James' instructions. James paces circles around Ahmed.*

JAMES: What was it like when your name was taken from you? We have given you a new name. But you cannot keep it. Only I call you this name. It is the only name which matters for you now.

MARK: *(Softly)* What. Was. It. Like.

MARK: You see. This is all that matters now. This wood. This air. That darkness on the wall. Feel this closeness.

*James is inches away from Ahmed, running his hand just above Ahmed's torso, breathing upon him.*

JAMES: What was it like!!!

*James disintegrates, hands over his head in shame, Mark and Jonathan look to each other. James walks to the table, followed by Mark, then Jonathan, then SGT Patrick, then Ahmed. They all sit.*

(Casteel, 2007, pp 3-4)

The use of recurring motifs — or 'leitmotif' — is common both to opera composition, where it was perhaps most famously employed in the operas of Richard Wagner, and in film score composition. *Returns* is unusual as a text in the extent to which it employs motif as a structural principle; the challenge for me as composer was therefore to find an economical musical response to Casteel's pre-existing motivic schema. In particular, I wanted to establish a relationship between the melodic material of particular motifs and the overarching harmonic universe of the work, so that these motifs could clearly be identified as the 'DNA' underpinning and infusing larger-scale structures. To give a detailed account of all of the motivic techniques employed in *Returns* would be a prohibitively lengthy task: instead, I will

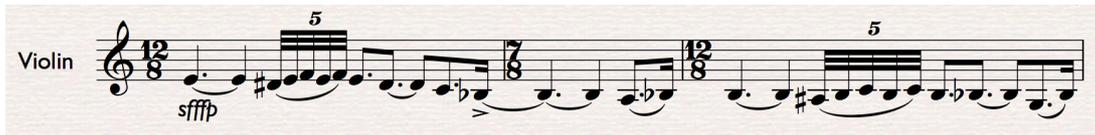
consider here two examples, a motif first played on the oud at the opening of the work, which is later associated with the idea of ‘whirlwind’, and the motif associated with the little boy, Dhahur. (A comprehensive list of motivic devices and their structural relationships is provided at Appendix A.)

(Image 11: Cave, J. (2017). *Returns*. p.3, bars 1-11)

The prelude to *Returns* opens with a repeated two-note figure, which is immediately elaborated into a tetrachord consisting of C-B-F#-G (bars 3-4), and then is further elaborated into a scalic figure (bar 6). This extended version of the initial motif provides much of the melodic material of the Prelude. At rehearsal marks A and D, this figure is presented first on viola and cello, and then later on oud, violin and viola. This presentation is a homage to the *pish-daramad* or ‘pre-introduction’ heard at the start of a traditional Persian classical performance, in which the instruments of the orchestra present truncated motifs from the performance to follow (Youssefzadeh, 2015, p.335). After rehearsal mark E, the prelude draws to a close, with repeated restatements of the motif in its tetrachordal form (bars 62, 65, 69, and 71).

The scalic version of the motif appears some twenty-five minutes later in the opera, where it underpins an extended section evoking a whirlwind

travelling across the desert. In this version the tetrachord — which, in this version, is E-D#-Bflat-B — is implied, through the emphasis placed on B flat (bar 429) and B natural (bar 430).



(Image 12: Cave, J. (2017). *Returns*. p.29, bars 428-430)

As in the prelude, the scalic version of this motif is restated insistently throughout this section, and is presented in contrast to a number of other key figures, including a dance-like figure based on parallel fifths heard first in the violin, marimba, and clarinet at bar 438, and, at bar 465, a lyrical theme also featuring parallel fifths. The dense polyphonic textures following rehearsal mark CC draw heavily on this scalic figure; from bar 472 to rehearsal mark FF the scalic figure is combined with more explicitly tonal material in which the dance-like parallel fifths motif feature heavily.

My intention here is to mimic in music the process of memory-association-and-interrogation that underpins the plot of *Returns*. Just as James, the protagonist, struggles not only to recover his memories, but also to establish the correct connections between them, so my use of motif is intended to suggest particular connections between narrative events, which may or may not be misleading. As the text unfolds, it becomes clear that James may have conflated particular memories and suppressed others. At rehearsal mark HHHH, for example, James revisits a scene first presented at rehearsal mark PP in which, under orders from Sergeant Patrick, he is poised for combat whilst en route to the front line. Returning to the scene for the second time, James realises that he has repressed the memory of seeing the little boy, Dhahur, standing at the side of the road, and has, presumably, also

repressed the memory of shooting him by mistake. This scene starts in the same way as its previous presentation at PP but swiftly transforms into an elegiac passage starting at bar 1402 to the text 'Little eyes! What were you doing at the side of the road?', as realisation begins to dawn.

In his 1899 essay 'Screen Memories' Sigmund Freud noted the apparently unreliable nature of memory-association, an unreliability that is also highly creative. He presents as a case-study the testimony of a 'man of university education, aged thirty-eight' who has become fixated upon a particular childhood memory: a vignette in which, as a little boy, Freud's client had walked across a meadow of yellow flowers, accompanied by two friends, a boy and a girl. The little girl picks a bunch of flowers, which the boys promptly steal; and the vignette ends at a cottage, at which a peasant-woman gives each of the children some fresh bread (Freud, 1962, p.309). Freud subsequently identifies the source of the fixation as a later memory from the client's adolescent of being in love with a girl in a yellow dress from whom he subsequently became estranged. The client has 'projected two fantasies onto one another and made a childhood memory of them ... [almost] like [a work] of fiction' (Freud, 1962, p.315).

Freud's account of the unreliability of memory provides an excellent critical lens through which to view the plot of *Returns*. Just as his client's account of his fixation, and its unravelling upon the psychotherapist's couch provides the material of Freud's essay, so too it is James' creative misremembering, and memory-interrogation that creates the narrative of the opera. My intention in using motivic devices was to mimic this narrative process, presenting motifs in different combinations throughout the work in order to emulate the way in which James' memory has associated and superimposed different events. This is illustrated in the use throughout the opera of a motif associated with Dhahur, the little boy whom James believes

he may have killed. It appears for the first time at the start of the opera's opening scene, on solo violin (bars 79-82):

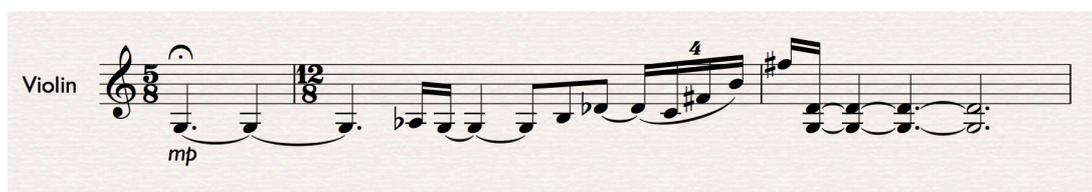


(Image 13: Cave, J. (2017). *Returns*. p.8, bars 79-82)

This four-note melody is in the Lydian mode; this mode is identical to the raga known in the north Indian system as *yaman*, and in the south Indian Carnatic system as *kalyan*. In both of these Indian systems it is typically associated with evening, and with a mood of contemplation and tranquility. To foreground this association, the violinist is instructed to play 'quasi sarangi' in reference to the bowed instrument with many sympathetic strings used extensively in north Indian classical music. The motif is immediately elaborated through addition (bars 85-102), evoking the idea of memory association: as the melody is unfurled, so, it is suggested, an initial recollection of Dhahur has immediately prompted an attempt to uncover more extensive memories of him.

There is a brief allusion to the motif at bar 142 at the start of a brief *arioso* passage for the character Mark; at bar 189, in a passage that mirrors and develops ideas from the earlier *arioso* passage, the initial melody preserves the melodic contour of bar 142, but the pitches here — B-D-Eflat-D-G-Fsharp-D — represent a contraction of the earlier motif (Bflat-D-E-D-A). My intention in creating this pair of brief allusions was to keep this motif present in the minds of the audience at a subliminal level: the initial brief quotation of the motif with its original pitches preserved prepares the audience for the distorted, contracted version of the melody appearing —

like a half-recalled memory — in the second passage. Another distorted version of the motif appears at bar 355 (rehearsal mark X): here it appears on solo violin, as at the start of the first scene, but the G-B-Csharp-Fsharp tetrachord is combined with an ascending semitone pattern associated with one the work's other main motifs, the motif linked to the question 'What was it like?':



(Image 14: Cave, J. (2017). *Returns*. p.26, bars 355-357)

The character of Dhahur finally enters the action at bar 604. It was my intention that, by this point in the opera, the audience should be familiar with the motif associated with him, both in its original form, and in a number of modified forms suggestive of memories that have either been only half-remembered or have been combined with other memories, in the manner of Freud's 'screen memory' theory. Just before his appearance at bar 604, the imminence of Dhahur's appearance is signalled in a number of different ways. At bar 560, Ahmed uses the notes of the Dhahur tetrachord, set to the words 'A little boy alone in an attic'; and in bars 585-589, James uses the tetrachord to invoke Dhahur by name. When Dhahur finally does appear, it is as the physical manifestation of a motif with which the audience has had the opportunity to become familiar.

Apart from a rearranged version of the tetrachord at bar 655, following Dhahur's appearance, the motif hardly reappears until the opera's final

minutes, where it is combined with the 'what was it like?' motif into a single melody:



(Image 15: Cave, J. (2017). *Returns*. p.106, bars 1504-1508)

This composite melody is given first to Ahmed, Mark and Dhahur, in unison (bars 1504-8), then to James (bars 1520-4), and then, at the very end of the work, to Dhahur alone (bar 1537; bars 1542-4). The disappearance of the motif following Dhahur's appearance suggests that the tetrachord represents James' repressed memory of the little boy. The various presentations of the motif prior to Dhahur's appearance onstage enact the process through which James attempts to conjure up Dhahur's 'ghost'. Once Dhahur himself has appeared, the motif has served its purpose, until the very end of the work when, it might be argued, the combination of the 'What was it like?' motif and the Dhahur motif into a single melody represents a form of closure on James' part. Dhahur sings the melody that has conjured him into life, bringing to an end both his role as the voice of James' consciousness and the work itself.

Through my use of motifs in *Returns*, outlined briefly here with reference to a couple of examples, I have sought to find a musical counterpart to Casteel's use of recurring ideas within the text of his play, and to Freud's theory of memory-juxtaposition as outlined in his essay 'Screen Memories'. As such, my motifs should create a shifting musical terrain for the audience, one in which the relationship between different musical ideas, and the memories and characters to which they relate, is constantly in flux.

## **Polystylism in Returns**

Casteel's stage-play is an inherently musical text. As I have argued, Casteel uses motifs throughout his work to create structure much as a composer would, and the overall form of the play resembles an extended rondo. In addition, Casteel makes frequent reference to different types of music in the text. His soldiers apply Radiohead's *Pyramid Song* during an interrogation, quote Bob Dylan in the letters they exchange with their families, and sing songs learned at Bible camp when they get drunk (Casteel, 2007, pp.8, 18, 25). The play also brings music associated with different religious traditions into stark contrast with each other. The play opens with a recording of the *adhan* or Islamic 'call to prayer', with which the characters join in: later in the play, the characters frequently use phrases from Catholic tradition, which, in a liturgical context, would usually be set to music (Casteel, 2007, p.3).

Explicit musical references, then, are as much a part of the sound-world of Casteel's play as the numerous references to other types of sound in the text: the chattering of a detainee's teeth during waterboarding, a form of torture, the cataclysmic din of an explosion that kills eight marines (Casteel, 2007, pp.8, 29). As a composer, I wanted to find a way of incorporating all of these sonic references into my score, whilst still preserving stylistic coherence. One particular challenge that presented itself early in the composition process was the extent to which I wanted to introduce elements of Eastern music traditions into my score as a means of evoking the spirit of the Iraqi landscape. In the two other substantial works in this portfolio, *Latrabjarg* and *God's Keyboard*, I staged a series of encounters with different

musical traditions — including Icelandic *rimur* folk-song, shape-note singing and gospel music — as a way of generating musical structure and distinctive idioms. In each case, I considered the ethical implications of this form of creative practice: rather than trying to create authentic *rimur* or gospel music, or looking to appropriate elements of these traditions into my work in order to instil a sense of novelty or exoticism, I wanted instead to generate a respectful, non-hierarchical dialogue between these traditions and the stylistic gestures of contemporary classical music. In the earliest sketches for *Returns*, therefore, I decided deliberately to eschew elements of Arabic music, so as to avoid the accusation of tokenism.

My approach to this issue changed following a number of group-classes and individual supervisions with Kiya Tabassian and Dhruba Ghosh as part of a composer-residency at the Banff Centre, Canada, in early 2015. Kiya and Dhruba were expert exponents of the Persian and North Indian classical traditions, respectively: both were skilled instrumentalists, and both had substantial experience in combining these traditions with Western contemporary classical music as composers and performers. The advice I received from them was that I shouldn't be afraid to stage the kind of 'cultural encounter' in *Returns* that I had included in my other compositions: the key thing was to find musicians sensitive to the kind of musical interaction I wished to create, and to allow space within the score for different musical idioms to be heard alongside each other clearly.

As a result I decided to incorporate elements of the traditions that I had studied at Banff into my score, albeit with some provisos. I decided not to restrict myself to using Iraqi-Arabic music, with which I had limited familiarity, but decided instead to make use of Persian and North Indian elements which I had studied with Dhruba, Kiya, and the tabla player Yogesh Samsi. This would mean that the score would act as the location for a series of 'musical encounters' in the manner of *Latrabjarg* and *God's Keyboard*,

but the resulting musical idiom would not in any way resemble ‘authentic’ Iraqi-Arabic music. I did, however, decide to make prominent use of the *oud*, an instrument that is found within this tradition, primarily for its timbral palette rather than its specific association with Arabic music. There are no genuine Arabic *maqam* or Persian *dastgah* (modes) in *Returns*. Instead I wanted to focus on particular stylistic elements from the Persian and North Indian traditions: in particular, I wanted to evoke the style of unison playing found in Persian classical orchestras at certain points in the score, and to explore some of the rhythmic practices found in North Indian classical music.

Many of the exercises in Persian classical music in which I took part at Banff involved playing extended melodies or *gushe* as part of a conductorless group, in free time but preserving a collective sense of ensemble. This style of playing is particularly evident in the introduction to a Persian classical performance, or *pish-daramad*, in which melodic fragments of the pieces to be performed are presented as a form of overture. The resultant effect is heterophonic, with each player performing the material of the *pish-damarad* with slightly different timing, interpretation and ornamentation (Youssefzadeh, 2015, p.335). This style of performance resonated strongly, in my thinking, with the style of the play, in which particular motifs appear repeatedly, but with different inflection, timing, and intention.

There are a number of passages in *Returns* that evoke this style of performance. At the start of the Prelude, for instance, the solo *oud* introduces a florid melody (bars 1-11) which is rapidly elaborated by viola and cello (bars 13-21) and then developed further by *oud*, violin and viola (bars 23-32). With its frequent use of ornamentation and tremolo in the *oud* part, this passage is intended to emulate the start of a *pish-damarad*, although, unlike in the Persian traditional form, the melody is heard in counterpoint with a number of other figures: breath tones and harmonics in the strings (bars 6-8

and 17-21), and a descending figure in the cello and viola (bars 24-6). The *pish-damarad* style is evoked again in a later passage, drawing on elements from the prelude, during which James begins to interrogate Ahmed (bars 392-427). Recalling the prelude's opening, the *oud* plays a fragmented melody, (bar 392); as the intensity of the interrogation increases, the *oud* is joined by strings, and the tempo begins to accelerate, underscored by a pulsating rhythmic pattern on the *dumbek*.

An important passage at rehearsal mark MMM, which immediately follows Mark's suicide, is intended to emulate the use of microtones in Persian classical music. For the first time in the score quarter-tones are used, along with an inverted version of the repeated semiquaver motif first heard at the start of the prelude. My intention here, as in the earlier *pish-damarad*-style passages was to evoke a heterophonic style of playing: in this passage, the string players move very slowly away from unison, suggestive of a melody played in this style, but at a very slow speed.

With the exception of the first statement of the Dhahur motif, at the start of the opera's opening scene, which makes use of rag *yaman*, my interest in North Indian classical music in *Returns* is restricted to rhythm. Whilst studying at Banff, I learned that the rhythmic foundations of North Indian classical music are *tala* or 'time-cycles'. *Tala* are repeating rhythmic patterns, or 'cyclical metrical framework[s]' established by a tabla player and then elaborated during the course of the composition (Widdess, 2015, p.144). The notion of cyclicity and repetition central to the *tala* concept resonated strongly with the ideas of memory and recall central to *Returns*, and so I was keen to explore this idea in my opera.

Initially I was interested in dividing the opera into a variety of different sections, each governed by a different *tala*. This idea rapidly seemed too restrictive, however, and so I decided instead to use *tala* processes as inspiration for different kinds of rhythmic layering, which are employed at a

number of different points in the opera. In particular, I was interested in drawing inspiration from the ways in which tabla players develop and vary *tala* by using rhythmic ratios. One example of this is at the start of the work's first scene (bars 76-94). The tam-tam and water gong play a simple two-note figure (bars 76-78), which, when it returns a few bars later, is immediately halved in length (bars 81-82). When the sequence returns at bars 92-94, the whole of it is halved. (Modified versions of this figure also appears at rehearsal mark P, scored for timpani and bass drum, and at bars 252-262, in the original scoring, and again at rehearsal mark Y (bars 380-386)). This is an extremely basic form of the kind of rhythmic extension or diminution often employed by tabla players.

In an important passage at rehearsal mark J, I made use of another tabla technique, the use of overlapping time-schemes to create complex patterns of syncopation. Here the countertenor, violin, viola, and clarinet play in simple time, in 10/8, whilst the harp, mandolin, vibraphone, untuned percussion play compound time groupings of three semiquavers. My intention here was to create the illusion of two separate time-schemes overlapping, as an analogue to the technique of motivic association that I discussed above. Just as, in line with Freud's concept of 'screen memories', I used motifs in different contexts and combinations to suggest memories being remembered, misremembered and superimposed, so too at this point in the score I wanted to use superimposed time-schemes to indicate that James' present experience, having returned from Iraq, has become superimposed with remembered time.

This juxtaposition of 10/8 and compound-time semiquaver groupings is strongly associated with the character of Mark. This musical material is referenced at rehearsal mark BBB and again at rehearsal mark JJJ in a pair of linked passages describing firstly Mark's family life in rural Iowa, and secondly his death by drowning. The first passage revolves around a

humorous anecdote about fishing. In bars 833-838, quicksilver arpeggiated figures in the clarinet, harp and violin, suggesting the movement of fish underwater, are juxtaposed with the semiquaver compound-time grouping first employed at rehearsal mark J. At bar 841 — rehearsal mark CCC — the character of the music abruptly changes as the semiquaver pattern is transformed into a country ‘hoe-down’, complete with banjo and honky-tonk piano: this brief section details a comic incident in which Mark leaves a fish that he had caught in the sink for his father to discover. The material is transformed at rehearsal mark JJJ in order to describe how an apparently innocuous group-walk by the sea ends in tragedy when Mark dives headlong into the ocean. Here, the ‘quicksilver’ arpeggiated figures on the clarinet (bars 928-931) lead swiftly into more urgent triplet material (bars 932-935) as Mark’s friends hurry to keep up with him. The parodic ‘hoe-down’ version of the material is referenced in the piano (bars 937-942), whilst the semiquaver groupings are transformed into urgent scalic figures in the strings as the group of friends draw closer to the promontory where Mark is to meet his end (bars 937-948).

In addition to references to Persian and Indian classical styles, *Returns* is filled with musical quotations and invocations of many other musical styles. Some of these musical references are intentionally oblique. For instance, in bars 196-206, the harp and mandolin quote a fragment of the plainsong melody ‘Veni Creator Spiritus’ during a passage in which Mark considers the nature of eternity: ‘they say that salvation is living in eternity. I heard though that eternity might be living fully present.’ The plainsong is presented as one of a number of different layers within the musical texture at this point: it was not my intention that the plainsong fragment should be heard distinctly, but rather should be experienced in the same way as many of the character James’ memories, half-glimpsed and half-recognised. Similarly, in the passage described in the score as ‘Waterboarding

Aria' (rehearsal mark S to rehearsal mark W) both the initial chord progression and the *spiccato col legno* technique employed by the string players are intended to evoke the aria 'What Power Art Thou?' also known as the 'Song of the Gold Genius' from Purcell's opera *King Arthur* (Purcell, 2012, p.66). By making this intertextual allusion, I aimed to situate my own 'cold scene', with its highly-stylised presentation of a graphic contemporary subject — torture — within the operatic tradition of which Purcell is a part. An audience familiar with Purcell's work *might* get the reference, but my primary intention was to evoke Purcell's style as a compositional device rather than as a stylistic cue for the listener. By referencing Purcell in this way, it was my intention to make it seem as if the music itself were half-remembering an earlier evocation of freezing cold in opera.

There are a number of places in the score, however, where particular styles are evoked more explicitly. One example is the section based upon the religious children's song 'Rise and Shine' (also known as the 'Arky Arky Song') (rehearsal mark TT to rehearsal mark ZZ). At this point in the opera, the characters have just participated in a mock ceremony in which James is awarded a medal for bravery. One of the soldiers, Jonathan, pretends to play a banjo and starts singing in the bluegrass style associated with the Southern United States as an ironic response to this ceremony: his suggestion is that this medal-presentation, conducted in safety 'a whole fucking ocean away from Iraq', is not an accurate reflection of the actual experience of the soldier on the battlefield. Jonathan's camp-fire song describes in childishly-alliterative language how Noah builds an 'arke-arky' to escape from the 'floody-floody': we recognise that Jonathan is here drawing an ironic parallel both with the ocean-journey of soldiers returning home from Iraq and also with the struggle of those same soldiers to free themselves psychologically from the 'muddy-muddy' of the battlefield on their return. My arrangement of this song, making prominent use of honky-tonk style piano, banjo, a

walking bass line, and jazz-style close harmony draws heavily on the country hoedown style also employed at rehearsal mark CCC. Quickly, however, the music spins out of control at rehearsal mark UU, and whilst elements of the hoedown style remain — such as the walking bass — the overall effect is one of stylistic dissolution: as the characters become drunk, and their singsong descends into a brawl, so too a clearly-defined, familiar folk-style gives way to more fragmented music.

In using polystylism in *Returns*, I wanted to evoke the musicality and musical allusiveness of Casteel's text, and also to depict a psychological landscape that is constantly in flux, where different musical styles frequently emerge, only to be rapidly transformed into other idioms. Similarly, in using elements of Persian and Indian classical traditions, I wanted to evoke the character James' experience of being in the unfamiliar landscape of Iraq, without making any attempt at creating 'authentic' recreations of these styles. Ultimately the only point of connection between these disparate styles is James himself: by hearing fragments of folk-music, Eastern classical traditions, and plainsong within the score, and by attempting to piece together these musical connections for ourselves, we are able to listen in on the world of his troubled consciousness.

### **Text-setting and the problem of language in *Returns***

My general approach to text-setting is discussed in more detail in the commentary discussing my portfolio of choral works; in the context of *Returns* I want to draw attention both to the particular challenges presented by setting Casteel's text, and also consider Casteel's writing style in the context of some of his literary contemporaries.

A growing number of US army veterans have — like Casteel — forged literary careers, drawing on their experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan for inspiration. In composing an operatic version of *Returns* I was interested to consider whether Casteel’s style of writing could be situated in the context of an emergent school of ‘Iraq-writing’. By reading other recent responses to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, I hoped to identify some of the defining hallmarks of Casteel’s style, and hence to develop a clearer sense of how I might respond to these qualities in writing.

On reading the opening of Phil Klay’s short story collection *Redeployment*, published in 2014, I immediately identified some points of comparison with *Returns*. Both texts allude heavily to opaque military jargon and acronyms — Klay refers to ‘M9s’, ‘XOs’ and ‘KA-BARs’ — as a means of lending authenticity to their literary worlds, and also distancing those worlds from the everyday (Klay, 2014, pp.2-3). The rhythm of Klay’s prose also resonated strongly with Casteel’s: both writers display a fondness for using varying sentence-lengths as a means of creating rhythmic counterpoint within a paragraph or speech, often for comic or ironic effect. The following example from the opening of *Redeployment* is illustrative:

See it’s not a straight shot back, from war to the Jacksonville mall. When our deployment was up, they put us on TQ, this logistics base out in the desert, let us decompress a bit. I’m not sure what they meant by that. Decompress. We took it to mean jerk off a lot in the showers. Smoke a lot of cigarettes and play a lot of cards. And then they took us to Kuwait and put us on a commercial airliner to go home (Klay, 2014, p.1).

This paragraph is framed by two references to the soldier’s journey home: the journey from ‘war to the Jacksonville mall’ and from ‘Kuwait ... on a commercial airliner ... to go home’ (Klay, 2014, p.1). This movement is

paralleled in the passage's oscillation between military jargon and civilian language, between short and long sentences, and between soldierly duty and vulgar bathos. This technique of extreme contrasts in geography, register and tone is explicitly employed to mimic post-traumatic stress disorder. As Klay's protagonist later notes:

the problem is, your thoughts don't come out in any kind of straight order. You don't think, Oh, I did A, then B, then C, then D. You try to think about home, then you're in the torture house. You see the body parts in the locker and the retarded guy in the cage' (Klay, 2014, p.2).

This method evokes the inner life of Klay's protagonist, and also creates a varied, engaging experience for his reader. As in detective fiction, we read on because we wish to see the complete narrative underlying the series of clues that create the text: in this style of writing the experience of the protagonist in attempting to piece together these clues parallels our own reading experience.

Other authors who have articulated their experience of conflict in Iraq or Afghanistan in somewhat different literary styles still share some features with Casteel and Klay. For instance, Brian Van Reet, in his 2016 novel *Spoils*, adopts a conventional third-person linear narrative, but peppers his prose and dialogue with unsettling references to 'LTs', 'jihadis' and 'Chinese water torture' (Van Reet, 2016, p.4). And, in Kevin Powers' 2012 novel, *The Yellow Birds*, highly lyrical evocations of Iraq's landscape are constantly undercut by jarring references to the casualties of war, their 'faces puffed and green, allergic now to life' (Powers, 2012, p.4). While these authors adopt a range of techniques, they are united in their use of jarring disjuncture as a literary device: between the beauty of the landscape and the ugliness of war's

aftermath, between military language and literary prose, between combat and civilian life.

In the section on polystylism above I provided an account of how I used different musical styles to evoke the inner life of Casteel's protagonist, and as a counterpart to the sound-world of the original play. In addressing the specific challenge of setting Casteel's words to music, I wanted to draw on my increased awareness of the hallmarks of his written style, gained by reading *Returns* in the context of other works by recent veterans. The key principle I adopted was to be eclectic in my approach, in order to do justice to the rhythmic counterpoint and abrupt register-shifts of Casteel's writing. My score, therefore, includes a wide range of different text-setting techniques, including melisma, *arioso* melodic writing and passages for the characters singing in chorus, as well as *secco* recitative and naturalistic speech-rhythms.

Consider, by way of an example, the passage between rehearsal marks R and S. Here the dialogue shifts rapidly back and forth as Mark begs James to act as his confessor. A two-note semitone motif, first heard at bar 248, is passed rapidly back between the two characters, acting as the basis for a number of the vocal figures. These vocal figures, however, vary substantially in speed, rhythm and vocal contour. In bars 252 and 253, for example, Mark's words are set to music that is intended to emulate both the haste of his speech-rhythm — as he begs James to listen to him — as well as the melodic contour of his speech, as it rises for emphasis at the word 'confession'. In bars 255 and 256, however, the words 'bless me Father for I have sinned' are set to a melodic figure that employs two-note melisma, elongating the rhythm of the words and exaggerating the natural melodic contour of the phrase. At bars 258 and 259 the semitone-motif returns; here the rhythm of the words is again elongated. At the end of this passage, immediately before rehearsal mark S, James repeats Mark's words and the musical figures to

which they are set (bars 272-274). Here, though, the figures are differentiated by an extreme shift in vocal range, the first phrase ending on the bass-baritone's low F# and the second set employing his falsetto register. James' echoing of Mark's speech mirrors the rhythmic interplay of Casteel's dialogue; by having James also emulate Mark's countertenor vocal range, which, for the baritone is an area of vocal fragility rather than strength, I also wanted to emphasise the irony in James' use of the phrase 'I have never confessed', and, by extension, the vulnerability of James' position.

This passage illustrates something of the eclecticism of the approach to text-setting employed in *Returns*. As I suggested above, Iraq veterans who have sought to draw on their experiences for literary inspiration have often adopted a similarly eclectic approach to the interplay of different tonal registers, forms of language, narrative elements and geographical locations in their works: this eclecticism is particularly evident in Phil Klay's work as well as Casteel's own writings. By employing a wide range of text-setting techniques without privileging any one method in particular, I have attempted to create a musical equivalent to the rhythmic and tonal variety of Casteel's play.

As I indicated at the start of this commentary, although the composition of this work included some elements of curatorial practice - the inclusion of elements of Persian and Indian musical traditions, plainsong, campfire songs and so on - my primary interest was in using the idea of historical enquiry as the defining structural principle of the work. Working with the non-linearity, allusiveness, and complex structure of Casteel's text presented me with a series of complex collaborative channels. As such, the composition of this work aligns closely with my key research questions.

#### **Commentary 4: ‘Shards of Vocabulary’ : choral settings of texts familiar and unfamiliar**

In this commentary, I focus on the following research question:

- *Does the notion of author as curator rather than author also undermine the idea of composer as solitary practitioner? Is the composer always essentially engaged in an act of collaboration, either with other living artists, or with the originators of the other texts than inform his or her work?*

Discussing a range of choral works, I consider the challenges associated with setting both ‘canonical’ texts and newly-written ones. Drawing on an essay by the poet Derek Walcott I consider how language itself can be thought of as a fragmentary medium, shot through with the shared experience of the community that shaped it. In setting texts, I suggest, the composer is collaborating not just with the author of the text, but also the community of that has formed the language in which it is written.

In composing the choral works that make up the third of my portfolio projects, I worked with a wide range of different texts. Some of these texts — *Ave Maria, Ubi Caritas and Magnificat* — are stalwarts of liturgical practice, and have been set to music many times before. Conversely, the texts of *Philae’s Landing*, and ‘Santy Anna’ and ‘The Call of the Sea’ from *Seaside Songbook* were specially commissioned by me from the poet David Thorley; the text for ‘When the Whales Beached’ from the latter work came from a

recent unpublished collection by the poet Niall Campbell with whom I had previously collaborated on my song cycle *North Atlantic Drift*. The carols that I arranged in order to create *Hardingfele Carols*, were extremely well-known to the members of Norwegian choir Vocalis, who commissioned the work. Yet the melodies and words of these three carols were previously unknown to me.

The familiarity or unfamiliarity of each of these texts presented me with different compositional challenges. To me, the liturgical texts seemed like palimpsests, each of them overwritten with compositional and performance traditions stretching back centuries. How could I create fresh responses to these texts, whilst at the same time acknowledging the traditions to which my works would now belong? Working with new texts potentially afforded me greater compositional freedom, but both Thorley and Campbell employ dense, poetic language, rich in allusion and semantic range; how could I create music that would honour this poetic depth? And, in working with Norwegian carols that were highly familiar to choir and audience, how could I make my own lack of familiarity with these works compositionally advantageous?

A passage from an essay by the poet Derek Walcott — adapted from his Nobel prize acceptance speech — was instructive in informing the attitude towards text-setting employed in these choral works, and in the other works that make up my portfolio. Walcott uses the metaphor of mending a vase to discuss the way in which his poetry draws upon the history and language of the Antillean culture within which it is written. (The Antilles is the Caribbean archipelago that Walcott called home):

Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the  
fragments is stronger than that love which took its  
symmetry for granted when it was whole ... Antillean

art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent.

And this is the exact process of the making of poetry, or what should be called not its making but its remaking, the fragmented memory, the armature that frames the god, even the rite that surrenders it to a final pyre ... Poetry, which is perfection's sweat but which must seem as fresh as the raindrops on a statue's brow, combines the natural and the marmoreal; it conjugates both tenses simultaneously: the past and the present, if the past is the sculpture and the present the beads of dew or rain on the forehead of the past. There is the buried language and there is the individual vocabulary, and the process of poetry is one of excavation and of self-discovery (Walcott, 1998, p.69).

Walcott's imagery here evokes the way in which poetic language can rekindle the shared vocabulary of a particular community. Walcott argues that poetry's ambition should be to innovate by restoring to language a sense of the range and power of the shared history it contains. A broken vase, lovingly restored, is more engaging than a complete vase, because it brings to the fore a 'symmetry [taken] for granted when it was whole' (Walcott, 1998, p.69). By assembling the fragments of a shared language into a new form, Walcott argues, the poet addresses past and present, attesting to language's history even as he or she gives it a new form.

Walcott's attitude towards poetic language here clearly resonates with many of the texts about curation and historiography that have shaped the conceptual landscape of my doctoral work, including the curator Jonathan

Watkins' polemical notion of curating as a form of artistic bricolage, the philosopher Walter Benjamin's use of textual montage as a means of writing history in the *Arcades Project*, and Morton Feldman's conception of composition as akin to overseeing a family of 'kinder ... yearning for attention'. The difference between these texts and Walcott's lecture is that Walcott is exploring ideas of historical fragmentation and reassembling at the level of language itself. In this respect, Walcott's remarks resonate with those of another poet, J H Prynne, whom I quoted earlier in this thesis. Prynne described language as 'depot-inventory and memory-theatre' and, like Walcott, argued for language's role in preserving and reanimating the shared history of a particular society or culture (Prynne, 1993, p.18). In so doing, I suggested, Prynne was rejecting the view of language put forward by theorists of linguistics like Saussure as merely a system of relationships between essentially arbitrary signifiers. Walcott, like Prynne, suggests that, far from being arbitrary, language use is highly specific: language is shot through with the 'shattered histories' of the community by which it is used, histories that permeate language use at every level (Walcott, 1998, p.69).

In composing *Ubi Caritas* for Worcester Cathedral choir, and *Ave Maria* for York Minster choir, I was aware of the fact that both of these texts themselves contain elements of an extensive 'shattered history'. Both texts have been extensively performed in a liturgical context, in plainsong settings and also as texts for a large number of through-composed anthems, by composers including Maurice Duruflé, Franz Schubert, and Anton Bruckner. My challenge as composer was therefore to unlock what Walcott might describe as the 'buried language' of these much-used texts, finding a means of revivifyng texts which for choral singers have become commonplace.

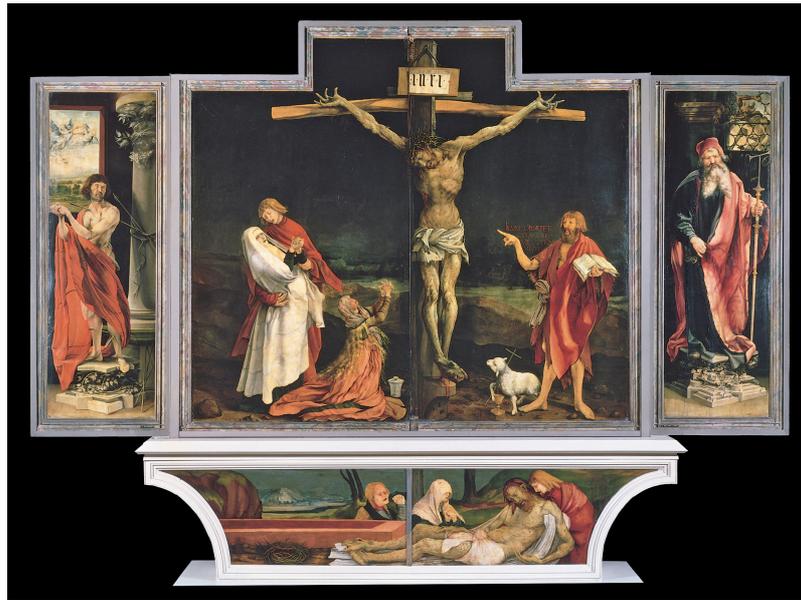
My approach, in both cases, was to respond to the overarching form of these texts rather than the nuance of individual phrases. In so doing, I took inspiration from religious altarpieces and triptychs, such as Matthias

Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece* (1516), which I mentioned earlier in my essay on curating. Such works employ stark formal delineation to lend drama and contrast to imagery that is highly familiar in the context of liturgy. As John Berger has argued, Grünewald's altarpiece, whilst superficially depicting a number of familiar religious scenes, is in fact a complicated web of associations drawing particularly on visual references to the treatment of invalids at the hospice by which the work was commissioned. The formal divisions of the piece emphasise, rather than undermine, the interrelatedness of the different scenes depicted (Berger, 2001 pp.134-5). There was another reason for drawing inspiration from religious visual art in this work: *Ave Maria* was written during a composer-residency at the Mahler-LeWitt Studios in Spoleto in the immediate aftermath of the Central Italian earthquake of August 2016, the epicentre of which was only twenty-five kilometres from Spoleto. Media images of the devastation wrought upon the nearby town of Amatrice included pictures of ruined churches, dead and stricken survivors and one particularly striking photograph of an injured nun using her mobile phone to call for help. These images called to mind not just the images of physical injury and disease depicted by Grünewald and other artists, but also the idea of the Virgin Mary as an icon of grief; during the remainder of my residency I wanted to respond to these images in the form of my own 'icon.'



(Image 16: Percossi, M. (2016). *Sister Mariana, from Albania, checks her mobile phone*. [Photograph]. Rome: Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata)

In my *Ave Maria* I wanted therefore to create a formal scheme inspired by the idea of a triptych. The primary principle of formal organisation in this piece is modulation: the work starts in A Major, before modulating to B Phrygian (bar 9), A Major (bar 17), F# Major (bar 26), B Dorian (bar 43) and finally A Major (bar 48). The three A Major sections are analogous to the three panels of a triptych; the other passages represent the divisions or transitions between panels. In addition to this tonal scheme, the work organises its melodic material according to an A-A-B-A-C-A structure. In developing these two interlocking formal schema, I drew inspiration from the way in which Grünewald uses visual motifs to create relationships between the different panels of his altarpiece. In his essay on Grünewald, John Berger mentions, for example, the way in which the artist uses motifs of healing and bodily illness throughout the work to resonate with the shattered form of Christ's body at the centre of the work (Berger, 2001 pp. 134-5).



(Image 17: Grünewald, M. (1516). *Isenheim Altarpiece*. [Altarpiece]. Colmar: Unterlinden Museum)

An example of my attempt to echo Grünewald's practice can be heard at the start of the work. Material associated with the phrase 'Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum' is heard at the start of the work in A Major; initially the material is presented by sopranos alone, joined in bars 5 to 8 by altos and basses. At bar 9, a variation on this material is presented, this time in B Phrygian and set for altos, divided tenors and basses. By giving this material to lower voices alone, and by setting it in the Phrygian mode, with its distinctive semitone movement to the second degree of scale, I wanted to give the opening material a much more plangent character, whilst retaining a clear connection to the opening bars through use of the same text and similar gestures. (In the scoring of work from its opening to bar 16 there is an oblique allusion to a work frequently performed at York Minster on Christmas Day, Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina's *Missa Hodie Christus Natus Est*. Palestrina's work is scored for double choir, divided SSAB-ATTB; throughout the work, he contrasts antiphonal writing, making use of the

stark timbral differences between the two choirs, and eight-part polyphonic writing for SSAATTBB choir. The way in which Palestrina interweaves these different choral textures seemed to me analogous to Grünewald's use of cross-panel motivic linking, and, as this work was also a Christmas commission, for the 2016 Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, it seemed fitting to allude to Palestrina in my work (Palestrina, 1961.)

At bar 17, the work modulates into A major: this passage, which sets the text 'benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Iesus', features freely polyphonic eight-part writing, with frequent textual repetition in the lower voices, and some extended scalic melismas, particularly in the second soprano part (bars 21 and 23). As in the previous sections of the work, my intention was to create a marked formal contrast with earlier sections, rather than to engage in direct 'word-painting'; nonetheless, the frequent repetitions of 'benedicta tu' and the downwards scalic writing, particularly on the word 'Jesus', are suggestive of imploring prayer.

The modulation into F# major at bar 26 is approached by way of three bars in a C Lydian tonality (bars 23 to 25), rooted on C5, so the shift of tonal centre by a diminished fifth is perhaps unexpected. Nonetheless, this modulation has a clear function within the overall tonal scheme outlined above. C Lydian contains the same notes as B Phrygian, so bars 23 to 25 can be seen as an echo of the earlier B Phrygian passage, with its characteristically plangent sensibility. And the radiant F# major tonality introduced at bar 26 swiftly gives way to a section (bars 35 to 43) in which the tonality hovers between B minor and B Major. The nine bars in F# major (bars 26 to 34), in which the work's main melodic material reappears in eight-part harmony, represents the bright 'central panel' of the piece, in which 'Sancta Maria' ('Holy Mary') is revealed to be 'Mater Dei' ('Mother of God'): this section stands in marked contrast to the transitional passages which surround it. The work concludes with a 'Amen' passage in which

florid, descending vocal melismas in B Dorian (bars 44 to 47) rapidly give way to a restatement of the main theme in A Major beneath a sustained high A in the first soprano part.

*Ave Maria* therefore represents an attempt to use clear formal delineation, by means of modulation, as a means of revivifying a much-used text. Whilst this setting does employ some elements of ‘word-painting’, the overall focus is on the formal properties of the prayer, rather than the nuances of its poetry. My intention in composing *Ubi Caritas*, which was first performed by Worcester Cathedral choir in late 2015, was the same; as such it can be thought of as a companion piece to *Ave Maria*. *Ubi Caritas* is simpler formally and compositionally than *Ave Maria*. I chose to set only two stanzas of the text. The text of each stanza is heard twice; the Gregorian plainsong in mode 6 (or the ‘Hypolydian’ mode) to which this text is traditionally sung on Maundy Thursday in each case precedes my newly-composed setting of the text. In so doing, my intention was to create a ‘curatorial’ juxtaposition of old and new elements, which would, at the same time, recall the formal construction of an altarpiece. Rather like Grayson Perry’s *The Agony in the Car Park*, mentioned in the section of this thesis on curating, which explicitly reworks Grünewald’s *Isenheim Altarpiece* I wanted to create a work that foregrounded its historical precedent, whilst at the same presenting an entirely new response to that precedent.

The newly-composed sections of the work draw on the same material; the second section develops and augmented the material of the first section. Like *Ave Maria*, *Ubi Caritas* makes substantial use of changes in modality to emphasise the contrast between different sections. The first through-composed section (rehearsal mark A to rehearsal mark B) occupies ambiguous harmonic territory, poised between E minor and A Dorian: the inclusion of a limited amount of chromaticism — focussed on D#, G# and A# / Bflat — creates further ambiguity, suggesting the possibility that the

music might move towards the octatonic scale. At rehearsal mark B, the melody shifts into E major, although the underlying harmony is poised between the new key and the previous E minor tonality. In the second through-composed section, this material is expanded: the initial melody line in the tenor is now underpinned by a rising bass-line, harmonised in fifths, and the music moves more rapidly towards six-part writing. The E major passage is now followed by a brief coda, in which, like the *Ave Maria*, an 'Amen' constructed around descending scalar melismas concludes with a restatement of major tonality (in this case B major) beneath a sustained tonic in the highest voice part.

Like the other liturgical texts featured in my portfolio, the *Magnificat* has been set to music by a great many composers, and is featured every evening as a canticle at Evensong in Anglican liturgy. The *Magnificat* is a complex text that carries out a range of different liturgical functions: it is a personal hymn of praise to God, attributed to Mary following the Annunciation, but it is also a more general summary of God's support for the tribe of Israel, and his opposition to its enemies. The challenge for the composer is to find a way of enabling these two very different properties of the text to coexist musically. My approach to this problem was to incorporate this strong sense of contrast into my work as a compositional principle. Whereas, in *Ave Maria* and *Ubi Caritas*, I made use of clear formal delineation, here I opted instead to focus on a series of marked rhythmic contrasts as the basis for my work.

In the opening section of the piece, the energetic semi-quaver movement in the right hand of the organ part contrasts strongly with the predominantly *legato* movement of the voice part (bars 1 to 16). In addition, throughout the opening section the time-signature constantly oscillates between 4/4 and 7/8, creating a sense of rhythmic instability: this pattern returns with the recapitulation of the opening theme in the concluding

Gloria (bars 74-88). At bar 19, this dynamic changes: the vocal writing is rhythmically closer to speech-rhythm, an approach that is maintained from rehearsal mark C to rehearsal mark E, when the more *legato* style of vocal writing returns. At rehearsal mark C the semiquaver writing that characterises the organ part becomes markedly more percussive, although the sense of rhythmic instability is maintained by the alternation of on and off-beat semiquaver figures. Bars 42 to 51 acts as a transitional section in which the semiquaver organ patterns are doubled in length and transformed into the underpinning for more *legato* vocal writing, leading into a reflective section at rehearsal mark F, in which the organ plays ‘freely, as if improvised’.

Although there are some gestures here in the direction of a more naturalistic text-setting approach than that employed in *Ave Maria* and *Ubi Caritas*, such as the speech-rhythm writing between rehearsal marks C and E, overall *Magnificat* employs the same attitude towards structure as these other works. By making use of strong rhythmic contrasts, and clearly demarcated differences between sections, I aimed to avoid the word-painting clichés found in many settings of the *Magnificat* — particularly those from the late 19th and early 20th centuries — whilst acknowledging the tension within the text between personal and historical narratives.

*Hardingfele Carols* (2016) was a response to a commission from the Norwegian chamber choir Vocalis, and their conductor Tim Ferguson. Like the liturgical works outlined above, based on time-worn texts, some of the material in this work was already familiar to the group performing it: the choir sent me a series of popular Norwegian carols on which to base my piece, from which I chose three, ‘I denne sode juletid’, ‘Eit barn er fodt i Betlehem’ and ‘Den yndigste rose’ (loosely ‘In this sweet Yuletide’, ‘A child is born in Bethlehem’ and ‘The fairest rose’). Unlike the texts of the liturgical pieces, these carols were previously unknown to me: whilst, in Walcott’s

phrase, they formed part of the ‘individual vocabulary’ of the choir who would be performing them, this vocabulary — and indeed, the nuances of the Norwegian language in which the carols were written — was hidden from me. As with my work *Latrabjarg*, which also draws upon Scandinavia music and texts, I found myself in the position of an explorer interacting with an unfamiliar culture, and needed an entry-point into this uncharted territory.

This came in the form of the sound of the Hardingfele or ‘Hardanger fiddle’ as it is known in English, a violin fitted with sympathetic strings that is often employed in Norwegian folk music. I listened to a number of recordings of the Hardingfele during the early stages of the composition of my opera *Returns*, and initially thought of including it in the scoring of that work because of its similarity in timbre to the sarangi, another instrument with sympathetic strings commonly used in North Indian classical music. There are relatively few professional sarangi players in the UK able to work with Western classical notation, and so the Hardingfele seemed like a possible alternative, although ultimately I also rejected this option as impractical. But, in beginning work on my commission from Vocalis, the sound of the Hardingfele once again entered my compositional imagination, not least because of its congruity with the register and part-divisions of the upper-voices choir for which I was writing the piece. The Hardingfele has four main strings, often A-D-A-E in the manner of a regular violin but with a raised low string, and five sympathetic strings which can be tuned in a wide range of different configurations, depending on the key and mood of the piece being played. Hardingfele repertoire therefore has a strong emphasis on pieces that make use of the range of drones and overtones that the different tunings afford; this seemed to me comparable with the way in which a close-harmony upper-voice choir like Vocalis might generate a

resonant sound in performance through careful attention to tuning, in the same register as the Hardingfele.

In the opening piece, 'I denne sode juletid', a range of techniques are employed to evoke the sound of the Hardingfele: in bar 4, the second altos sound a sustained bottom G, suggestive of the lowest string of the instrument; the first alto part throughout the opening section (to rehearsal mark A) is intended to evoke the striking of sympathetic strings above the lowest string. From rehearsal mark A through to rehearsal mark B, and from rehearsal mark E to the end of the piece, frequent use is made of the performance directions *quasi pizzicato* and *quasi arco*; here my intention was to evoke the sound of a number of fiddlers playing together as an ensemble, interweaving plucked and bowed playing-styles. Correspondingly, the sections of the piece that make use of the text and melody of the original carol are interspersed with these 'instrumental' sections, in which syllables recalling different string playing styles — such as 'tak' and 'aah' — are used.

The second piece 'Eit barn er fodt i Betlehem', opens with an extended vocalise section, in which the gradual accumulation of sustained notes is intended to suggest the Hardingfele's open strings being tuned: the grace notes, turns, harmonic suspensions and resolutions that characterise this section are all hallmarks of Hardingfele playing-style. The carol's melody is introduced at rehearsal mark B, underpinned by a wordless figure in the first and second alto parts that is again suggestive of drone-playing on the lower strings of the instrument. Following a jubilant 'Halleluja' (rehearsal mark D to rehearsal mark E) and a reflective semi-chorus passage in which the main melody returns over more drone-like accompanying harmonies, the piece concludes with another brief vocalise passage.

The finale of *Hardingfele Carols*, 'Den yndigste rose' intersperses strongly rhythmic sections which evoke the playing of broken chords across the instrument's strings, with sections in which the melody is accompanied

by choral textures that alternate rapidly between *quasi pizzicato* and *quasi arco*, in the same manner as the opening piece. The piece concludes with a coda (from rehearsal mark D to the end) in which the 'broken-chord' material is combined with the main melody harmonised in thirds and sixths. In an oblique reference to *Ave Maria* and *Ubi Caritas*, the final bars feature a sustained chord under which the second sopranos and second altos present an extended cadence, making use of the broken-chord material, before the work concludes with an exuberant *tutti* 'ta-dak!'

*Hardingfele Carols* is a relatively straightforward work, both in terms of the musical idiom and the challenge it presents to the performers; yet this simplicity stands in contrast to the complex compositional challenge it presented. My unfamiliarity with the Norwegian melodies and texts with which I was presented was initially daunting, but I was able to make use of the sound and technical vocabulary of the Hardingfele as an entry-point into the world of the original carols. In composing two pieces from the portmanteau work, *Seaside Songbook*, 'Santy Anna', and 'When the Whales Beached', I faced a superficially similar but in many ways comparable challenge.

The work was commissioned by the Ilkley-based chamber choir, Cantores Olicanae, and was to be jointly created by the composer Jon Brigg and myself as a celebration of the British seaside. There were a number of practical considerations: the work needed to feature a jazz group, the Robert Sudall trio, with whom the choir had worked before, had to address a range of different aspects of seaside-life, and needed to be performable by an amateur group. Jon and I decided to work on the individual movements of the work separately, but to develop the structure of the piece collaboratively. We also decided that I would focus on the wilder elements of the seaside, writing pieces that would evoke the open ocean and its marine life, and the

sea-shanties performed by sailors, whereas Jon would look to conjure the spirit of beach-life, fairground attractions and music-hall entertainments.

We each selected the texts on which we would base the different sections of the work: Jon chose texts by Victorian and early Modernist poets including Robert Louis Stevenson, D.H. Lawrence and Vachel Lindsay, and I selected a sea-shanty, 'Santy Anna' from Cecil Sharp's collection *English Folk-Chanteys* (1914), as well as two contemporary poems by poets with whom I had previously collaborated, 'Travel O Travel' by David Thorley, and 'When the Whales Beached' by the Hebridean poet Niall Campbell. For the first two of my pieces, I decided to write for the whole choir *a cappella*, leaving the jazz trio to improvise an accompaniment in performance. For 'When the Whales Beached' I decided to showcase the upper voices of the group, and composed a complete piano accompaniment, as well as a optional *ripieno* part for solo flugelhorn, as this instrument would be available for the first performance.

In the introduction of the first piece, fragments of the sea-shanty 'Santy Anna' presented by a tenor soloist and by *tutti* basses are interspersed with interjections from the rest of the choir: 'Travel, O Travel!'. These choral interjections gradually increase in urgency: initially they are sung only by the sopranos and altos, but they are rapidly joined by the rest of the choir. The antiphonal 'call-and-answer' effect created by interspersing sea-shanty fragments and choral interjections gives rise to antiphonal division within the choir itself: in bars 14 to 15 and 21 to 22, the first choir's exhortation is immediately echoed by a second choir. Whilst this call-and-answer patterning was intended to evoke the way in which sailors employed sea-shanties as a means of coordinating their work, the ebb and flow of the sea itself was the inspiration for the work's harmonic scheme, which is underpinned by three key centres, A, G and G#. The work's opening is solely in A Aeolian up to bar 13 at which point the tonality begins to shift towards

G Lydian, by way of B Minor 9. In bars 24 to 27, however, the music begins to modulate again, this time with much greater chromaticism; after brief gestures towards D# minor and G minor, the music finally reaches G# minor at rehearsal mark B. Although the music explores a number of other tonal avenues, moving towards F# minor in bars 36 to 38, and D# minor in bars 33 and 43, G# minor remains the key centre for the remainder of the piece.

This stabilising of tonality suggests the idea of arrival, following a turbulent voyage at sea; however, the feeling of 'ebb-and-flow' is maintained in the momentum generated by persistent rhythmic variation within the basic 12/8 time signature throughout the remainder of the work. Thorley's poem is a contemporary take on the sea-shanty, in its subject matter and vocabulary and also in its use of metre, with strong emphases on key verbs like 'haul' and 'roar', in keeping with the idea of a 'work-song'. This metre suggested to me a 12/8 time-signature, maintaining these strong emphases, but also with the possibility of exploiting the other internal rhythms of the poem. At bar 35, for example, the contrast between the quaver-dotted quaver-semiquaver groupings, and the semiquaver-dotted quaver-quaver grouping, and quadruplet grouping, is intended to suggest the irregularity of waves on the open ocean. This piece finally concludes with the recapitulation of the 'Santy Anna' fragment.

'When the Whales Beached' is based on a short poem by the poet Niall Campbell, which depicts the attempted rescue of beached whales by islanders on Campbell's native South Uist in the Outer Hebrides. The enormity of the islanders' task becomes metonymically linked to the death of the poet's grandparents. Just as the rescuers draw 'lines and inlets in the sand' with their spades in their attempt to 'unmoor ... black shapes to the waves', demonstrating their respect and love of the marine life that sustains their island existence, so too, suggests Campbell, did his grandmother demonstrate a similarly persistent love in joining her husband in death

shortly after his own demise (Campbell, 2013, p.10). 'Love, and yet so much more than' writes Campbell, suggesting that the acts of the rescuers and his grandmother exceed simple categorisation. I set the text to a simple, limpid melody in 12/8 for upper voices, in which the basic G major tonality is occasionally inflected by elements of C7, C minor and G minor. The refrain 'love, and yet so much more than' is set to a series of plangent harmonic suspensions, first on an A minor chord (bar 49) and then in G minor (bars 51 and 52). The arpeggiated piano part and simple double-bass part based on octaves and 'walking-figures' were intended to leave room for embellishment by the jazz trio. The lyric is repeated: between the two sung sections there is a brief interlude (bars 25-32) in which melodic material from bar 13 is developed in three-part counterpoint, before being rejoined at bar 29 by the flugelhorn.

The remaining choral piece in this portfolio, *Philae's Landing*, was a commission from York-based chamber choir Ebor Singers, for a new work to celebrate St Cecilia's Day. St Cecilia is, famously, the patron saint of music; there is a lengthy poetic tradition of Cecilian panegyrics including works by Dryden, Addison and Auden. In these works, Cecilia's mastery of music is often linked to the idea of celestial harmony. For example, Addison's *An Ode for St Cecilia's Day* includes the lines 'Next, let the solemn organ join/  
Religious airs, and strains divine/  
Such as may lift us to the skies/  
And set all heaven before our eyes' (Addison, 1800, p.224). I wanted to find a way of reinventing this trope for a contemporary audience.

Around the time that I received the commission, I read a news article about a space probe, Philae, which had been developed by the European Space Agency as a means of landing on and surveying comets. After completing the first-ever successful landing on a comet, and sending home a series of groundbreaking images and reports of its new environs, Philae, operating on solar power, had moved out of range of the sun, run out of

power, and finally had lost contact with mission control. The image of the lonely space probe, sending its transmissions to Earth from a distant corner of the universe, but ultimately doomed to fall silent forever, resonated strongly with the idea of celestial music; I therefore commissioned David Thorley, with whom I had previously worked on the *Seaside Songbook* project, to write a new poem on the theme of Philae, incorporating themes and ideas from earlier Cecilian literature. Thorley's finished poem, presented from Philae's perspective, explores two different musical metaphors. On the one hand, Philae's disappearance and impending demise is associated with cacophony, and a form of highly mechanical music: 'falling hammers ... trilled vibrations ... an unending roll of reels ... the caterwauling throng' (Thorley, 2015, p.1). On the other, Philae makes reference to a 'calm ... music', associated with images of natural and cosmic order, such as the movement of tides, and the orbiting of planets; this music is associated with singing, rather than the playing of instruments.

Correspondingly, my work is based upon the interplay of two main types of musical material. The first of these, associated with Thorley's image of a 'calm music', is a slow-moving descending figure, first presented at the work's opening, based upon two fifths, generating an A major 7 chord in first inversion. This figure appears three times at the start of the work, in bars 1 to 4 and 8 and 9, and then again transposed down a minor third in bars 11 and 12 and 14 and 15. Versions of this figure are heard again throughout the work, both as transposed versions of the original figure (at bars 55-56 and 59-60) and in modified or augmented form. The mixed major/minor E flat chords in first inversion at bars 18 and 19 (rehearsal mark A) and bars 21 and 22 are versions of this figure, as are the C minor 7 (with augmented 7th) chords in bars 61-65. At the work's close the figure is heard again, repeated five times: this time it is in E major and in second inversion, giving the sense of simultaneous stasis and arrival.

In opposition to this 'calm music' stand numerous fast-moving passages, often making use of what Gerard Manley Hopkins described as 'sprung rhythm [which] is the most natural of things. For ... it is the rhythm of common speech and of written prose, when rhythm is perceived in them': this is the use of a single strongly stressed syllable followed by a variety of unstressed ones in a metrical line, in order to give a sense of speech-rhythm (Hopkins, 1990, p.117). In the opening bars of the work, there are a number of instances of this 'sprung rhythm' writing: the word 'smut' in bar 4, 'asleep' in bar 9, and 'falling hammers' (bars 12 and 13). In bars 23 to 26, this 'sprung rhythm' approach is developed into the basis for extended polyphony, in which a harmonised melodic line in the soprano, altos and tenors, making significant use of these emphases is underscored by downwards scalar movement in the basses and second tenors (bar 26). There are a number of comparable passages, in which strong syllabic emphasis and fast-moving counterpoint are combined to give a sense of what Thorley calls 'an unending roll of reels' (Thorley, 2015, p.1). In bars 31 and 32, the 'churn of cadences uncoiled' is emulated in the movement of the melody's rhythm from triplets to quadruplets; in bar 33, a rapid downwards 'shrieking' gesture, is immediately followed by a strong first-syllable emphasis on the word 'burn' in bar 34. In the climactic section of the work, from rehearsal mark D to rehearsal mark E, the descending-fifth 'calm music' figure is combined with repeated use of first-syllable emphasis, in addition to rapidly rising imitative polyphony in the lower voices in bars 62 to 65. The overall effect is of cosmic order (represented by the descending-fifth motif) being disrupted and finally shattered, culminating with the line 'no quarter from the caterwauling throng' in bars 67 to 69. The reappearance of the descending fifth-motif in its E Major second inversion form in the closing section (rehearsal mark E to the end) suggests a reinstatement of cosmic harmony, although overshadowed by the inevitability of Philae's eventual

demise: the solo tenor sings the line 'before commitment to the fire I sing' as the rest of the choir, repeating the descending-fifth motif, bring the work to its close.

In the passage that I quoted at the start of this commentary, Derek Walcott suggests that poetry — and by extension, all art, 'combines the natural and the marmoreal ... [it] conjugates both texts simultaneously, the past and the present' (Walcott, 1998, p.69). In composing these choral works, I have repeatedly attempted to marry the past and the present in different ways, addressing not simply the challenges of the forms with which I have been working, and the texts that I have been setting, but also the histories and cultures of the choirs for whom each of the works was composed. In so doing, I have also sought to make use of a wide range of different approaches to text-setting, in order to meet the demands of the text, the occasion, and the abilities of the performers.

*Ave Maria*, *Ubi Caritas* and *Magnificat* were written for liturgical use, and set to texts that I described as 'palimpsest-like' in the extent to which they have inspired large numbers of musical settings. Rather than create settings of these texts based around 'word-painting' I opted instead to create strong formal — and in the case of *Magnificat*, rhythmic — schemes inspired by religious art as a means of creating a fresh response to the words whilst still honouring their extensive histories. In *Hardingfele Carols*, as in *Latrabjarg*, I faced the challenge of working with musical materials in an unfamiliar language and from an unfamiliar culture, that were, nonetheless, deeply bound up with the cultural and musical life of the group for whom I was writing. In this instance, I used the sound of the Hardingfele as an entry-point into this culture; rather than attempting to engage closely with the nuance of the Norwegian texts, I instead created a kind of fantasia in which the choir evokes the performance of the carols by a band of Hardingfele players. In the pieces from *Seaside Songbook*, I faced the challenge of writing

for an amateur ensemble, with limited rehearsal time, and so set out to write music that would be engaging but relatively straightforward to perform. Even so, I decided to juxtapose new and old elements to create an evocation of maritime life: I drew on an archive material, the sea-shanty 'Santy Anna' in the opening piece, and commissioned new responses to the sea-shanty form from poet David Thorley. In *Philae's Landing*, I again worked with Thorley, and once again commissioned him to create a new text drawing on old tropes, here reworking the paradigm of heavenly music as the basis for cosmic order. In this work I came closest to 'word-painting', using a 'sprung-rhythm' technique both to animate the rhythm of the choral lines and also to lend emphasis and colour to key points in the text.

In these works, therefore, I have, as throughout my portfolio, acted as both composer and curator. I have brought together archive materials, ancient forms, and poetic tropes with newly-commissioned texts, and music in a range of different idioms, in a range of striking musical encounters. In so doing, I have been mindful of Walcott's notion of poetry as 'buried language': I have acted as archaeologist, using different formal, idiomatic and text-setting approaches to draw out meaning from texts that in some cases have very lengthy histories (Walcott, 1998, p.69). And, in working with these musical and textual materials, and uncovering their unique histories, I have constantly born in mind Feldman's warning to Stockhausen that 'sounds are very much like people. And if you push them, they push you back' (Feldman, 2000, pp.157-8).

## Resource List

### Books, articles and written online resources

Addison, J. (1800). An Ode for St Cecilia's Day. In S. Johnson. (Ed.). *The Works of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland, With Prefaces Biographical and Critical*, Vol. 4. London: Andrew Miller.

Aristotle. (2014). *On Memory and Reminiscence*. [Online]. Translated from the Ancient Greek by J.I. Beare. University of Adelaide. Available at <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle/memory/> [Accessed 7 June 2018].

Aristotle. (2014). *Nicomachean Ethics*. [Online]. Translated from the Ancient Greek by W.D. Ross. University of Adelaide. Available at <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle/nicomachean/index.html> [Accessed 7 June 2018].

Arsenault, R. (2009). *The Sound of Freedom: Marian Anderson, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Concert That Awakened America*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, Music, Text*. Translated from the French by Heath, S. London: Fontana Press.

Bauman, Z. (2007). Liquid Arts. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24(1),117–126.

Benjamin, W. (1999). *Illuminations*. Translated from the German by Zorn, H. London: Pimlico.

Benjamin, W. (2002). *The Arcades Project*. Translated from the German by Eiland, H. and McLaughlin, K. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Berger, J. (2001). *Selected Essays*. London: Bloomsbury.

British Museum (2011). *Grayson Perry: The Tomb Of The Unknown Craftsman*. [Online]. British Museum. Available at [http://www.britishmuseum.org/about\\_us/news\\_and\\_press/press\\_releases/2011/grayson\\_perry.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/news_and_press/press_releases/2011/grayson_perry.aspx) [Accessed 17 December 2016].

Brooks, W. (1982). On Being Tasteless. *Popular Music*, 2, 9-18.

Cage, J. (1961). *Silence*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press

Campbell, N. (2012). *After The Creel Fleet*. Glenrothes: HappenStance.

Casteel, J. (2007). *Returns*. London: A.P. Watt Ltd.

Casteel, J. (2008). Joshua Casteel: Author Note. *Alaska Quarterly Review*, 25(3). [Online]. Available at [https://aqreview.org/aqr\\_authors/joshua-casteel/](https://aqreview.org/aqr_authors/joshua-casteel/) [Accessed 12 June 2018].

Casteel, J. (2010). Call of Duty. *The Point Magazine*, 3. [Online]. Available at: [https://thepointmag.com/2010/essays\\_type/call-of-duty](https://thepointmag.com/2010/essays_type/call-of-duty) [Accessed 12 June 2018].

Cedar Rapids Museum of Art (2007). *Grant Wood*. [Online]. Cedar Rapids Museum of Art. Available at: <http://www.crma.org/Content/Collection/Grant-Wood.aspx> [Accessed 12 June 2018].

Chilcot, J. (2016). *Sir John Chilcot's Public Statement, 6 July 2016*. [Online]. The National Archives. Last updated: 23 November 2017. Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20171123124608/http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/the-inquiry/sir-john-chilcots-public-statement/> [Accessed 12 June 2018].

Dante Alighieri. (1996). *Inferno*. Translated from the Italian by R. Durling. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dante Alighieri. (2008). *Convivio*. Translated from the Italian by A.S. Kline. [Online]. Poetry In Translation. Available at: <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Italian/Conviviohome.php> [Accessed 5 June 2018].

Dennebaum, M. (2015). Introducing Curator, a new way to find and display great Twitter content. 31 March 2015. *Twitter Blog*. [Online]. Available at: <https://blog.twitter.com/2015/introducing-curator-a-new-way-to-find-and-display-great-twitter-content> [Accessed 16 December 2016].

Derrida, J. (1994). *Spectres of Marx*. Translated from the French by P. Kamuf. London: Routledge.

Doubtfire, J. and Ranchetti, G. (2015). Curator as Artist as Curator. *Curating the Contemporary*. Last updated: 30 April, 2015. [Online]. Available at: <https://curatingthecontemporary.org/2015/04/30/curator-as-artist-as-curator/> [Accessed 16 December 2016].

Feldman, M. (2000). *Give My Regards To Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*. Cambridge: Exact Change.

Filipovic, E. (2013). When Exhibitions Become Form: On the History of the Artist as Curator. *Mousse Magazine*, 41. [Online]. Available at: <http://mousemagazine.it/taac0/> [Accessed 16 December 2016].

Freud, S. (1962). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated from the German by James Strachey. Oxford, England: Macmillan

Fukuyama, F. (1989). The End of History? *The National Interest* 16, 3-18

Gann, K. (2007). Feldman, Painter of Pages. 2 January, 2007. *PostClassic: An ArtsJournal Blog*. [Online]. Available at: [http://www.artsjournal.com/postclassic/2007/01/feldman\\_painter\\_of\\_pages.html](http://www.artsjournal.com/postclassic/2007/01/feldman_painter_of_pages.html) [Accessed 5 June 2018].

Gere, C. (2004). New Media Art and the Gallery in the Digital Age. *Tate Papers*. [Online]. Available at <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/02/new-media-art-and-the-gallery-in-the-digital-age> [Accessed 16 December 2016].

Graham, B. and Cook, S. (2010). *Rethinking Curating*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Hollander, R. (2009). Dante's *Paradiso* as Philosophical Poetry. *Italica*, 86(4), 571-582. [Online]. Available at [https://www.jstor.org/stable/20750652?read-now=1&seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/20750652?read-now=1&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents) [Accessed 15 July 2014].

Hopkins, G.M. (1990). *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Edited by N. Mackenzie. Oxford: Clarendon.

Horn, R. (1994). *To Place*. Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König

Horn, R. (1997). Weather Girls: An Interview With Roni Horn. Interview with C. Schorr. *Frieze Magazine*, 32. [Online]. Available at: <https://frieze.com/article/weather-girls> [Accessed 8 June 2018].

King James Bible Online (2018). [Online]. Available at: <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/> [Accessed 11 June 2018].

King, M.L. (1965). *The American Dream*. [Online]. Stanford University Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute. Available at: <https://>

[kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/american-dream-sermon-delivered-ebenezer-baptist-church](http://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/american-dream-sermon-delivered-ebenezer-baptist-church) [Accessed 11 June 2018].

King, M.L. (1965). *Our God Is Marching On*. [Online]. Stanford University Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute. Available at: <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/our-god-marching> [Accessed 11 June 2018].

Klay, P. (2014). *Redeployment*. Edinburgh: Canongate.

Macintyre, A. (1981). *After Virtue*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Miller, K. (2008). *Travelling Home: Sacred Harp Singing and American Pluralism*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.

Modern Art Oxford (2014). *Love is Enough: William Morris & Andy Warhol*. [Online]. Modern Art Oxford. Available at <https://www.modernartoxford.org.uk/event/love-is-enough-william-morris-andy-warhol-curated-by-jeremy-deller/> [Accessed 17 December 2016].

National Park Service (2017). *Effigy Moundbuilders*. [Online]. National Park Service, US Department of the Interior. Available at: <https://www.nps.gov/efmo/learn/historyculture/effigy-moundbuilders.htm> [Accessed at 12 June 2018].

Ólafsdóttir, R. (2008). Pride and Prejudice: The Preservation of the Icelandic Rímur Tradition. *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 40, 104-116.

Padel, R. (2007). *Diary*. *London Review of Books*, 29(23), 39.

Pierpont, C.R. (2010). Black, Brown, and Beige: Duke Ellington's Music and Race In America. *The New Yorker*. [Online]. 17 May 2010. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/05/17/black-brown-and-beige> [Accessed 11 June 2018].

Powers, K. (2012). *The Yellow Birds*. London: Sceptre.

Prynne, J.H. (1993). *Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words (The William Matthews Lectures)*. London: Birkbeck College.

Ricoeur, P. (2004). *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Translated from the French by Blamey, K. and Pellauer, D. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rugg, J. and Sedgwick, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*. Bristol: Intellect Books.

Thorley, D. (2013). *Travel O Travel*. Unpublished.

Thorley, D. (2015). *Philae's Landing*. Unpublished.

Thorsson, O. (Ed.). (2000). *The Sagas of Icelanders*. New York: Penguin.

van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The Body Keeps The Score*. New York: Viking Penguin.

Van Reet, B. (2016). *Spoils*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Vasquez, J. (2012). *Remembering Joshua Casteel*. [Online]. Iraq Veterans Against The War. Last updated 26 August 2012. Available at: <http://www.ivaw.org/blog/remembering-joshua-casteel> [Accessed 11 June 2018].

Vehanen, K. (1941). *Marian Anderson: A Portrait*. New York: Whittlesey House.

Walcott, D. (1998). *What The Twilight Says: Essays*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.

Whaley, D. (Ed.). *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1*. Turnhout: Brepols.

Widdess, R. (2015). North India. In Church, M. (Ed.). *The Other Classical Musics: Fifteen Great Traditions*. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, pp.320-339.

Wilde, O. (1913). *Intentions*. London: Methuen and Co.

Youssefzadeh, A. (2015). Iran. In Church, M. (Ed.). *The Other Classical Musics: Fifteen Great Traditions*. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, pp.320-339.

## Visual Art

Deller, J. (2001). *The Battle of Orgreave*. [Performance]. London: Artangel.

Deller, J. (2014). *Love Is Enough*. [Exhibition]. Oxford: Modern Art Oxford.

Duchamp, M. (1921). *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Selavy?* [Sculpture]. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Grünewald, M. (1516). *Isenheim Altarpiece*. [Altarpiece]. Colmar: Unterlinden Museum.

Horn, R. (2007). *Library of Water*. [Installation]. Stykkisholmur: Stykkisholmur Library.

Levas, S. (1945). *Jean Sibelius in his library*. [Photograph]. Järvenpää: Otava.

Percossi, M. (2016). *Sister Mariana, from Albania, checks her mobile phone*. [Photograph]. Rome: Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata

Perry, G. (2011). *Grayson Perry: The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*. [Exhibition]. London: British Museum.

Perry, G. (2012). *The Agony In The Car Park*. [Tapestry]. London: Victoria Miro Gallery.

Somerstein, S. (1965). *Martin Luther King speaks at the Selma-Montgomery March*. [Photograph]. New York: New York Historical Society.

### Musical Scores and Recordings

Bantock, G. (Ed.). (1911). *One Hundred Folksongs Of All Nations*. Philadelphia: Oliver Ditson Company.

Bernstein, L. (1965). *Chichester Psalms*. London: Boosey and Hawkes.

Duckworth, W. (1999). *Southern Harmony*. New York: Henmar Press.

Ellington, E.K. (1958). *Black, Brown And Beige*. [LP]. New York: Columbia.

Feldman, M. (1980). *Turfan Fragments*. New York: Universal Edition.

Feldman, M. (1986). *Coptic Light*. New York: Universal Edition.

Palestrina, G. (1961). *Missa Hodie Christus Natus Est: Le Opere Complete di Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina Vol. 30* [Online]. Edited by L. Bianchi. Rome: dall'Istituto Italiano per la Storia della Musica.

Purcell, H. (2012). *King Arthur*. [Online]. Edited by J-C Malahieude. Choral Public Domain Library. Available at: [http://hz.imsip.info/files/imglnks/usimg/6/66/IMSLP194159-PMLP69503-Purcell\\_Arthur-Conducteur.pdf](http://hz.imsip.info/files/imglnks/usimg/6/66/IMSLP194159-PMLP69503-Purcell_Arthur-Conducteur.pdf) [Accessed 12 June 2018].

Rautavaara, E. (1972). *Cantus Arcticus: Concerto For Birds And Orchestra*. London: Boosey and Hawkes.

Reich, S. (1988). *Different Trains*. London: Boosey and Hawkes.

Sharp, C. (1914). *English Folk-Chanteys*. London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent.

Sibelius, J. (1907). *Six Songs*. Berlin: Schlesinger.

Sibelius, J. (1901). *The Swan Of Tuonela*. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel.

Sigur Ros and Steindor Andersen. (2001). *Rímur*. [CD]. Reykjavik: Krúnk.

Þorsteinsson, B. (Ed.). (1906). *Íslensk þjóðlög*. Copenhagen: S.L. Møller. [Online]. Available at: [http://baekur.is/bok/000042130/0/847/islensk\\_thjodlog\\_Bls\\_847](http://baekur.is/bok/000042130/0/847/islensk_thjodlog_Bls_847) [Accessed 11 June 2018].

Weelkes, T. (2012). *Thule, The Period Of Cosmography*. Edited by J. Gibb. [Online]. CPDL.org. Available at: [http://www1.cpd.org/wiki/index.php/Thule,\\_the\\_period\\_of\\_cosmography\\_\(Thomas\\_Weelkes\)](http://www1.cpd.org/wiki/index.php/Thule,_the_period_of_cosmography_(Thomas_Weelkes)) [Accessed 8 June 2018].

White, B.F. and King, E.J. (Eds.). (1860). *The Sacred Harp*. Philadelphia: S.C. Collins.

Wyton, A. (Ed.). (1987). *The Anglican Chant Psalter*. New York: Church Publishing.

#### Film and Video

Armitage, S. (1993). *Harmonium*. [Online]. The Poetry Station. Available at: <http://poetrystation.org.uk/poems/poet-simon-armitage-reads-harmonium> [Accessed 11 June 2018].

Lomax, A. (1982). *Footage of the 1982 Holly Springs Sacred Harp Convention: Hallelujah*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m34OaYzG9NE> [Accessed 11 June 2018].

Incognito. (2007). *Footage of Martin Luther King's 'How Long? Not Long!' Speech in Montgomery, Alabama On March 25, 1965*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAYITODNvIM> [Accessed 11 June 2018].

Weimberg, G. and Ryan, C. (Directors). (2007). *Soldiers of Conscience*. Berkeley: Luna Productions.

## Appendix A: Structure Table for Returns

Appendix A			
	Structural principle	Refers to previous section:	Additional notes
<b>Prelude</b>	Insistent repetition of motif; canon		
<b>Fig E-F</b>	Presentation and elaboration of Dhahur motif		Uses raga yaman
<b>F-H</b>	'What was it like?' motif: presented by James and elaborated by Mark (bar 115)		
<b>H-I</b>	'What was it like?' motif: elaborated by James		
<b>I-J</b>	'What was it like?' motif: elaborated by Mark		
<b>J-K</b>	Dhahur motif — elaborated by Mark		Overlapping time-cycles
<b>K-L</b>	'What was it like': James		
<b>M-N</b>	'You're in a totally different world'		Percussion ostinato
<b>N-O</b>	'What was it like?': James — bar 186		
<b>O-P</b>	Contraction of Dhahur motif	J-K	Use of plainsong: 'Veni Creator Spiritus' and overlapping time-cycles
<b>P-Q</b>	Employs key notes of 'What was it like' motif (C -D flat). Percussion mimics percussion at F-H	F-H	

<b>Appendix A</b>			
	<b>Structural principle</b>	<b>Refers to previous section:</b>	<b>Additional notes</b>
<b>Q-R</b>	Combines elements of James' and Mark's key materials: the semitone 'What was it like?' motif with reference back to O-P section at 250	F-H;O-P	Use of plainsong: 'Veni Creator Spiritus' and overlapping time-cycles
<b>R-S</b>	References P-Q; introduces 'Bless me father' motif at bar 255; bass clarinet at bar 256 references section F-H	P-Q; F-H	
<b>S-W</b>	This section references the 'Cold Song' from Purcell's <i>King Arthur</i> in its initial chord progression and string figuration		Purcell: 'Cold Song' from <i>King Arthur</i>
<b>W-X</b>	Uses plainsong-like <i>a cappella</i> writing	O-P (style only)	
<b>X-Y</b>	Combines modified version of Dhahur motif on solo violin with elements of 'What was it like?' and 'Bless me father' motifs. Concludes opening section.	E-F;F-H; R-S	
<b>Y-Z</b>	Oud figuration and string 'breath' figures refer to Prelude. Percussion figures refer to E-F	Prelude; E-F	
<b>Z-AA</b>	Strings and oud emulate a Persian classical ensemble playing a 'pishdaramad'		Pishdaramad' is the opening section or prelude in a Persian classical performance, played in unison but with flexibility

<b>Appendix A</b>			
	<b>Structural principle</b>	<b>Refers to previous section:</b>	<b>Additional notes</b>
<b>AA-FF</b>	'Whirlwind' sequence in a modified rondo form that hinges on the interplay of a motif related to the oud's main prelude idea (heard first at bar 428), and a dance-like figure (heard first at 438)	Prelude	
<b>FF-GG</b>	Section deconstructs the dance-like rhythmic figures of the proceeding section. The final 'dissolve' recalls the ending of the prelude	AA-FF; Prelude	
<b>GG-bar 554</b>	A section of accompanied recitative. Oud figures recall prelude and Y-Z	Prelude; Y-Z	
<b>bar 554 — KK</b>	'Dream-like' section with gong and arpeggio string underscoring. Initial vocal melody restates the 'Dhahur' motif first heard at E-F. This returns at bars 587-589, set to the word 'Dhahur'	E-F	
<b>KK-LL</b>	Violin solo recalls E-F and X-Y, incorporating elements of the dance-like motif from the 'whirlwind' sequence at bars 615-620	E-F, X-Y, AA-FF	

<b>Appendix A</b>			
	<b>Structural principle</b>	<b>Refers to previous section:</b>	<b>Additional notes</b>
<b>LL-NN</b>	Reinstates elements of the 'whirlwind' sequence', combined with pizzicato figures from F-H and the 'Dhahur' motif on violin at MM	E-F, F-H, AA-FF	
<b>NN-OO</b>	Recalls percussive writing of L-M	L-M	
<b>OO-PP</b>	Variation on Dhahur motif at bar 655. End of section.	E-F	
<b>PP-SS</b>	Antiphonal percussion writing recalls percussion ostinato of M-N. 'Samba' music at QQ is a reworking of the overlapping rhythmic patterns heard at J-K (and subsequently at O-P)	J-K, M-N, O-P	
<b>SS-TT</b>	Bar 710-711: 'Abu Ghraib' motif		
<b>TT-ZZ</b>	Section focusses on an arrangement of a children's 'church-camp' song, 'Rise and Shine' (The Arky Arky Song). At UU this is combined with fanfare material derived from SS-TT	SS-TT	Key material: 'Rise and Shine' (The Arky Arky Song)
<b>ZZ-AAA</b>	'Bless me Father' motif reappears at bar 804	R-S	
<b>AAA-BBB</b>	Plainsong-like a cappella material	O-P, W-X (style only)	
<b>BBB-CCC</b>	Reworks overlapping time-signatures material from O-P	O-P; Q-R	

<b>Appendix A</b>			
	<b>Structural principle</b>	<b>Refers to previous section:</b>	<b>Additional notes</b>
<b>CCC-DDD</b>	Introduces 'The boy's become a man' motif at bar 844-845		
<b>DDD-EEE</b>	Reworks overlapping time-signatures material from O-P	O-P; Q-R; BBB-CCC	
<b>EEE-FFF</b>	Presents 'The boy's become a man' motif on solo horn		
<b>FFF-III</b>	References col legno material from S-W at bars 878 and 886		
<b>III-JJJ</b>	Reworks the 'Specialist Roberts' battlefield sequence from PP-QQ	PP-QQ	
<b>JJJ-LLL</b>	Reworks overlapping time-signatures material from O-P. Quotes 'The boy's become a man' motif at bar 946	O-P; Q-R; BBB-CCC; DDD-EEE	
<b>LLL-MMM</b>	Ends section		
<b>MMM-TTT</b>	Reworks repeated note motif from Returns prelude	Prelude	
<b>TTT-UUU</b>	Trumpet quotes bass clarinet material — signalling the initial interrogation — from F-G	F-G	
<b>UUU-YYY</b>	Introduces Khalil material		

<b>Appendix A</b>			
	<b>Structural principle</b>	<b>Refers to previous section:</b>	<b>Additional notes</b>
<b>YYY-ZZZ</b>	Quotes bass clarinet material from F-H at bars 1194 and 1200. Also incorporates elements from 'whirlwind sequence' and the 'Arky Arky Song' sequence	F-H; TT-ZZ	
<b>AAAA-BBBB</b>	Uses plainsong style	O-P, W-X, AAA-BBB (style only)	
<b>BBBB-CCCC</b>	Quotes bass clarinet material from F-H at bars 1255 and 1200. Also incorporates elements from 'whirlwind sequence' and the 'Arky Arky Song' sequence. Bars 1265-1274 reference recitative sequence at GG. Bar 1275 to CCCC recapitulates 'Khalil' material.	F-H; GG — bar 554; AA-FF; TT-ZZ; UUU-YYY	
<b>CCCC-HHHH</b>	Recitative section . At bar 1338, quotes 'Bless me Father' motif, and the repeated note motif from MMM-TTT at bars 1367-1375		
<b>HHHH-JJJJ</b>	Reworks the 'Specialist Roberts' battlefield sequence from PP-QQ	PP-QQ; III-JJJ	
<b>JJJJ-KKKK</b>	A capella dialogue. Quotes 'Bless me Father' motif at bars 1426 and 1436, 1439		

<b>Appendix A</b>			
	<b>Structural principle</b>	<b>Refers to previous section:</b>	<b>Additional notes</b>
<b>KKKK-OOOO</b>	Sextet involving all six singers, incorporating elements of the 'Khalil' material as well as material from HHHH-JJJJ ('Little Eyes')	UUU-YYY; HHHH-JJJJ	
<b>OOOO-End</b>	Coda; recapitulates 'What was it like?' motif, as well as 'Dhahur'		