

**CONTINGENCY DIALECTICS IN FASHION-OPERA**

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**PHD THESIS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research project is an attempt to think through the consequences of a non-Newtonian reality for a Marxist theory of aesthetics. From this, a compositional methodology is proposed in the realisation of a four-part “fashion-opera” cycle.

It begins by contextualising itself against a historical misreading of Schoenberg, briefly showing the implications for this in the tradition of Marxist opera and contemporary political art music. Following this critique, it offers an alternative contemporary revolutionary context through concepts from Adorno (2006), Badiou (2013a), Jameson (1991), Lukács (1971), Meillassoux (2007; 2009) and Negarestani (2008).

From this perspective, it combines aspects of the materialist and idealist traditions via the coming stage of capital as defined by what Dowling and Milburn (2003) have called “the second quantum revolution.” This proposes a series of concepts: *the fiction model*, a materialist map of the individual’s relationship to its world; *the contingent dialectic*, a form of maintained paradox; and *the contingent subject*, a trans-subjective agent composed of technology (ie. texts) and individuals. This allows for the establishment of a manifesto, which is later developed in an enquiry regarding choice and relation to propose two fundamental laws.

These ideas are elucidated through analyses of the four operas — *WEAR*, *ROBE*, *WOAD*, and *RUNE* — alongside further theoretical discussion of their themes. This procedure determines the various founding dialectics of the methodology: plurality and immanence; spatialisation and temporality; autonomy and intervention; structure and contingency; and atmosphere and integrality.

It concludes with a reflection on the politics of imagination, the inexistence of limits and the mysteries of theatre, as well as an assertion of the reality of “the space between” — and its emergent agency.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION: KOBAYASHI MARU**

### **1.1 STATEMENT**

This research project is an attempt to think through the consequences of a non-Newtonian reality for a Marxist theory of aesthetics.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, it hypothesises a model of the individual's relationship to an external world and from this, a praxis appropriate to 21st-century knowledge. By developing the implications of this through compositional practice in the late-capitalist marketplace, it proposes a methodology of its realisation.

### **1.2 TERMS**

**Fashion-Opera** is a methodology built on irreconcilable paradox. In this, spatial, interventionist art forms combine with their temporal, autonomous counterparts in a dialogue that reconciles the independence and hierarchical equality of each element with their integration into a logical whole. That is, fashion and opera, for instance, preserve their absoluteness, with neither submitting itself to the other to become mere costume or musical aura.<sup>2</sup> This idea extends throughout to govern all aspects of the artwork, including its realisation across (and beyond) the compositional process. The maintenance of such paradox is justified by the theory of a particular type of antagonism:

a **Contingent Dialectic**. In this, each pole of an opposition maintains its identity and integrity in **mutual exclusivity**, whilst simultaneously being made to **reciprocally contain** one another, and to be contained within larger structures that permit the paradoxical integrity of their constituents. Through these concepts and their application across all stages of the aesthetic process, it is hoped that works can be produced which rival and overcome given structures of perception, and allow for new forms of communal agency in a posthuman

**Contingent Subjectivity**, that is, a transhuman agent composed of technology (ie. texts) and individuals. It is to this — the group and its situation — that the works address themselves. While it is composed of alienated, individual perspectives, these are held to be ultimately a social and biological fiction that can only be transcended in their combination and reassembly.

**The Fiction Model** refers to a materialist model of the individual's relationship to its world.

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<sup>1</sup> By "aesthetics," I am referring specifically to the subject/object relationship in the context of art, rather than a totalising theory of the latter.

<sup>2</sup> Alain Badiou (2005, 62-63) talks of the irreconcilability of dance to theatre or music due to their fundamental ontological differences. I argue that such mutual exclusivity (of the art forms involved: fashion, music, poetry, theatre, dance, amongst other practices) gains radical potential via *the contingent dialectic*.

A **Totality** is defined as a situation that has the power of preserving and combining **mutually exclusive** elements within it: such as a society, or certain artworks.

**Mutually Exclusive** refers to the Hegelian conception of the dialectic which sees an epistemological antagonism as an index of truth (Žižek 1989, 200).<sup>3</sup> This is read through contemporary cosmology<sup>4</sup> and the work of Alain Badiou (2013a; 2013b) and Quentin Meillassoux (2007; 2009), further supplemented by a Marxist theory of time under late capitalism (Adorno 2006; Jameson 1991; Lukács 1971). Together, these argue for the material truth of paradox and non-causality as the nature of the external world and, indeed, our contemporary, socially-determined subjective experience — particularly with regard to alienation and the spatialisation of time.

Finally, **Reciprocal Containment** refers both to a characteristic of the structures of experience and, therefore, of certain artworks. In this latter, I proceed from a reading of the historical bearing of western art music through postmodern conceptions of decentring and multiplicity.<sup>5</sup> That is, the heart of what we might call the western classical canonical trajectory is a freedom of phenomenological perspective, where points within the work function simultaneously as both object and context: they simultaneously contain, and are contained, by one another. Central to this is the antagonism between development and polyphony. This could briefly be traced from the epic quality of Bach (1722/1983), where each voice contextualises its counterparts (Barenboim 2005), to the humanist insights of Mozart (1788/1957), where themes are developed into fully-fledged characters before being recombined as counter-contexts for one another (Tovey 1935, 195-198), to the

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<sup>3</sup> This project shares Hegel's (1975, 99) desire to transcend finite perception, but rejects processes of synthesis and reconciliation. Thus it affirms the fact that "what man seeks...ensnared here as he is in finitude on every side, is the region of a higher, more substantial, truth" but denies the claim that such a truth is one "in which all oppositions and contradictions in the finite can find their final resolution." We must re-frame the Hegelian dictum that "the region of absolute, not finite, truth...is the resolution of the highest opposition and contradiction" (99-100) as its opposite: a place where paradox is preserved.

<sup>4</sup> By this I mean the hermeneutic concepts made possible by notions such as the superposition and the multiverse. I refer to the cultural possibilities that the ability to imagine such relationships makes possible. Ours is a world still in the grip of an outdated Newtonian metaphysics: I am interested in how such knowledge could transform music, society, even ourselves.

<sup>5</sup> This can be read as a reimagining of Hegelian synthesis. Regarding freedom and necessity, Hegel (1874, 243) writes that,

the members, linked to one another, are not really foreign to each other, but only elements of one whole, each of them, in its connection with the other, being, as it were, at home, and combining with itself. In this way, necessity is transfigured into freedom — not the freedom that consists in abstract negation, but freedom concrete and positive. From which we may learn what a mistake it is to regard freedom and necessity as mutually exclusive.

I contend that our historical moment and the knowledge it may deploy demand a re-imagining of synthesis as *reciprocal containment* — which allows us to maintain concepts' *mutual exclusivity*.



elevation of this a level of technique in Schoenberg (1932/1984), where each note is able to operate as both foreground and background (Adorno 2006, 45). In the music of Brian Ferneyhough (1980), through the separation of parameter, the very aspects of the musical event become events — objects — themselves and, within this, function as contexts for one another's progress.<sup>6</sup>

### **1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

According to this, I draw no distinction between composition and research, yet maintain the irreconcilable autonomy of both. Theoretical enquiry is absorbed completely within composition's multi-dimensional procedure, yet proceeds via its logic separately and disinterestedly. Similarly, practice does not diligently elucidate the demands of theory but, instead, by riding roughshod over its claims, ends up showing them to be all the more integral.

It thus develops Ferneyhough's (1995, 41; Fitch 2005, 205) notion of "depth perspective" to incorporate extra-musical abstract theoretical discussion; post-compositional interpretation; deconstructive rehearsal; insurgent performance; and the practical intervention of press and promotion: all as fundamental stages within the compositional process, while still asserting their total discreteness from one another.<sup>7</sup>

Just as it combines diverse epistemological practices, it confirms the independence and truth of various philosophies of music regarding the site of the aesthetic event, utilising their contradictory musical strategies within and across various phases and levels. As part of this, it holds that both the artwork and knowledge production can be understood as object and process. Materialist-idealist reconciliation, which Lenin (1908, 198) identified in Kant, and which Badiou (2013a) attempts from a post-Cantorian position, is here sustained. That is, it proceeds according to the axiom that truth exists and is unknowable but, through the process of moving towards an unknowable truth, the process becomes itself a part of truth, which has a revolutionary, transformative effect upon reality.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, as with every aspect of this project, it holds that different approaches and methods of enquiry can stand arbitrarily alongside one another, intersecting and interrupting, and combine together into an agency beyond the scope of any of

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<sup>6</sup> See footnote 93.

<sup>7</sup> For more on this, see chapter 7, "The False Choice of Choice: Structure and Contingency in *WOAD*." According to this dialectic, the works combine highly specific, complex notation with absolute freedom in interpretation. As such, the reader will notice differences between the scores and their realisation. These range from subtle differences, to gestural/pitch changes (see *ROBE*: track 1 "Beira's Warning" on the album; page 6-7 in the score) to total re-arrangements (see *WOAD*: track 5 "Interim: The Painted Ones" on the album; no. 5 in the score).

<sup>8</sup> While the situations are different for the three (Badiou, Marx and Kant), the process remains the same. The journey towards truth propels and transforms. This corresponds to: the noumena in Kant (by the transcendental subject); the infinite truth process in Badiou (by the faithful subject); the future in Marx (by the subject of history).

their limits. And so throughout it submits its ontological and epistemological claims to its own epistemic praxis: by working through the ideas both theoretically and compositionally, realising them practically in collaboration with the opposing strategies of other practices that the work contains (and is contained by), and finally, by arguing for them within and against the logic of the market.

In this, it affirms their diversity and contingency rather than their synthesis. Fundamentally, it asserts its relevance as a universal theory of perception, though only accessible through this historical moment: it is both a necessarily limited, personal response and absolute system. By doing so, it supports the axiom that the universal and the particular remain inaccessible yet absolutely reciprocally integral in their dialectical negativity, and (of course) the fact that they are essential constituents of one another.

It should be no surprise, then, that this thesis moves between different voices and registers, and features a wide range of strategies, including philosophical reasoning, political polemic, critical reading, musicological study and compositional demonstration. I nevertheless maintain that this research is within the domain of composition rather than philosophy or practice research. First, in its claim that composition is a multi-dimensional procedure with multiple, hierarchically equal stages outside the notes themselves; second, through its contextualisation within a tradition of structuralism that recognises the primacy of the Symbolic over the individual. In this way, it rejects solipsistic Heideggerian models that centre the practitioner rather than the text. This has implications for the use of example. The system's emphasis on contingency and alienated infinity, as well as the necessity of a plurality of readings (of which the composer's is only a single, equal, constituent), makes a strong case for jettisoning notational illustration altogether — and presenting the works and their philosophical system separately. Indeed, we should be mistrustful of compositional “research” that describes processes or events and then asserts their meaning. While trying to focus, for the most part, on general methodological principles, I have still included such techniques at certain points, as well as the interpretations of others regarding the meaning of the works. For both the detail and the individual that grasps it are not only relevant — but vital to the antagonisms that they form with their opposites. Thus I hope this research (at least) attempts a dialectic between the subjective and the objective.

Finally, a word on the use of footnotes. These have been deployed as an extension of the text, in part to stylistically explicate the methodology's themes of multiplicity, excess, interruption and annotation, and also to facilitate the segregation of example and argument as outlined above. They variously contain: references to the artworks and illustrative excerpts; comments, digressions and supplements to the main line of enquiry, including musicological studies; and long quotations that directly (or indirectly) illuminate a point. The reader may engage with these as they wish.

## **1.4 RESEARCH CONTEXT**

No wonder to art music's cultural irrelevance: contemporary technological, social and scientific realities demand a reformulation of the cultural practices which emerged from their predecessors. Retaining frameworks of praxis that are as out of date as the worlds in which they arose is at best disingenuous: we search everywhere to break the late-capitalist consensus only to affirm the ideological fictions by which it is maintained. The saying goes that “it is easier to imagine the end of the world rather than the end of capitalism” (Jameson 1998). Yet the world imagined here is long disproved, as “ended” in any meaningful sense as the flat earth. Just as we cling to disproven models of the universe, we cling to outdated aesthetic strategies that have been repeatedly proved to fail, stuck in the perpetual newness of the recent, irrelevant past.

The contingent dialectic is proposed as a solution to the current impasse of co-dependent pluralism. Living processes have ossified into schools and languages: a marketplace from which the composer selects and then conforms to a safely established identity, no matter how “revolutionary.” Once diverse procedures unite in this New Classicism: the schools of Neurotic Structure, of Hysterical Negativity, of Rational Compromise. We believe in the all-encompassing realism of their fictions, and recite: this, or that. We may, respectively: systematise; mime destruction; conform. This plurality of expression is its reification, for, like digital culture more generally, eclecticism of style ensures the similitude of the result. Self-justified systematic autonomy is no more independent than Experimentalism's (repetitions of its) rituals are iconoclastic; the middle way's compromise is structurally identical to both. Far from offering any kind of insurgent strategy, these languages remain permitted by having neutralised themselves in the museum of a subject that no longer exists. The factions depend upon one another in their surface negativity: that is, without content beyond style, other tensions must sustain. This co-dependence belies their plurality. At its heart, almost all contemporary art music is a mask play upon absence, upon the inability to muster belief beyond the local as defined by its others.

I believe this situation has arisen from a fundamental misreading that can now be rectified: namely, the nature of the dialectic implicit in Schoenberg. In a world bestowed with concepts such as multiple infinities,<sup>9</sup> parallel universes<sup>10</sup> and superpositions,<sup>11</sup> we can return to the source of the

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<sup>9</sup> The mathematician Georg Cantor proved “that some infinite sets are larger than others—for example, the real numbers are larger than the integers” (Hosch 2016). His work “implies that there are infinitely many infinite cardinal numbers, and that there is no largest cardinal number” (Keef and Guichard 2017, 112).

<sup>10</sup> The name “parallel universe” denotes a number of phenomena (Tegmark 2014). One of these constitutes “the Many-Worlds Interpretation (MWI) of quantum mechanics [which] holds that there are many worlds which exist in parallel at the same space and time as our own” (Vaidman 2021).

<sup>11</sup> This refers to “the feature of a quantum system whereby it exists in several separate quantum states at the same time” (Joint Quantum Institute 2022).

misreading and confirm the truth of the contingent dialectic. This will allow us, instead of being caught within the marketplace as one of its dutiful actors, to transcend its limitations and assert: neither this, nor that, yet all.

Why return again to Schoenberg? Because perhaps the impasse turns directly upon this tragic misreading, for it implies that the procedures which emerged from it would eventually collapse. Over a hundred years later, contemporary music practices can still be characterised by their interpretation of the historical and philosophical significance of the Schoenberg phenomenon. This is partially due to their being (of course) a reaction to this; but also, because of its failure to connect the meaning of Schoenberg to living culture, contemporary music believes itself to still contain a radical potential. Whether this belief is held to or challenged (sometimes, via a denial of aesthetic value altogether), it remains fundamental to music's self-sustaining mediocrity. Following Richard Kurth (2001), I will read Schoenberg's conception of Hegelian *Aufhebung* as suspension rather than synthesis. This suspension, where tonality is not negated, but rather hangs as a latent possibility through the tension between subjective negation and the weight of history, is the modernist origin of the possibility of a contingent dialectic.

The early dramatic implications of this can be seen in Schoenberg's (1917) own *Die glückliche Hand*, which Luigi Nono (1961, 421, quoted by Gilbert 1979, 22) identified as a model for his own Marxist practice:

*Die glückliche Hand* was the start of a modern conception of theatre. In this, 'drama,' singing and mimed action alternate and develop simultaneously, not one an illustration of the other but each characterising independently various situations. The chorus has a double function: the sonorous and purely visual-colour and form are integrated into the scene in an autonomous and symbolic use.

Such division is made possible by the modernist subject of psychoanalysis, where "the divided individual represented reality" (Harvey 2005, 48), and the subsequent fragmentation of temporal experience under late-capitalism into "Lacanian schizophrenia" (Jameson 1991; Adorno 2006). Further to this, I would add that which the work's polemical content implies: the alienation of the subject from itself, here transmuted into a separation of music and drama.

Whereas, as Adorno (2006) suggested, in the later *Moses und Aron* (Schoenberg 1932/1984), this suspension resolves into a reified serial logic, Berg's operas represent an attempt to sustain, albeit through a systemisation, the original paradox itself. By forcing the separate strategies of inherited, given tonality and its atonal negation together, the harmonic languages of *Wozzeck* (1922/1923) and *Lulu* (1935/1964) hang in an uncomfortable suspension that remains more provocative than serialism's dutifully cadential tonic-liquidation. From this, Berg uses the implied non-integration to

create a unifying language of irreconcilable dichotomy. These tensions have been well documented: between through-written argument and post-Symbolist scenic delineation (Weller 2005, 80); in “the seemingly paradoxical fusion of technical calculation and emotional spontaneity” (Jarman 1989, 21); and even alluded to in the contrasting palettes used in vocal characterisation, orchestration and stage direction (Perle 1989, 185-187). Alan Street (2005, 94-95) maintains that such an attempt to ensure “a complete correlation between the representation of personal experience and the constructive mechanisms of architectural design” is a strategy of Berg's Schoenbergian musical autonomy to “ensure that the dual dimensions of structure and selfhood would achieve a coherent synthesis” (96). By reading it as a totality rather than a process, this fundamentally misunderstands the nature of such autonomy. Rather, the Schoenbergian process of becoming, centring around the core paradox of being and nothingness via the procedure of negated and sustained tonality, extends out into the work in a language of plurality that resists any form of integration. Indeed, George Perle (185) questions whether it is “tendentious to assume that the many different compositional procedures and techniques in *Wozzeck* must be integrated as components of a single comprehensive system,” surmising that the classical tradition ill-prepared analysts to contend with *Wozzeck's* design. Accordingly, I read Berg's procedure as: the creation of a forced integration of the unresolvable.

By “clamping” mutually exclusive compositional approaches against one another (an operation made possible by the non-human, machinic logic of the composer’s contemporary industrial reality), great expressive potential becomes available. Each bears its counterpart's negativity as an active mechanism of expression, like a scar, a sense of permanent incompleteness, which testifies to the plight of the characters and their world. The experience of modernist community is here conceptualised: the monadic interiority of an extra-conceptual/hyper-objective (Morton 2013) urban sprawl, which finds voice in the reciprocal objectivity that each subjective procedure bestows upon the other: two strangenesses in one another's homes. This presence of the uncanny (Freud 2001) can itself be read as a development of Wagner’s (1874/1986) semanticisation of sound through leitmotif in the *Ring*, particularly with regard to the tetralogy’s environmental theme on the colonisation of the natural world (the unity of the Imaginary, the home, made strange by Symbolic technological systematisation). Ultimately, this operates at a phenomenological level in an expressionist, humanist appeal for its characters, translating the moral discomforts of a cruel society into the musical language. In this, the crystallisation of suspension is metonymic rather than metaphysical. It is not, like *Tristan und Isolde* (1859/1973), a musical theory of being, but rather an expressive tool with which to articulate a polemical howl of pain that should be read in the

same romantic modernism as Marx (2008). Functioning only as a device in the service of such commitment,<sup>12</sup> it is perhaps not surprising that it represents an endpoint rather than an opening.<sup>13</sup>

Marxist opera's failure to engage the autonomy of this formula has led to its being subsumed within the structures it was attempting to overcome. Nono's (1961/2013) *Intolleranza 1960* engages the dialectics of alienation, but becomes instead caught in spatialised time through the disjunction that contains (rather than being contained by) the work). In *Ulisse*, Dallapiccola's (1968) eclectic language unifies diversity into synthesis and so neutralises it. Henze's (1965/2005) *The Bassarids* continues this line, representing a form of musical capitulation to sense rather than the active attempt to remake its possibilities. Here, what is offered is that which can be conceptualised, when surely the point of any Marxist art is to remake the possibilities of perception itself.<sup>14</sup>

The failure of such "political" music rests upon two errors. First, that resistance may constitute anything less than transcendence. Adorno (2007) has shown how there is no way out of capitalism, of the givenness of perception, by fighting it hand to hand, in places, piece by piece. It will always adapt and subsume the strategy within itself. All such posturing masks a reciprocally self-sustaining negotiation. Second (and especially when attempting such transcendence), that it assumes the limits of the social. Contemporary music is unforgivably content with its position, even in Adornian "autonomy," as a "complacently tolerated ghetto" (Lachenmann 2002, 25). Meillassoux (2007, 71-74) has taught how contingency declares: everything is always possible.<sup>15</sup> The challenge of this is nothing less than the proximity of revolution, the knowledge that — even tonight — the

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<sup>12</sup> By commitment and autonomy, I am referring to Adorno's (2007) definition of them in "Commitment." I understand a work's "commitment" to be a constituent of what I refer to as "intervention," which may also include extra-textual strategies.

<sup>13</sup> For a supplementary close reading of *Wozzeck*, see footnote 47.

<sup>14</sup> Today such retreats have borne a lamentable legacy in the modern operatic realism of Britain. It is caught within a mean-spirited ideology, one which hypothesises the audience as a series of identical receivers to whom only a certain, narrow logic can be constructed and transferred. In this way, it mirrors the false choice of parliamentary democracy: only that which is communicable through the established modes of communication is valid as a discourse. Indeed, the broad reconciliation of modernism to the market's demands mirrors the argument of those who patronisingly view the populace as an unsophisticated mob with whom they must compromise. All of this can be drawn back to the use-value/exchange-value divide: we value not what something is, but what it is worth in relation to something else. A new generation of composers has demonstrated that, like the logic of the consumer marketplace from which it draws its power, those willing to find success on this path will not be readily exhausted. Worse, though, is the faux critique that many of these pieces play out: in the cheapening of the politics of art to the politics of content. In the age of the digital marketplace, when our very thoughts are programmed by social media algorithms, I do not believe that anyone still genuinely believes in the power of gentle suggestion to create any meaningful change within the totality of capitalism. "A revolution is not a dinner party" (Mao 1972, 11); it is certainly not a programmatic conceit.

<sup>15</sup> See section 7.1, "The Seven-Sided Die."

world could change utterly, into a beautiful, wonderful thing for all. What has not been considered is that *this is exactly what is at hand*.

The postmodern spatialisation of time,<sup>16</sup> and the modernist alienation<sup>17</sup> from which it arises, foreground the possibility of contingency in our historical moment: by embedding non-relation and disjunction as fundamental constituents of the contemporary individual, and defining its relationship to itself, its others and its world. As capital splits the subject into a paradox of mutually exclusive pieces depending on the task they are instructed to perform — a mouth, a hand, an ear — a significant experiential ground arises. This has been alluded to by Reza Negarestani (2008, 195-207), who contrasts the openness that “comes from the outside” against negotiated, “economical openness.” I read this polemic as claiming: the exteriority of transcendence is not achieved through false claims to liminality or compromise, but rather the submission of the individual to its nonhuman alienation. **The Contingent Subject** becomes possible in a society where the social fiction of the individual is both *absolute*, and *absolutely disproven*. This is given pressing relevancy by the historical ground of the coming stage of capital, which in its quantum technological revolution unveils **the Fiction Model** within its cultural dominant. Finally, it is justified by the ontological ground of Cantor,<sup>18</sup> whose demonstration of multiple infinities forms the basis of Badiou’s (2013a) ontology of multiple, processive truths. Taken together, these allow for the possibility of **mutually exclusive reciprocal containment** and, in turn, **the Contingent Dialectic**. In these, we may conceive of the unimaginable: that which lies outside the givenness of ourselves. Such an endeavour is the only true heir to the meaning of Schoenberg, the composer who understood and captured the materiality of the beyond.

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<sup>16</sup> See section 5.1, “The Logic of The Axis (Introduction).”

<sup>17</sup> “In this environment where time is transformed into abstract, exactly measurable, physical space, an environment at once the cause and effect of the scientifically and mechanically fragmented and specialised production of the object of labour, the subjects of labour must likewise be rationally fragmented” (Lukács 1971, 90).

<sup>18</sup> See footnote 9.

## **2. CONTINGENCY DIALECTICS I**

### **2.1 THE FICTION MODEL**

The quantum computer heralds a dramatic change in our relationship to reality: capital's normalisation of quantum weirdness from specialist knowledge to everyday use-value will have far-reaching superstructural effects. "The first quantum revolution gave us new rules that govern physical reality. The second quantum revolution will take these rules and use them to develop new technologies" (Dowling and Milburn 2003, Introduction). To this should be added: those technologies, in turn, will create a revolution in culture and thought via the establishment of their own cultural logic (Jameson 1991). As subtle, nuanced and reciprocal as we know the base/superstructure relationship to be, the "vulgar" Marxist insight that the modes of production are the ultimate determinants of cultural experience<sup>19</sup> is essential in its austere understanding. For, as technological forces incorporate extra-perceptual transcendence, it allows us to read the stage of capital defined by quantum technology as a moment of great opportunity for reimagining aesthetic form and the limits of the possible.<sup>20</sup> I hold that the nature of this coming epoch demands artists propose a model of how their work intervenes within the structures of experience.<sup>21</sup>

Although there are as yet no conclusive descriptions of our universe to satisfy a Marxist aesthetics fully, what there is agreement upon amongst a majority of physicists is that "there exists an external physical reality completely independent of us humans" (Tegmark 2014, 271); following

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<sup>19</sup> "In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness" (Marx 1859, 2 of 3).

<sup>20</sup> Indeed, already, all around us, popular culture reinvigorates forms and franchises with the dramatic potential of the multiverse. See, for instance, *Loki* (Waldron 2021) *Rick and Morty* (Harmon and Roiland 2013), *DEVS* (Garland 2020), *Dr Strange In the Multiverse of Madness* (Raimi 2022) and *Everything Everywhere All At Once* (Kwan and Scheinert 2022). Of course, this is only used to shore up existing structures through novel content. What if we pursued its implications at a formal level?

<sup>21</sup> Much has already been written about the implications of this for music in the context of dialectical materialism. Bruno Deschênes (1991) has mapped how modern scientific theories such as Hologram theory and relativity can change our approach to listening. Brian Cox (2015) has portrayed Messiaen's (1941/1942) compositional methods as exemplified by *Quatuor Pour La Fin Du Temps* as being a superstructural expression of a base reality, the novelty of Cox's argument being to replace Marxism's social conception of an underlying reality in a society's modes of production with the fundamental processes of the physical universe: in this case, the concept of inflation. Similarly, Judy Lohead (2001) has asserted music's critical role in navigating our relationship to a non-Newtonian reality.



Max Tegmark, I accept that this entails the demand for a distinction between the “external reality” described by recent scientific advances and the “consensus reality” of evolutionarily determined human perception (239).<sup>22</sup>

The resultant “unknowability” of that external reality is the nexus of a contradiction between idealism and materialism, and it is through a reformulation of this principle that transcendence can be grounded in revolutionary possibility. K. K. Theckedath (1974) responds to quantum physics' problematisation of the concept of objective reality by arguing that, rather than returning to idealist notions of unknowability, we should apprehend quantum noumena through the dynamic, relational approach of dialectical materialism. T. Jayaraman (1975) develops this by further impressing the problems of idealism's answer to quantum science by emphasising its ideological function as bourgeois philosophy to distort truth and prevent change. However, if we take Tegmark's (2014, 5, 299) contention that the unknowability of reality is evolutionarily determined by the practical demands of Darwinian selection, we can reformulate the concept of “unknowability” as instead “imperceptibility,” which figures the limits of our sensual understanding as themselves part of a knowable process of evolution. Extending the domain of knowledge (as a widespread cultural dominant) beyond the realms of the immediate and the individual<sup>23</sup> would be the great prize of the second quantum revolution: the death of post-truth (an inversion of this, where the individual defines truth as its limited, selected knowledge) and the Newtonian liberal subject-monad (the lie of the individual as a rational, complete perspective). And, indeed, Theckedath and Jayaraman's insistence that physics adopt dialectical materialism carries as much truth when posited the other way around: Marxist critiques must necessarily incorporate aspects of the idealist tradition, or, by emphasising consensus over external reality, become quasi-idealist denials of scientific knowledge themselves. Stephen G. Brush (1980) has shown the historical irony of how culture-bound accustomedness to mechanistic materialism has brought about the same cultural resistance to scientific theory that idealist religiosity had to Copernicus and Galileo's materialism. A Marxist theory of aesthetics is no different: a philosophy that attempts its utopian ideals through the demystification of false consciousness must incorporate this layer of illusion into its framework.

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<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that this distinction is separate from, and in no way dependent upon, Tegmark's notorious theory of a “mathematical universe.” Rather, this represents the most conservative presumption regarding the implications of contemporary cosmology.

<sup>23</sup> “Dialectics as *living*, many-sided knowledge (with the number of sides eternally increasing), with an infinite number of shades of every approach and approximation to reality...Human knowledge is not (or does not follow) a straight line, but a curve, which endlessly approximates a series of circles, a spiral” (Lenin 1979, 186).

In doing so, we can construct a model of imposed fictions that arbitrate our relationship to reality.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Louis Althusser's (2008) concept of ideology as the reproduction of the relations of production through the imposition of false consciousness upon the subject must ultimately be dependent upon the subject's psychology, which Daniel Kahneman's (2011) work has revealed to be an evolutionarily determined machine of necessity that employs processes which privilege pre-formed bias over rational enquiry. Psychological bias is therefore inseparably linked to the imposed ideology by which the economic base reproduces superstructural beliefs in its citizens. Because it is the same evolutionary necessity which is ultimately responsible for the collapsing of external reality into consensus reality, all three levels can be understood as interrelated to the point of dependence, working together to weave an intricate series of imposed fictions which the subject experiences. That is, the Marxist conception of ideological fiction can no longer be limited to the social sphere, but extends into the flesh, the bowels, the double helix, the most basic units of identity's data: on an evolutionary — rather than historical — temporal scale.<sup>25</sup> Materialist analysis leads, via recent cosmological discovery, to the idealist division of the subject from the real. I call this expanded scheme of false consciousness *the fiction model*.

The significance of this to a Marxist aesthetics must be understood through value's relationship to knowledge, as Terry Eagleton (1990, 227) explains: "what the fact/ value dichotomy fails to account for...is emancipatory knowledge...In the understanding and the transforming of reality, 'fact' and 'value' are not separable processes but aspects of the same phenomenon." According to the Hegelian and Marxist traditions (Churchich 1994, 275), we can define emancipatory knowledge as the dialectical counterpart to the fiction model's arbitration of our knowledge of reality in that it (the fiction model) is ultimately determined by evolutionary necessity. Freedom is simultaneously dependent on and opposed to necessity, as Engels (1947, Chapter 11) argues: "freedom does not consist in any dreamt-of independence from natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends." Consequently, if we understand necessity according to modern scientific appraisals of our relationship to "natural laws," we must similarly reformulate the concept of freedom and emancipatory knowledge. By expanding the concept of false consciousness into the fiction model, we can recognise the discrepancy between external and consensus reality itself as being a locus

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<sup>24</sup> This differs from similar "transcendental materialisms" such as that of Žižek (1989) or Adrian Johnston (2014) in that at its heart it is nothing more than a structuralist Marxist politics redefining itself via the stage of capital represented by the quantum computer. While this thesis does go into some detail regarding the nature of the concepts and methodological principles this implies, it is important to grasp the meaning of this historical moment from as simple a reading as possible, based on nothing more than widely accepted data. The point, ultimately, is the implications for a cultural dominant.

<sup>25</sup> This is not to indulge in a biological determinism; Catherine Malabou (2019) has shown the reciprocal interplay between the social, psychological and biological, even genetic, allowing us to conceive of this reciprocity as a site of intervention.

of forces of emancipation and subjugation, dictated by hard-won truth and conditioned falsehood. The axiom that “there are certain kinds of knowledge which we must at all costs obtain in order to be free” (Eagleton 226) thus loses its historical relativity.<sup>26</sup> Nietzsche’s (1957) apprehension that the consequences of the confines of our subjectivity must themselves be surmounted is given new meaning through a Marxist appropriation of a historically re-invigorated Kantianism, where “the subject lives not in divided and distinguished worlds but at the aporetic intersection between the two, where blindness and insight, emancipation and subjection are mutually constitutive” (Eagleton 80). This, the contradiction of the Kantian idealist-materialist split (Lenin 1908, 198), is the contingency at the heart of the second quantum revolution.

The advent of such a moment allows us to collapse both traditions into a theory of the artwork as a political event. Self-actualisation (dependent upon knowledge) occurs in the interplay between subject and object, an operation which is arbitrated by evolutionary-biological and socio-ideological processes, and freed from these by creative practices that resist the passive inheritance of necessity. Art is the most important of these because of its reconciliation of the individual to the social within a practice that is primarily concerned with the subject/object division and relationship, allowing it to engage with the fiction model at every level: from the limits of experience and an awareness of their modalities, through sensation and bias, to reason. The concept of freedom as defined against the fiction model's necessity thus becomes a measurement of revolutionary and aesthetic value,<sup>27</sup> and art can be seen as a dialectical process towards the imperceptible (Kant 2007, 143) that transforms the material world, ourselves included (Marx 1859, 6 of 18) “by render[ing] the indiscernible immanent,” as Badiou (2013a, 361) so memorably puts it: “the all powerfulness of a truth is merely that of changing what is.”

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<sup>26</sup> The achievement of utopia, if it were ever possible, would still not resolve the struggle that originates at the very heart of what it means to be a knowing subject.

<sup>27</sup> To be clear, this is absolutely not a teleological appeal to the extra-aesthetic, as used by much modern political art to justify its own absence of value. Rather, the aesthetic and the political align in the fiction model’s transplantation of the aesthetic into the political sphere, and vice versa. The aesthetic is political; politics occurs at the level of the aesthetic.

## **2.2 THE CONTINGENT SUBJECT: A MANIFESTO**

*Defining terms as: “the individual” as that which is imposed by non-human structural necessity; “the subject” as that which is freely created in an ongoing process of self-actualisation; and “a totality” as a complete situation that can combine mutually exclusive elements (ie. other totalities) within it.*

*The individual experiences a totality of imposed fictions (by evolutionary necessity that mediates data input and psychological process and drives, the resultant social ideology which mediates drives and thought content, and the random intersections of these which determine their realisation upon the individual, and then the relationship between this and its realisations in “the other” at all levels of social interaction, real and otherwise) and is composed of constitutive fictions (these as their sedimentation into a monadic, material “individual”).*

*The imposed fictions are a negation of reality, and combine into a series of totalities through the establishment of rigorous immanent structure that incorporates their contradictory elements.*

*Art is a fiction, which, when operating under the same mechanics, may function as a negation of those very fictions: a structurally cohesive and immanently complete artwork that contains and justifies its own contradictions can function as an aesthetic totality (beyond and outwith the social totality) in which non-conditioned encounters can take place.*

*Such art operates as a negation of the imposed fictions' negation of reality to reveal the positive content of that negation, thereby moving us to the limits of our phenomenal experience: the edge of the noumenal real.*

*Freedom (and therefore subjectivity) is possible through the restructuring of the structures that create us as unfree.*

*Transcendental intersubjectivity here gains new life: as the imposed fictions' filtration of external reality into constitutive fictions. Communities of observers share different elements of consensus reality and ideological interpellation, while at the same time being constructed as absolutely separate from one another by that same biological construction and historically-determined social conditioning; in the artwork, we gain the possibility of transcendental community in our constitutive fictions being engaged and overcome.*

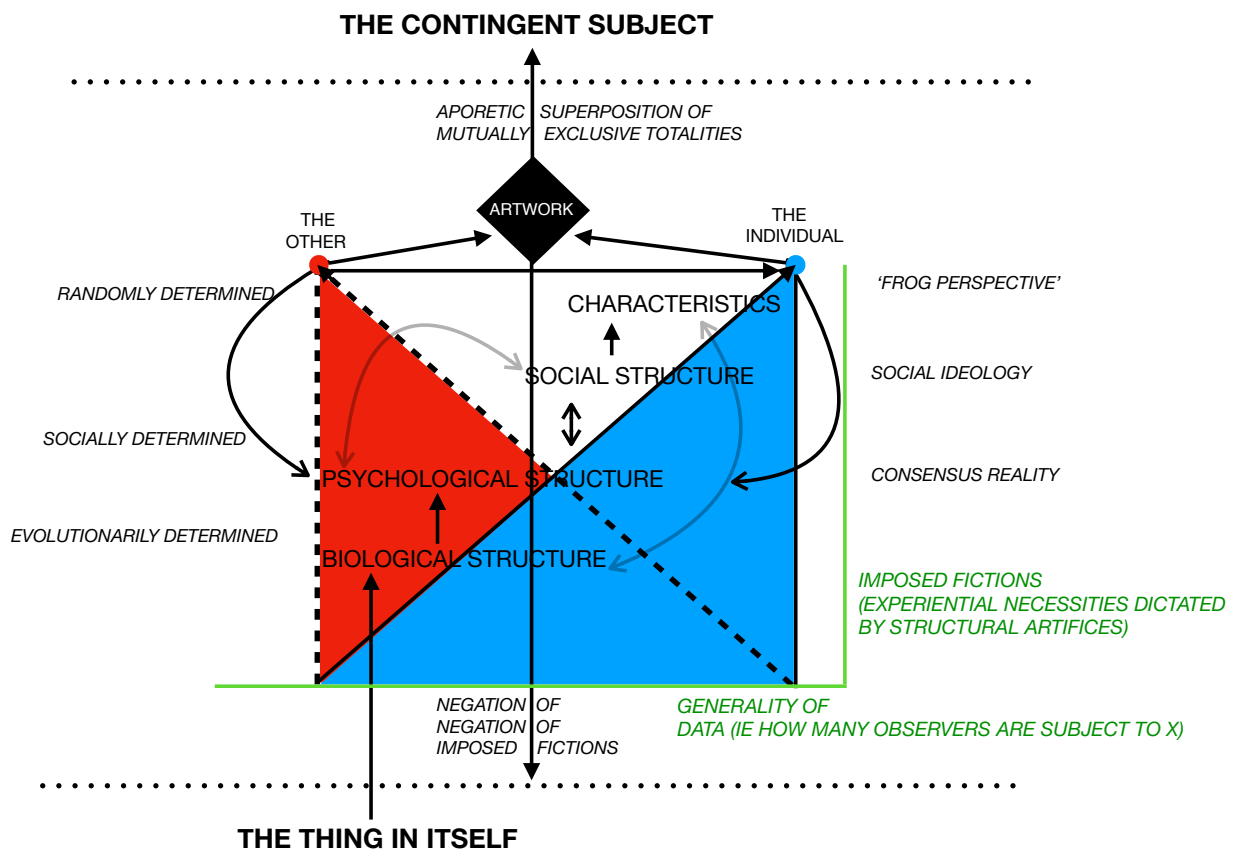
*The artwork of the future is that in which the subject is re-assembled by being incorporated into a community of meaning-creation: from individual to constituent of a machine that reveals the arbitrary nature of imposed individuality.*

*That is: an aesthetic totality can function as a social totality by recombining mutually exclusive wholes (human and aesthetic) within it. Structural immanence gives this meaning; this immanence*

can organise information too great to be apprehended by a single consciousness, and allow it to contain structural breaks and arbitrary elements as fundamental constituents of truth. Functioning in this way, the aesthetic totality can incorporate the individuals perceiving it within its structure as fundamentally necessary for its meaning production (and so integral to form). Combining mutually exclusive individuals outside of the social totality creates the possibility for a new form of subjectivity: an intersection of technology (ie. texts, artworks) and individuals: what will be termed “the Contingent Subject,” a trans-subjective agent assembled from multiple semiotic and psychological structures through aesthetic procedures.

Negation of imposed fiction occurs simultaneously in the assembly of individuals into a trans-subjective agent: truth and community are, as processes, indistinguishable.

Fig. 1.<sup>28</sup>



<sup>28</sup> For the avoidance of doubt, “X” refers to variables of input and “frog perspective” refers to a point of view from within a system.

### **3. FASHION-OPERA, A CLOSE READING: PLURALITY AND IMMANENCE IN ROBE**

#### **3.1 WORKS AND DIALECTICS**

Fashion-opera is the name given to the practice that attempts to realise these ideas. It was proposed in an initial cycle of four works created between 2018 and 2021: *WEAR*, *ROBE*, *WOAD* and *RUNE*, which organise dance, fashion, music, poetry, drama and their participants (amongst other things) in contingent dialectics. These form the core of this project's portfolio. They are supported by five supplementary pieces which demonstrate the implications of the methodology in entirely different contexts: *A Boat in an Endless Blue Sea*, *The Drowning Shore*, *WORK*, *The Snake That Eats The World* and *Music Against* —. Included also with these is *Hareflight*, a fifth fashion-opera (though not part of the cycle) which premiered in 2022. This latter, and the supplementary offerings, are alluded to only briefly in appendix 2; their main point is to prove the function of the concepts beyond the immediate limits of the cycle, but they are also sometimes referenced to make or reinforce a specific point.

The original cycle endeavoured to found four primary dialectics as the basis of its methodology: spatialisation and temporality; plurality and immanence; structure and contingency; and autonomy and intervention. From these emerged a fifth: atmosphere and integrality. While not connected by a direct plot or storyline, the operas represent a continuous narrative of enquiry via the questions that each poses, answers or problematises. And though all works contain all dialectics, each takes a certain antagonism as one of its primary themes. I have chosen not to proceed linearly through the cycle, but rather in terms of how best to articulate both theory and practice. Thus, I begin with a more traditional close reading of *ROBE*, which shows how the organisation of language and music works to enable the processes outlined in the previous section. This allows for a theoretical consideration of the contingent dialectic to propose two laws concerning choice and relation. I then move to a wider consideration of the methodology. In this, I first address spatialisation and temporality in *WEAR*. The logics that this dialectic implies are here used to present global implications for the methodology and the effects on the organisation and content of the various practices involved. This is followed by a discussion of the meaning of the autonomy and intervention dialectic, from which I propose principles for operating in the late-capitalist marketplace. I then examine *WOAD* in relation to the dialectic of structure and contingency, specifically with regard to the relationship between performance and compositional practice in a bid to resolve contradictions between earlier chapters. Finally, I explore the dialectic of atmosphere and integrality in *RUNE*. This is both the first and last of the antagonisms — in equal parts finalising and re-problematising them.

### **3.2 ROBE**

*ROBE* offers an analytical model of how the theoretical ideas presented previously work in practice. At the core of the opera's structure is a set of relationships that emphasise the antagonisms implied by the above manifesto: between the one and the many; between plurality and immanence; between structure and contingency; between spatialisation and temporality. The dramatic action explicates this by combining two altogether separate narratives, each with its own levels of artificiality and reality, and which, as the work progresses, begin to affect each other before eventually colliding into a reciprocal containment of one another.

A diligent materialism might recognise these notions' origin in the lived experience of Edinburgh, the city of parallel worlds: of coexisting paradoxes in architecture, landscape, history, language. The contrast of different "Edinburghs" that exist within the same space is the inspiration for much of the Scottish capital's iconic mythos: take, for instance, Robert Louis Stevenson's (1999) *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, or James Hogg's (2006) *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, the Scott Monument's (Kemp and Steell, 1844) bizarre amalgam of Neoclassical statue and Gothic spire, or how the Scottish Parliament Building (Miralles and Tagliabue, 2004) combines glass, light and air with the encroaching earth of its neighbouring mountain. *ROBE* puts this tradition to work on questions concerning the implications of A.I. and virtual reality: exploring the concepts outlined above regarding how multiple realities are layered upon one another to produce a composite of jostling stimuli; and how collaboration and community can perhaps create, by combining individuals through the ancient technology of artworks, a form of artificial superintelligence.

In this, the opera proceeds from the hypothesis that virtual reality has existed since the dawn of time, in that books, theatres — even the clothes we wear — are all examples of machines which transform and augment our perceptions of the world. Accordingly, the libretto attempts to create a language that combines aspects of ancient Attic theatre (Aeschylus 1977) with the complex wordplay of poets such as Geoffrey Hill (2013) and the surging, excessive imagery of authors like William Gibson (2015). Words become, on one hand, totems, archaeological artefacts which, through an almost material physicality, bear the past into the present; and, on the other, indiscriminate flotsam within a flow of sensation and musicality. This tension varies in intensity according to the demands of the dramatic structure: with peaks of poetic density giving way to moments of striking clarity through simple descriptions of everyday memory. Language is exploited as object and process, as disassociated elements and meaningful trajectory: to create a complete artificiality, a totality of opposing impulses. These ideas coalesce in the way the worlds within the piece transform into (and out of) the imagery used to describe them: birds change from omens to metaphors and back again; places and their memories become extended Homeric metaphors for displaced, unseen dramatic events; proper nouns become in turns adjectival or incantatory;

characters dissolve into ideas and arguments, which proceed to contradict themselves back to the point that they are characters again (and vice-versa); until the boundaries between individual and world become wrapped around one another.

The plot — a circular narrative that uses retroactive and multi-layered causality — straddles the related but nonidentical trajectories of content and structure.<sup>29</sup> Despite its fundamental importance, not only in and of itself, but as the ultimate explication of the opera's theses, it is still consistently relegated in favour of the character's individual momentary experiences: to emphasise, on one hand, the disorientating nature of pure, immediate sensation and, on the other, the fundamental primacy of individual consciousness, of free subjectivity, over the imposition of fictive structures: stories, maps, laws, codes. In line with reality, music and drama must share a mutually exclusive but reciprocally containing relationship. Their consistencies and inconsistencies, and the shapes drawn in the transitions between these, (most interestingly of all, perhaps, between the clash of the demands of strict poetic and musical forms) create a far greater rationalism than the methodical application of mediated musical signifiers to a series of events. Obviously, this contradicts a certain line of thought that circulates through market and institution alike: one which reduces the incalculable potential of the art form to questions of knee-jerk, filmic, one-dimensional meaning, questions of efficacy, of the pleasure of understanding that everything remains in its right place, graspable, finite, as it was. This is part of a deep, pernicious evil of late capitalism: the desire for things to change only superficially, using stylistic novelty to maintain ancient structural relations;

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<sup>29</sup> For reference, I provide one possible reading of the plot structure:

*In a society where the difference between the real and the virtual is no longer meaningful, a powerful new being threatens the stability which holds these worlds together. Two elders, Neachneohain and Beira, convince the young cartographer Rowan to complete a terrible task: descend into the mind of the superintelligence EDINBURGH and map this creature so as to grant its desire — to become a living city, teeming with human life and activity. Witnessing visions of the awful realness of life beyond cyberspace, Rowan agrees — plunging into its depths: a strange, abstract world of data and dream.*

*30 years later, Rowan and EDINBURGH have fallen in love, have lived their lives together. Though every morning she awakes with no memory of the past, Rowan has almost completed the map that EDINBURGH desires. But into this map Rowan has woven something else: something hidden, silent, unsaid. As these rifts in the structure undo causality itself, her story begins to intertwine with a second narrative, the history of a forgotten city and an ancient, poisoned ROBE: of the growth of a map from its dirty, battle-camp beginnings, through the erasure of the myriad stories that its expansion silences, to a heady, plentiful future of spacecraft and bureaucracy, before a tragic reckoning with the cost of its own origins. The stories weave through and collide with one another until the opera collapses into a final, traumatic vision of the real world.*

*In the epilogue, Rowan realises that what she had created was full of the private, hidden histories of herself and EDINBURGH: the small, vital things of everyday life that never make it into our maps or myths. It was these imperfections that originally threatened the stability of their artificial society: life's detail is chaotic, flourishing — and impossible to quantify.*



the desire for things to remain as fixed objects, rather than ongoing, infinite processes; to be ineffectual, futile, for show.

Complexity, of course, is implicated in this. Though such music retains a renegade potential — still not subsumed into the cultural consciousness as its counterparts in the visual arts have been — to remain a process at all, it must incorporate negative knowledge, the future, the unknown, the infinite. *ROBE* attempts to establish a language of difficulty and strangeness, but, within these parameters, “Complexity” is made to work with its own negation, and becomes: first, engaged in a dialectic with transparency and perceptibility, with painfully simple readable processes at the work's surface (such as basic rhythmic relationships, classical thematic development as a contrapuntal layer, prime number sequences, and the repetitive unifying harmonic emphasis of minor seconds/major sevenths); second, subject to parametric motion, sliding as though an analogue focus in line with, and opposition to, signification: moving between perceptive complexity to a lyrical melodiousness that evokes the kaleidoscope of tonality's traditions in composites and overlays, though never as quotational fragments. Definition of structural sections through, for instance, parameters of pitch and rhythm are restricted only to these, regardless of historical stylistic models: rows may then mutate through disco rhythms, folk melodies, and nigh-impossible gestures within that structural moment's immanence and logic, which, it is held, justifies such contradiction as an integral element rather than pastiche or collage; in any case, the incessant, unmistakable sound of “new music” is to be as rejected as much as all other reified styles. And so, to an extent, here technique becomes structural and signifiatory, corresponding to the level of artificiality (myth, cyberspace, artificial intelligence, public life and the traumatic intensity of personal experience) being experienced by the characters: the more “real” the experience, the more strange and complex the music which, like the language, obscures the overall drama in favour of immediate experience; though this, too, becomes problematised after its establishment.

Fundamentally, taken in itself at the simplest level, the question of complexity evokes the dialectic between the human and the non-human at the opera's contentual and philosophical core: where, in questions of performability, biological limits collide with the demands of structural processes. These latter are the heart of the work's claim to realising its ambitions: it maintains that, by rivalling the nature of the structures of imposed fictions, it can negate them as part of the creation of what was termed *the contingent subject*. In this way, it takes the only eight 12-note all-interval mirror<sup>30</sup> chords: those which contain a tritone at their centre and repeat their intervals in inversion on either side, either as perfect retrogrades or perfect repeats. Diachronically, these imply a single structure in motion in that they map an emergence of structure from the chromatic scale, to its partial inversion that gives the all-interval chromatic pitch wedge with its intervals in an inverted

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<sup>30</sup> “Mirror” here is a shorthand for the various forms of repetition of the intervals (as inversions) that the chords contain.

retrograde, to these, the all-interval mirror chords with their intervals in repeat and retrograde; synchronically, they give a plurality of perspectives on a single object: they thus simultaneously suggest unreconciled plurality and fundamental unity.

One way of mapping them would be:<sup>31</sup>

1. Chromatic scale (1, 1, 1, etc)
2. Chromatic wedge (12345 6 789te)<sup>32</sup> (cf. Nono's (1956/1957) *Il Canto Sospeso*), obtained by combining the chromatic scale with its inversion
3. [A\*] 14235 6 e8t97
4. [A1\*] 53241 6 79t8e
5. [A] 14325 6 7t98e
6. [A1] 52341 6 e89t7
7. [B\*] 43125 6 89et7
8. [B1\*] 52134 6 7te98
9. [B] 41352 6 t79e8
10. [B1] 25314 6 8e97t

These chords generate three opposing structures, namely: a matrix of chords derived from Boulezian multiplication (as well as a related matrix of the same chords polychordally stacked); intervallically-defined Carterian character rows (and their derivations); and polychords (with their constituent triads and tonal associations); (for instance, "[A1\*] Prime" transposed to C contains a polychord of Fmin / Amaj, which gives a negative, or remainder, of [8e88e] which can be extended into a row of [8e88e6e88e8]); all of which, in turn, transform into one another, in that: each mirror chord contains a polychord and intervallically-defined row; each intervallically-defined row contains one of the multiplication matrix's domain tetrachords; the domain tetrachords imply polychords; furthermore, the primary multiplication structure may transform into the derived chords from the intervallically-defined rows, and into polychords through the polychordal "stacking" or addition (as opposed to multiplication) of its domain tetrachords. And so the structure itself is an object in motion, defined by opposition, negativity and contingency but also logic, meaning and lines of relation; that is, by mutual exclusivity and reciprocal containment.

These three structures are not merely ways of organising and generating pitch, but imply three fundamentally opposed (exclusive) understandings of the phenomenology of music which nevertheless may be composed of (contain) one another: intervallic technique sees pitch as an

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<sup>31</sup> See appendix 1, fig. 2-6.

<sup>32</sup> Please note: t=10; e =11.

edge used to designate a space, a procedure in which the listener's apprehension is paramount; multiplication sees it as a point, a material object that exists outwith human perception; tonally-based triadic groupings imply a historical tradition which sees them as components of a functional system, like a grammar. By interweaving not only these techniques but the ideologies and interpretive mechanisms they imply — and thus effecting various levels of establishment, dissolution and combination — the work gains a considerably effective tool in its creation of structures that rival those of imposed social, psychological and biological fictions.

To look at this in greater detail.<sup>33</sup> Row [B] is taken to be the row at the heart of the network of all-interval mirror chords (if seen statically), and perhaps the row in its most mature and characteristic form (if seen as part of a temporal development). Multiplying its sequential dyad relationships with one another gives a series of 12 tetrachords. Multiplying these with one another in turn creates a primary matrix of 144 chords arranged in 12 domains with each flavoured by the intervals of their domain's tetrachord<sup>34</sup> (each of which implies a musical subject that can be submitted to a further range of developmental strategies).<sup>35</sup> These chords can also be stacked, like polychords. Applying this procedure to the remaining all-interval rows (every one except [B]) gives 25 chords, 12 of which are found in the original matrix; subtracting these (plus one extra) gives a second related structure of 144 chords arranged in the same way (used for stacking/addition, and to generate melody): a negative, a remainder which is essentially the empty space within which the original structure performs. Each of these domains is again defined by an intervallically-characteristic subject of three notes. Like the original mirror-chord rows these imply a relationship between structure and contingency at the very heart of the work: where negativity problematises establishment. Crucially, negativity is not contrast; negativity is not striking; it is not an opposition nor a stylistic incongruity, but rather *space* that defines through its absence, like silence: here activated to operate (fittingly, paradoxically) within the work.

Furthermore, each of the mirror chords in their prime and inverted forms contains a polychord of two (minor and/or major) triads. Each polychord's establishment within the original mirror chord gives a remainder of notes which function as the polychord's negative space; these in turn become subjects for a series of intervallically-defined rows, which generate their own chords and pitch domains.

The work's form is that of separate dramatic sections which are coloured by the demands of the above structure: in how it continually interrupts, develops into and recontextualises itself. This

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<sup>33</sup> See appendix 1, fig. 5.

<sup>34</sup> This is then repeated with those same chords inverted and their intervals separated. These two structures are then combined to create greater chordal variety.

<sup>35</sup> See appendix 1, fig. 7.

“turning,” like tilled earth, is dramatically related to the undulations and interruptions of the various levels of reality which structure the world of the opera: myth, cyberspace, artificial intelligence, public life and the traumatic intensity of personal experience. The contingency of these interruptions is unified through temporal progression in rhythmic development and thematic integrity: there is a musical narrative at work throughout in which complexity surges and peaks before being broken down, from the flux and cascade of immediate experience into apprehendable semantic units which are then reassembled into meaning. For example, the way in which the intervallically-defined rows emerge from their negative space in Neachneohain's speech<sup>36</sup> (where the musical conceit is aligned to dramatic concerns and rhetorical devices) to their development in The Storyteller's myth of the ROBE<sup>37</sup> (where these are in turn aligned to the dramatic and choreographic structures), on to their sedimentation into separate but syntagmatic semantic units which form the discourse of EDINBURGH.<sup>38</sup>

Rhythm works as a counter to this, functioning initially as a parametric signifier (of character and situation), before being gradually developed into structural complexity in a course that tracks the relationship between the individual, its perceptual apparatus, and its world. For instance, the moment in Act 1 when Beira is warning Rowan of the horrifying realness of the world beyond cyberspace:<sup>39</sup> until this point, each section has been delineated by the use of motivic rhythmic ratios which operate to define and demarcate; however, during this aria, as her descriptions of the “real world” become causally related to its emergence, Beira's 3:2 relationship becomes gradually more complex through a self-multiplication that eventually produces a series of nested irrationals that problematise motivic clarity. These relationships then form the structural grid for Rowan<sup>40</sup> and Neachneohain's<sup>41</sup> visions in their following section, before these two models of rhythmic organisation become combined in a tentative resolution: in Beira's final vision<sup>42</sup> that ends the opera.

Between these, the work attempts to negotiate, incorporate and combine antagonisms of temporal perception that have emerged as socio-historical effects.<sup>43</sup> These are: time as a developmental

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<sup>36</sup> See *ROBE*: track 3 “Neachneohain’s Speech” on the album; page 17-29 in the score.

<sup>37</sup> See *ROBE*: track 5 “Song of Silk” and 9 “Song of Heather” on the album; page 32-40 and 51-55 in the score.

<sup>38</sup> See *ROBE*: track 17 “Rowan and EDINBURGH” on the album; page 87-90 in the score.

<sup>39</sup> See *ROBE*: track 7 “Beira’s Speech” on the album; page 42-49 in the score.

<sup>40</sup> See *ROBE*: track 10 “Rowan’s Vision” on the album; page 56-61 in the score.

<sup>41</sup> See *ROBE*: track 12 “Neachneohain’s Vision” on the album; page 63-66 in the score.

<sup>42</sup> See *ROBE*: track 19 “Beira’s Vision” on the album; page 110-116 in the score.

<sup>43</sup> For more on this, see chapter 5, “Three Logics: Spatialisation and Temporality in *WEAR*.”

process in which one's subjectivity is crucially involved; and time as a series of arbitrary, concatenated events, which may be either a regressive "spatialisation" of our temporal experience (an effect of late-capitalist production which serves to disempower the subject by removing its agency for change, that is, for its involvement in those temporal processes) or a radical affirmation of contingency and the ever-present possibility of total revolution. Like the ideologies of pitch structures and their capacity to constitute historically-laden signifiers, structures of listening and raw material for new musical potentials, these three understandings of musical temporality are used throughout the work in various ways. For example: how the tension between line and paragraph and their dissolution through arbitrary lacunae can be related to large formal structures and motivic integrity; how that (temporal) logic of motivic signification is dependent upon the (spatial) irrational arbitrariness of division; and how temporal perception itself can be made to bear dramatic meaning and thus incorporate the fictions which our biological limitations impose upon us, as well as the modalities by which they are imposed, within the opera. By containing mutually exclusive instances of these within the same piece, the work offers the possibility of their being transcended.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> This methodology can be seen in practice in a quite different context regarding collaborative theatre, experimental film and pedagogy in the supplementary work *A Boat In An Endless Blue Sea*. See appendix 2.1.

#### **4. CONTINGENCY DIALECTICS II**

Such combinations are achieved via **the Contingent Dialectic**: a paradox that organises **mutually exclusive reciprocal containment**. As maintained previously, it is made possible by: a historical moment defined by disjunctive alienation, and the experiential ground for nonhuman transcendence it allows for; where we are required to imagine multiple infinities, superpositions, even a catalogue of multiverses; where we may deploy the concept of contingency (Meillassoux 2007; 2009), and an ontology of multiple infinities (Badiou 2013a; 2013b); and finally, where the coming stage of capital as determined by quantum 2.0 supercharges this with a material basis that prohibits naive realism, revealing the fictions of our sense perceptions within its cultural dominant — and so posing us with the following challenge: to accept it as a further strategy within of the disorientating logic of capital; or to use it to transcend that logic.

Badiou’s insight into the generic plurality of infinity<sup>45</sup> is central to our concepts: it is this notion that allows for the multiplicity of mutually exclusive totalities, which is at the heart of both the theory and its methodological realisation. However, the nature of the relationship between such absolutes demands a re-reading — indeed, an inversion — of aspects of Badiou’s philosophy.

Badiou (2013b, 84) locates paradox, not within the artwork, but within the subject<sup>46</sup> of which the artwork is part, arguing that “a subject is a sequence involving continuities and discontinuities, openings and points.” Thus, for instance, with regard to the Second Viennese School, “the local antimony of ‘Berg’ and ‘Webern’, which is internal to the subject, constitutes the essential proof of ‘Schönberg’” (83). It is this that leads him to portray Berg’s practice as a “fertile transaction” in contrast to that of Webern’s “mystique of decision” (83). We saw earlier that such a characterisation is based on a fundamental misreading of Schoenberg. Rather than a negotiation, such paradox is an elimination of the structures from which it is derived through the transcendence of those structures. I have shown how sustained contradiction is deployed in *ROBE* to create a world — and indeed subject — entire, and now supplement this with reference to Berg’s

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<sup>45</sup> “Infinite alterity is simply *what there is*” (Badiou 2012, 25).

<sup>46</sup> Badiou’s subject is different from traditional notions; like the contingent subject, it can be composed of many individuals — for example, the army of Spartacus. See footnote 48.

(1922/1923) *Wozzeck* as historical evidence for such a possibility, and refutation of Badiou's model.<sup>47</sup>

What is at stake here is a material theory of relation and the possibility of a superpositional decision: that is, mutually exclusive reciprocal containment. For Badiou, the generic nature of a truth is sustained by the necessity of a binary choice. He calls such a decision a point: a yes/no answer that the subject must give, only one of which guarantee's the truth process' survival: "in the form of an alternative, a point is a transcendental testing-ground for the appearing of a

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<sup>47</sup> The opening scene offers a good, simple starting point in that its characterisation by seventh chords and secundal harmonies problematises the apprehension of both of their functions. The crystallisation of this idea is given (page 26, act 1, bar 161-164) in the quick movement between the two: we are challenged to read the use of the seventh/second interval as textural or structural. Far more pronounced is the instrumental passage at the end of this scene (page 27-29, act 1, bar 172-200). A coloured G flat minor seventh grounds a tonal phrase submitted to gestural and harmonic development. This procedure happens against an accretion of chromatic density in the rest of the orchestra that separates the original phrase out from it; the effect is a lonely one that speaks of alienation and irreconcilability. This builds to a climax between the original motif — now transformed into a line crashing downwards as though searching for its base — and the impossibility of this, via the suspension of that base in the dissolution of centres that the density performs. It is significant that later in the opera at the end of the first act (page 81, act 1, bar 711-717), the opposite happens. This time, it is from an atonal mass that another descending line emerges (tonally-centred perhaps only through our memories of those centres — even in, a Lacanian sense, their *lack*) crashing down onto a diminished D sharp minor. What is surprising is that it is the instability that remains; perhaps it is even intensified — for the return of a grammatical fragment is nowhere near as powerful as its shadow across its own absence. Indeed, such is the instability that when the mass of the chromatic weight returns, obscuring a harmonic pull, this feels more like a "home." This inversion is compounded by what follows (bar 715-717): an unassuming moment that in fact transposes many of the separate ideas of the first act into one another. It consists of a harmonic reference to a motif defined by fourths in the style of another (that was originally defined by thirds) compressed into a tremolo that sounds to the listener instead like a repeated note (which, as we shall see, is to become very significant). This true cadence of the first act is the feeling that everything has moved sideways, into an uncanny valley representation of something else. That which determines one object has become the other's strangeness. This approach can be seen in one of the opera's most striking achievements, which is that, later on (at page 136, act 2, bar 424-430) when a tonality is presented, such as here (F minor) it becomes deeply disconcerting. Whereas before, we heard it where it did not exist, we now experience the inverse of this: we no longer hear it, even when present. All of these ideas form a constellation around the central B at the heart of the tragedy (page 197, act 3, 109-121). At this point in the opera, like the F minor we heard earlier, this is no longer a centre; and yet it exhibits the same magnetic pull and sense of resolution; a resolution that has now become its dialectical opposite: that is, flux and change. This is achieved by Berg's use of repetition: he marks the end of almost every scene, and changes between sections of scenes, with a repeated note or chord — a technique that appears seldom elsewhere beyond the characterisation of the Doctor. (Though of course, this formula, too, is not entirely neat; and as the opera progresses it is problematised). But what I believe this does is gradually, subtly, repurpose *the meaning of an ending*. It is much like the common perception of the death card in the tarot: taken often to mean destruction, it is actually a card which heralds a total change. Encapsulated in such a simple idea then, this B, this repetition (perhaps the simplest of all musical techniques) is the whole Bergian paradox: the act of asserting the signification of that which it unweaves. This is an ouroboros of meaning, an endless circle of paradox — a total suspension — what I contend to be the true meaning of Schoenberg and the origin of the possibility of a contingent dialectic.

truth” (Badiou 2013b, 399). It is “that which makes appear the infinity of the nuances of a world — the variety of the degrees of intensity of appearing, the branching network of identities and differences — before that instance of the Two which is the ‘yes’ or ‘no’” (399-400).<sup>48</sup> And yet the fashion-opera cycle (and its ancestors) offer the possibility of a place beyond the points, as illustrated in the close readings of *ROBE* and *Wozzeck*. For though, as William Watkin (2021, 205) notes, points do not simplify reality, but rather “mathematise real-world complexity,” this cannot account for the plurality we have seen sustained. It is not *just* that the artwork is one thing from one perspective and one thing from another. It represents a paradox at the level of being, rather than interpretation; it cannot be localised. This is not a failure to choose (which to Badiou is anathematic). Rather, it is a transcending of the choice, a *Kobayashi Maru*. Neither this, nor that, yet all.

To understand the significance of this I want to invoke an insight of Žižek’s (2012, 805) regarding the Badiouian point. He writes that “at the level of appearance, the world has to be conceived of as language bound: each world is maintained by a Master-Signifier (the true reference of what Badiou calls a ‘point’).” He goes on to define this as the “subjective signifying feature which sustains the ‘objective’ symbolic structure itself: if we abstract this subjective excess from the objective symbolic order, the very objectivity of that order disintegrates.” This is one side of the littoral zone between external and consensus reality, the other being the Kantian intrusion of the noumena through the act of transcendental subjectivation: “there is an excess on both sides” of the subject and its world. Thus, for Badiou, it is the subjectivising act of choice that transforms the world with the intrusion of an (objective) generic truth. In light of this reading, we can see the contingent dialectic as an anti-subjective (in my terminology, “anti-individual”) force, one that disintegrates the symbolic order of the fiction model through the creation of the contingent subject by unpicking the quilting points — the “Master-Signifiers” — through which the model is sustained. And it achieves this via the mutually exclusive yet reciprocally containing plurality that resists the Badiouian localisation, or fixing, in any form of finitude that would limit its possibilities.

However — paradoxically, this is realised *through* order: the negation of negation achieved by aesthetic structures as powerful as those of the fiction model. How? Žižek follows the above

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<sup>48</sup> It may be helpful to offer the following exposition in full. “A faithful subject is the form of a body whose organs treat a worldly situation ‘point by point.’ Accordingly, the objective existence of a cavalry in the Roman army works as a point for the body-of-combat of the rebellious slaves in the following way: must the point be treated by creating a cavalry that would imitate the tactical discipline of the Romans. Or should one stick with the numerical mass of the slaves, perhaps capable of ‘drowning’ the enemy’s charges? It is clear that treating the point concerns the existence of an organ of the body and its mode of constitution on the basis of the multiplicities that compose that body. It is also clear that in the long this treatment will decide the outcome of the battles, and, therefore, the local fate of the eternal truth: ‘The slaves must and can liberate themselves relying on their own forces’” (Badiou 2013b, 399).



argument by advocating the primacy of Lacanian “suturing,” which describes this interplay between interiority and exteriority in “the conjunction of the imaginary and the symbolic” (Lacan 1977, 118).<sup>49</sup> Žižek (845) interprets this concept to mean “that external difference is always also internal, that the eternal limitation of a field of phenomena always reflects itself within this field, as its inherent impossibility to fully become itself.” Through this, then, we can contrast the external reality of the score with the consensus reality of the work. The text can provide infinite plurality through its closure,<sup>50</sup> and still include itself as its own limit. That is, the structure creates its plurality *through* immanence, with the contingent dialectic between these originating in the finality of the text.<sup>51</sup> In this way, rather than any constituent of the structure, *structure itself* has become the work’s “Master-Signifier” — and, if so, the score has lost its radical potential.<sup>52</sup> This, as we shall see, will be resolved by way of the antagonism between structure and contingency, explored in chapter 7, which, through the logic of the contingent dialectic, permits both the presence of the immanent, closed form and its utter annihilation. The anti-subjective (anti-individual) force of the work is maintained.

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<sup>49</sup> “The suture establishes the ‘symbolic’ — i.e., the field of discourse and language — by covering over an essential ‘gap’ or lack (which we can correlate to the ‘real’) in the domain of the ‘imaginary’, that is, the brute pre-symbolic experience of embodied existence” (Hallward et al. 2012).

<sup>50</sup> Badiou (2013b, 309-310) reasons that a world is forbidden from being finite “for if you take the parts...then the parts of these parts, and so on, you create an ascending series of numbers, which will performance surpass the (finite) number assigned to this world. That is impossible, since every composition of a being of the world is itself of the world. The principle ‘neither sub-sistence nor transcendence’ ultimately results in the necessity that every world be ontologically infinite...This infinite is not any infinite whatever. It is an infinite of the inaccessible type, in the following sense: you cannot construct its concept through any of the operations of ontology, such as these may be redeployed in the world. In other words, this infinite results neither from dissemination nor from the totalisation of parts of a less quantity; since their results remain immanent to the world, the operations that concern the beneath (disseminated elementary matter) and the above (state of subsets) cannot attain or construct the degree of infinity in this world. The extension of a world remains inaccessible to the operations that open up its multiple-being and allow it to radiate. Like the Hegelian absolute, a world is an unfolding of its own infinity. But, unlike that Absolute, the world cannot internally construct the measure or the concept of the infinite that it is. This impossibility is what assures that a world is closed, without it thereby being representable as a whole from the interior of the scene of appearance that it constitutes...in this sense, a world remains globally open for every local figure of its immanent composition...We will sum it up by saying: a world is affected by an inaccessible closure.”

He (321) continues: “The history of a world is nothing but the temporal figure of the universality of its exposition. In the last instance, it is the unfolding of its overabundance of being. The infinite inaccessibility of the ontological support of a world gives rise to the universal exposition of relations and therefore to the logical completeness of that world.”

<sup>51</sup> Not only is it physically finite — there is interpretive finitude to it concerning its realisation.

<sup>52</sup> Establishing a superposition between the score’s infinity with its counterparts gets us nowhere — they too, whether the poetry, the garments, the choreography, etc., obey the same logic.

This reading provides us with another ancestry for the theory of contingency dialectics: as an inversion of the philosophy of Badiou. While Badiou's anti-human structuralism becomes a mechanism for a profoundly humanist ethics (Ed Pluth 2010), contingency dialectics instead realises the monstrous contingent subject, an agent beyond the limits of any situation, which is enigmatically sustained by its opposite: a vulgar, historically-determined Kantian-Marxist model of external and consensus reality. The contingent subject is the antithesis to Badiou's faithful subject of truth; instead of creating the world through the act of subjectivation, it unclasps all Master-Signifiers via the material ground of the artwork which justifies paradox and through this, rather than making the world, destroys it, to become nothing less than the world itself.

We may now assert the first law of contingency dialectics: the logic of the superposition.

*You must choose: neither this, nor that, yet all.*

It is worth contrasting this idea with related concepts from which it is derived. First, the idealist notion of synthesis,<sup>53</sup> which this forbids: while *reciprocally containing* one another, each totality remains *mutually exclusive*. Second, the materialist dialectics of Lenin and Mao (2017, 67-69), which understands contradiction within the object itself as the motor of its evolution: the contingent dialectic is *external*.<sup>54</sup> Third, with the work of Deleuze and Guattari (2013), where relation is

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<sup>53</sup> See footnote 3 and 5.

<sup>54</sup> To that which it organises.

virtual.<sup>55</sup> The contingent dialectic is *material*. Finally, we may contrast it with Badiou's theory of relation to obtain a second law. For Badiou, though *Logics of Worlds* is a "Deleuzian move" towards a "minimal theory of relation (through logic and topology" which even "assigns the 'event' a minimal ontological status" (Daniel W. Smith 2003, 448), its theory of relation is strictly materialist. Badiou (2013b, 301) contends that

the definition of a relation must be strictly dependent on that of objects, not the other way round...a relation is a connection between objective multiplicities — a function — that

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<sup>55</sup> I refer to the infinite nature of relation as characterised by the rhizome in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 2013), and the following passage from *Difference and Repetition*, where Deleuze (2004, 209) locates reciprocal containment "in the virtual part of the work or object," rather than, as we have done, the materiality of the work and its participants.

The reality of the virtual consists of the differential elements and relations along with the singular points which correspond to them. The reality of the virtual is structure. We must avoid giving the elements and relations which form a structure an actuality which they do not have, and withdrawing from them a reality which they have....When it is claimed that works of art are immersed in a virtuality, what is being invoked is not some confused determination but the completely determined structure formed by its genetic differential elements, its 'virtual' or 'embryonic' elements. The elements, varieties of relations and singular points coexist in the work or the object, in the virtual part of the work or object, without it being possible to designate a point of view privileged over others, a centre which would unify the other centres....What is complete is only the ideal part of the object, which participates with other parts of objects in the Idea (other relations, other singular points), but never constitutes an integral whole as such. What the complete determination lacks is the whole set of relations belonging to actual existence.

The anterior nature of virtual relation is crucial. "Virtual structure exists and is completely determined by its abstract, constitutive relations before any positive content can be given." (Bowden 2011, 157); thus, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, "instead of having the trunk or binary logic dominate the multiplicity, [the authors] suggest situating the ungrounded and free rhizomic multiplicity before the formation of the trunk. By such a reversal, Deleuze and Guattari maintain the factual aspect of the world and at the same time cancel the solemn power of the One" (Yang 2017, 80). The logical endpoint of these concepts is that text's proposition of a

pure plane of immanence, univocality, composition, upon which everything is given, upon which unformed elements and materials dance that are distinguished from one another only by their speed and that enter into this or that individuated assemblage depending on their connections, their relations of movement. A fixed plane of life upon which everything stirs, slows down or accelerates. A single abstract Animal for all the assemblages that effectuate it (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 297).

Contrastingly, *the contingent subject* exists beyond (rather than behind, as in the case of this Creature) the confines of the Deleuzian limit that is mere "life." To quote Badiou (2013b, 387) *contra* Deleuze,

To break with empiricism is to think the event as the advent of what subtracts itself from all experience: the ontologically un-founded and transcendently discontinuous. To break with dogmatism is to remove the event from the ascendancy of the One. It is to subtract it from Life in order to deliver it to the stars.

creates nothing in the register of intensities of existence, or in that of atomic localisations, which is not already prescribed by the regime of appearance of these multiplicities.

*Pace* Badiou, I hold that a relation contains a transformative power that surpasses the object of its origin. Contingent dialectics may organise objects against the inherent logic of the latter, allowing for mutual exclusion to be permitted alongside reciprocal containment. The cycle shows this in practice: whether in fashion-opera's combination of various art forms as absolutes; their material, structure and form; stages in their history; and the perspectives of the individuals participating (as audiences or creators). Surprisingly, it is this last which, though it may be difficult to demonstrate (certainly in the ineffable power of a full auditorium) offers proof of such a relation.

For it can be seen in a limited way in the contrasting analyses of *ROBE* by the critics Henry Fogel (2021) and Lynn René Bayley (2021). In her review, the latter claims that the work “doesn't have any harmonic variety, being largely confined to one atonal scale,” while the former insists that it is “a random collection of notes that never coalesce into any kind of entity” and that no note “is the logical successor to the note that precedes it, nor the logical predecessor to the note that follows.” Value judgements aside, there is an irreconcilable paradox here: both these descriptions of the music cannot be true; and both (as was illustrated in the previous chapter) are. This has as its parallel a related instance regarding the opera's use of texture: between Christopher Ballantine's (2021: 1050) description of a “monochromatic palette”; and Claire Seymour's (2021) listing of contrasting textures to pronounce that “the experience of the score is anything but [schematic].” Mutually exclusive, these are nevertheless both the case — and contain one another within the work. Note again that, while audiences are expected, even required, to disagree about the meaning of artworks, these examples *represent an ontological, rather than hermeneutic, contradiction*.

This is achieved, crucially, not by a postmodern abdication of meaning to the whims of subjective response, or a Deleuzian move towards pure difference which, as Badiou (2013b, 385) has shown, will only lead us back from the many to the one.<sup>56</sup> The possibility for mutually exclusive plurality is built into the work itself; it is this that allows the perspectives to unconsciously contain one another. I hold that meaning ultimately exists in neither of the critics' perspectives, but rather in the space between them: their contingent dialectic. The relation's support is not in the individuals; yet it cannot be said to be virtual, due to its material origin in the work. Note that this is merely an origin: the site of the relation is between the original perspectives that the individuals generate; it is not that they participate in a pre-existing relation, but rather manifest a new one in the totality of the work. This, then, is evidence for the materiality of relation: one composed of neither inherent confluence nor virtuality. It is a space — between — that is more powerful than the points it

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<sup>56</sup> See footnote 55.

separates: for it exists beyond the (social) totality in which these exist. Unbound from such constraints, this relation enables an agency — named the contingent subject — greater than those of its demarcated points, be they objects, signs, individuals or otherwise. For these participants, therefore, such a combination allows their limited, given perspectives to be transcended. While the final result is effected by infinite associations of points within the artwork serving as a ground for infinite pluralities of participating perspectives,<sup>57</sup> the previous analysis has explicated the nature of the paradox quoted above: that is, at a technical level within the work itself.

And so when Watkin (166-167) champions Badiou to attest that “not ‘difference precedes identity’ or ‘every object is a predicate of a concept’ but *every relation preserves the reality of its objects* is the footing we need to set out future philosophy upon,” we may instead reformulate this as the second law of contingency dialectics:

*Through an object’s reality, a relation may be formed which allows an object to surpass that reality.*

And so, in conclusion — as a relation, the contingent dialectic represents two key properties: first, as a tension; second, as an absence, or space. The former eschews any notion of liminality or negotiation, and as such is fiercely *anti-inter*, be that interdisciplinarity, synthesis, or compromise. The contingent dialectic declares that you can — and must — choose both; that this is the only way to transcend the false choice of any system — social, aesthetic, biological, physical — that seeks to incorporate you as its constituent. The latter is in the tradition of Badiou’s (2013a) event, itself developed from Lacanian (2006) structuralism, particularly with regard to the concept of the Real: the contingent dialectic (and the contingent subject which it makes possible) is a break in the structure of being beyond a world’s possibilities. (In this, I refer also to Meillassoux’s (2007, 71–74) insights vis-à-vis contingency.)<sup>58</sup> Made possible by rigorous, immanent structure (of the (aesthetic) totality), and grounded in its materiality, it is in opposition to the virtual Deleuzian (2013) assemblage, machine and “mechanosphere.” Even still, such a space, as a descendant of the Lacanian Real, represents that which cannot be captured by signification; it is folly to attempt to apprehend it within any structural model.<sup>59</sup> How, then, could it be possible to do so? It surprised me as much as anyone where the answer to this lay: in fashion.

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<sup>57</sup> Badiou’s (2013b) definition of a world as a closed set permitting infinite relations has been instructive here. See footnote 50.

<sup>58</sup> See section 7.1, “The Seven-Sided Die.”

<sup>59</sup> See footnote 96.

## **5. THREE LOGICS: SPATIALISATION AND TEMPORALITY IN WEAR**

Fashion-opera is impossible. Fashion will always collapse into costume according to opera's hierarchy; or music will reduce to that of mere aura in support of the garment. It is the same with opera and dance; dance and fashion; fashion and poetry; etc. While opera itself represents an art form of plurality, it is one that still demands a stratified order<sup>60</sup> — privileging the utility of one-directional, unipolar signification.<sup>61</sup>

That is, unless we take Badiou's claim that infinity is *generic* and *plural* seriously. This allows us a conception of theatre as a paradox of absolutes: a superposition, a multiverse of coexistent, separate, yet reciprocally containing worlds — one appropriate to 21st-century materialist knowledge. There is more than one universe; there is more than one infinity; there can, therefore, be an art of true plurality — one that contains even that plurality's dissolution in meaningful structure; and that structure's abdication in pure contingency; and the emergence of a logic from that contingency; and so on.

However, that it is ontologically conceivable does not necessarily mean that it is historically practical. As much as it totalises, fashion-opera must be anchored in historicist analysis and the contingency of the now. Indeed, without this, it becomes nothing at all — like so many current interdisciplinary approaches to music which woefully graft protrusions onto music in a vain attempt to solve its internal antagonisms. Opera Magazine (Reed 2021, 1432-1433) took this view of *RUNE*, denying the existence of a separate methodology by naming it as a cantata (with a list of qualifiers). Similarly, the global claims of the practice were called into question by George K. Haggett (89-90, 2022), who, writing in *TEMPO*, summarised it as follows:

Fundamental to White's practice is what he calls 'contingency dialectics', wherein mutually exclusive, irreconcilable things coexist. Under the influence of French Marxism, White

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<sup>60</sup> Despite this, at the heart of opera's historical inheritance is the contingency of its art forms, and how these interweave to produce new demands upon one another, creating, often (as in the work of Monteverdi, Gluck, Wagner, Schoenberg, Stockhausen) explosions of progress in musical or dramatic development. Indeed, in its design, the opera house is an ancestor of the contingent subject — an immersive, tangled structure of beer vendors, sex workers, gossip and parties, the seats curving away from the stage to face one another rather than the drama itself.

<sup>61</sup> A historical manifestation of the truth of this might be the discipline of *Regietheatre*, which becomes most interesting when the text is made to bear a reading that it cannot sustain; the mutually exclusive but non-reciprocally containing disjunction between the opera and its production is often the site of fascinating and original art, but it is precisely this spatialised anti-relation, this absolute, non-superpositional break, that the theatrical work is upheld by. In my opinion, one of the greatest works of this century is Frank Castorf's (2013) centenary production of the *Ring* for Bayreuth; in this, it is the limits of the work that become the material — how they may be negotiated and surpassed — but also how they can function as content for a discussion of subjectivity and history in the 21st century.

bases the genre of fashion-opera on this distinction: fashion is ‘spatial’ and ‘interventionist’, whereas opera is ‘temporal’ and ‘based on tradition’; fashion privileges ‘exchange value’ (he gives the example of a nylon handbag deriving its value from the Prada label), whereas opera privileges ‘use value’ (trading in rarefied, visible human labour). White is on to something, but parsing the properties of art forms in this way is problematic, not least because all commodities need use value in order to have an exchange value.

These are both valid criticisms that regard what are ironically deeply Badiouian questions: of naming; and of the One and the Many. The former review sees the disciplines as disparate and already-existent: there is no need for a new entry in the dictionary, as nothing has occurred beyond the (re-)organisation of what already is. The latter affirms the one-ness of the methodology, its central name, but questions whether the art forms can retain their alienated multiplicity within this — that is, retain the definitions ascribed to them (if these are even valid in the first place).

I will attempt to answer both criticisms across the following two chapters, which deal with the dialectics of spatialisation and temporality and autonomy and intervention, respectively. This will advance several meanings of the name *fashion-opera*. The permission of such a name is always historical, and we must begin by returning, again, to the past.

### **5.1 THE LOGIC OF THE AXIS (INTRODUCTION)**

In *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson (1991, 16) makes the argument that our experiences under late capitalism are “dominated by space and spatial logic...by categories of space rather than by categories of time.” This theory originates from György Lukács’ (1971, 88) analysis in *History and Class Consciousness*, which articulates how the division of labour transforms what were “empirically average” processes of making into “objectively calculable work stint[s] that confront the worker as a fixed and established reality.” He (90) writes how

time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable ‘things’ (the reified, mechanically objectified ‘performance’ of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality: in short, it becomes space. In this environment where time is transformed into abstract, exactly measurable, physical space, an environment at once the cause and effect of the scientifically and mechanically fragmented and specialised production of the object of labour, the subjects of labour must likewise be rationally fragmented.

Creative development is replaced by an alienated space of specialised action, through which aspects of the worker’s individuality are detached from one another. At the heart of this is the dialectic between object and process, between movement and its reification. For the Marxist

tradition, subjectivity is a work of self-actualisation: a process accomplished in time as temporal, developmental linearity. The transformation of that experience into a series of alienated, objective instances – of spaces – precludes the realisation of this process. Instead of engaging with the temporally-based process of free subjectivity, the individual's unity becomes splintered into the maintenance of skills: specialised fragments best suited to whatever task is dictated by that block of the timetable. These are the roots of the postmodern fragmentation of the subject: the earlier spatialisation of temporal experience under capitalism.

Jameson's contribution to this tradition is to trace the phenomena through the entire superstructure of postmodern culture, exhaustively determining how it compromises the subject's ability to structure temporal bearing.

The crisis in historicity now dictates a return, in a new way, to the question of temporal organisation in general in the postmodern force field, and indeed, to the problem of the form that time, temporality, and the syntagmatic will be able to take in a culture increasingly dominated by space and spatial logic. If, indeed, the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold and to organise its past and future into coherent experience, it becomes difficult to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but 'heaps of fragments' and in a practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary (Jameson 1991, 25).

This failure is tracked outward in a number of occurrences. First, "Lacanian schizophrenia," in which temporal orientation is problematised by structuralism's disassembly of syntactic direction. Second, the phenomenon of postmodern "decentring," where the end of modernist individuality problematises private and public historical certainties: the lodestar of the monad now just another point on the intertextual web. Finally, this intertextuality itself: a spatially mediated reproduction of the past, an "omnipresent pastiche" in which all become images — become spatialised. Jameson makes clear the consequences of what Lukács had earlier perceived, with spatialisation now at the heart of the postmodern cultural dominant. Multinational capitalism installs this all-encompassing "hyperspace" as its new sublime, beyond the limited modality of our changed, fragmented subjectivity.

It is significant that this critique is essentially an expansion of ideas first set forth by Adorno (2006) in *Philosophy of New Music*. Jameson (17) himself says (almost) as much, declaring that his forbear's "prophetic diagnosis has been realised, albeit in a negative way: not Schönberg...but Stravinsky is the true precursor of postmodern cultural production". Though it is striking (for questions of a work's unspoken subtext and indebtedness, especially when taken with the relative omission of music from its analysis) that Jameson here uses Adorno's influence to comment on the relationship between quotation and originality when, although the two concepts are fundamentally



and inextricably linked, the book's greatest debt is to *Philosophy of New Music's* analysis of the temporal/spatial antagonism. In this, Adorno finds in Stravinsky an almost exact musical expression of what Lukács had previously described: the erasure of the subject through the reification of living processes into static commensurable spaces.<sup>62</sup>

Adorno connects the traits that Jameson identifies as the hallmarks of late capitalist culture back to an objectivist logic that he finds in the Stravinskian project, with *Petrushka* (1911/1988) and *The Rite of Spring* (1913/1975) forming the beginning of an enquiry that reveals how their contentual concern with the liquidation of the subject is directly related to the music's focus on semblance over essence. This is realised in two primary ways at a formal level: first, in how temporally dependent development of material is replaced by the arbitrary placement of juxtaposed elements within commensurable formal spaces. Second, in the ways this arbitrary juxtaposition is, in turn, linked to the Stravinskian aesthetic's focus upon quotation and simulacra, that is, the severing of historical styles from their context for stylistic effect rather than suggestive meaning. The formal construction of Stravinsky's music is related to a wider denial of history and a change in the logic of society towards one ordered by things: where free processes are exchanged for reified objects. Here we have all of the hallmarks of Jameson's postmodernism: simulacra, disjunction and ahistoricism, all ultimately realised through spatialisation.

Reading Adorno retrospectively through Jameson shows the tensions between the aesthetic and the social across the 20th century's "spatialisation" of temporal experience and, by extension, music. What this teaches us is the change in our experience of temporality is distinctly at odds with the Marxist conception of the subject and freedom. Where once, like a dressmaker, we were implicated in the process of making — with temporal progression as the ground of the act of subjectivation — we now experience the time of the production line, of the measured toilet break — like a block, a space: which forbids that essential foundation. For the composer, there is therefore a moral dimension to this: a choice to be made about the production of time and its experience. Both answers are unsatisfactory. On the one hand, it is impossible to go back, to claim a regressive, anti-historical temporality for one's music. To do so would be as conservative as writing a sonata. Yet to embrace the language of fragments is to give up on the possibility of change — to speak the

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<sup>62</sup> "There is no music today that bears anything of the historical hour that is not touched by the collapse of experience, by a process of economic adaptation — ruled by the power of economic concentration — that is substituted for 'life.' The passing away of subjective time in music appears so inescapable in the midst of a humanity that makes itself into a thing, into an object of its own organisation, that at the extreme poles of composition something similar can be observed...in Stravinsky — music casts itself as the *arbiter temporis* and prompts listeners to forget the experience of time and deliver themselves over to its spatialisation. Music glories in the disappearance of life as if its objectivation were the music's achievement. In return it reaps revenge immanently. One trick defines every manipulation of form in Stravinsky and is soon used to exhaustion: time is suspended, as if in a circus scene, and complexes of time are presented as if they were spatial" (Adorno 2006, 142-143).

cursed dialect of capital itself. We see the devastation of this everywhere: humans reduced to mouthpieces for algorithms, babbling fragments, repeating quoted lines. It is a travesty so many artists fail to understand that the sound of disjunction is not revolutionary; it is the status quo.<sup>63</sup>

The contingent dialectic offers us a reformulation of disjunction, transforming it into a progressive logic while losing none of its radical, isolationary faculties.

The modernist individual was defined by its relationship to a historical grand narrative which is necessarily plural, processive and interpretive; the postmodern statement “there are no absolute truths” is itself a grand narrative built upon opposing and monadically-alienated individual oppositions. In their successors — of which our digital, post-truth society is one — the external socio-theoretical logic of postmodernism is combined with the internal monadic alienation of modernism through the material conditions of the internet (at once externally alienating and internally communal). It is at the axis of these two forms of time — temporal and spatial — and of logics — arbitrary and processive — that we are given the dialectic of spatialisation and temporality. It incorporates both of these within it, defined by an alienated (spatialised) and processive, even eschatological (temporal) model of history: regarding the former, that time can be separated out into periodised blocks; regarding the latter, that they flow into and affect one another dialectically and cumulatively.

It was these ideas that founded 2018’s *WEAR*.

## **5.2 WEAR**

Fashion is, like music, specifically concerned with time. On one hand, it is fleeting and ephemeral, a constant flow of changing trends with their momentary beauty made even more vivid by its impending obsolescence. On the other, great clothes have this magical power to almost freeze their wearers in time and protect them from the rot and decay of disintegrating life — as though together they had become an artwork, an object, that is: become *spatialised*. It is in the contradiction and interplay between these opposing aspects that fashion derives its meaningful beauty. This offers an answer to the impossible choice of modern temporality in composition — a spatialisation in which its *anti-human properties* can be harnessed to transcend capital’s frustration of *all that is human*. This works according to three logics: first, that of the division and alienation central to spatialised experience, which we will call *the logic of the break*; second, through this alienation, the establishment of separate totalities (for instance, the immortality of the model transformed upon the runway) which shall be referred to as *the logic of the infinite*; third, *the logic of the axis*, implied by the previous two, which is the (divided) intersection between historical periods of time (seen as absolutes) — and what these imply.

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<sup>63</sup> Schizoanalysis (Deleuze and Guattari 2003) has much to answer for here.

But fashion takes on another meaning in its incorporation into the methodology. For while it deals in time and its transformation, it is, in a material sense, *spatial* whereas music is *temporal*. And so, while both contain the spatialisation-temporality antagonism within their discrete logics, together they form an expression of this key contradiction. This gives the first meaning of the name of fashion-opera:

*spatiotemporality, the contingent dialectic between object and process, disjunction and logic, space and time.*

These are the themes of *WEAR*, the first in the fashion-opera cycle. Scored for piano and three sopranos with two dancers, it was developed with director and curator Gemma A. Williams to present the Irish designer Derek Lawlor's graduate knitwear collection at The Crossing in London. The plot, which contrasts biographical reality drawn from Lawlor and Williams with apocalyptic mythicism, could be read thus:

*A designer prepares to display what will be their final collection: the world around them is disintegrating, a catastrophe brought about by the commercial use of time-machine technology. The arrival of an old friend sets in motion a series of recollections of their lives and the work that gave these meaning — but what significance can anything have in a world devoid of memory and reason? As spacetime unravels around them, they are thrown into a collage of passion, recollection and dream — until all that is left are the objects they created.*

In this, *WEAR* uses the science fiction trope of the time machine to satirise a world where true stories are no longer possible. It asserts that multiple timelines, beloved of modern fantasy media, are a contradiction in terms — they could not exist alongside one another. Rather, they would be experienced as a constant erasure and reworking of history. This works as a polemical metaphor for the digital post-truth west, where the past seems so distant from its amnesiac, ever-modernising present — and where the online excess of information permits the justification of any argument imaginable. The opera makes the case that the only way forward from such a moment is not through the dull, methodical reconstruction of the past, but rather the possibility of something totally new, something utterly unexpected — that no one had thought possible before — that didn't need to happen — that was, until now, in this shifting, tumbling present, impossible to imagine.

### **5.3 THE LOGIC OF THE BREAK**

This concerns the notion explored above regarding the spatialisation of our experience of temporality through alienation,<sup>64</sup> a concept present throughout the fashion-opera cycle.<sup>65</sup>

In realising this, *WEAR* is characterised by a trajectory whereby the logic of division spatialises traditional temporality, only for this to be reassembled in a contingent dialectic with its opposite at the opera's conclusion. Furthermore, the music is divided from itself according to the insistent spatial logic of the garment, which becomes a programmatic-metonymic mode of organising the musical narrative outside of itself: specifically, via the idea of weaving and knitting taken from the cord-work of Lawlor's collection. This was an intervention into operatic signification through the tradition of the "programme": it represents an excess which is subtracted from the work, leaving its trace only in the musical events' organisation. Together, these two processes — of space and time *as music* and space and time *as the logic of fashion contained in music* — create the musical embodiment of spatialisation and temporality.<sup>66</sup> Thus, *WEAR* exploits the logic of the break to alienate the musical structure from the drama: both the underlying pitch formations and rhythmic-gestural surface run parallel and separate to that of the text. Though derived from the themes of the drama, the musical organisation is ultimately excluded from it. However, such separation is then *itself alienated (from itself)* — in a negation of negation — by how these arbitrary structures are realised at a phenomenal level to form an analogue scale of relationships (of various degrees

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<sup>64</sup> This has been a hallmark of my compositional thinking since my earliest classical works such as the *Panels For String Quartet* series (White 2017/2022). In this, by severing each bar from its counterparts, seeing them as quanta of material, and even, in *Two Panels*, having the score's eponymous diptych work according to a pictorial logic that nevertheless contains interlacing musical linearity, I showed how from spatialised time, a form of temporal direction could still emerge.

<sup>65</sup> In its employment of disorientation, disjunction, anti-causality, paradox and negation to discuss the loss (and reclamation of) subjectivity, *WEAR*'s score offers few clear-cut examples and is fittingly resistant to becoming the empirical data of a musicological illustration. I therefore provide the supplementary piece *WORK* for cello as a "petri dish" specimen that demonstrates the logic of the break simply and lucidly. See appendix 2.2.

<sup>66</sup> Both of these concern musical signification. It should be remarked that here is one of contemporary art music's great failings: we either capitulate to the tradition of motivic signifiers as a way of organising meaning through apprehendable units and their development in time (for instance, even the great Lachenmann — who deals otherwise entirely in negativity — makes this one parameter his exception), or we jettison it all together (as in minimalist or experimentalist absence). It will be admitted that the fashion-opera cycle has by no means solved this problem. In considering it, it often attempts to see motif and signification as either pre-compositional causes (as in the discrete scenic characterisation of *ROBE* that was referred to earlier), or post-compositional effects (for example, *RUNE*'s isorhythmic organisation of gesture via its central data sequence of 312). However, such strategies are ultimately nothing more than mere displacement. There is more work to be done.

of representative propriety) to the drama — and even the intrusion of the drama to grasp (and create signification from) the musical structure itself.

This is effected in the following way.

The work begins with a series of tetrachords which are generated from the dyads of a central row<sup>67</sup> that is all but removed from the work.<sup>68</sup> These are gradually broken down and woven into “threads.” Such a conceit is achieved through the interplay and development of these alongside the emergence of grace-note material — which interrupts and furrows the primary events with related intervallically-defined rows.<sup>69</sup> Thus spatiality imposes itself: through division and through the arbitrary (that is, the extra-musical programmatic organisation); and, in turn, the imagery of that metonymic programme (the physical garment itself). This organises the primary musical narrative, which is the aforementioned emergence of (a new form of) logic from division.

Through the vocal writing, the musical narrative is seized by the drama to create an opposing sense of temporal development. At the opening, the two characters are designated by contrasting sets of data: The Writer uses minor seconds and minor thirds while The Designer is delineated by major seconds and major thirds. As the opera progresses, these intermingle and the characters gradually become able to enunciate the foundational chords of the structure through The Writer’s interventions.<sup>70</sup> These two processes: of concatenation via the operations of interlacing and weaving; and enunciation of underlying pitch material; become the basis for the musical drama in the final “Moth Aria,”<sup>71</sup> where fragmentation reveals its own logic through the creative re-imaginings of The Writer.<sup>72</sup> More generally, the work establishes an overall affect of propulsive motion across scenes riven by breaks and interruptions, a progressive energy that blends events into one another and gives the piece a poetic sense of urgency — even when at its most absurd.

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<sup>67</sup> See *WEAR*: “The Designer’s Aria,” 0.00-6.00 on the video; page 6-10 in the score.

<sup>68</sup> The exceptions are its statement at page 23, bar 157-159 and page 62, bar 422-426: to symbolise extra-Symbolic excess (paradoxically through what is, of course, the work’s foundational “symbol.”)

<sup>69</sup> See *WEAR*: “The Meeting Duet,” 6.00-12.40 on the video; page 6-20 in the score.

<sup>70</sup> See *WEAR*: page 24, bar 165-170; page 27, bar 187-190; page 63, bar 427-433.

<sup>71</sup> See *WEAR*: “The Moth Aria” studio recording and (with the introductory passage) 37.20-46.30 on the video; page 67-79 in the score.

<sup>72</sup> It should be noted that this resolution is problematised by “The Model’s Aria” (46.30-49.48 on the video; page 80-81 in the score), the epilogue in which the silent character, until now the object of the others’ agency, speaks the final cataclysmic language of pure spatialised objectivity: a polemical reminder of the necessity of devastation to create meaningful change.

More complex is how the logic of the break is employed in the field of meaning-production. Though all signification is arbitrary, we may still map “temporalities” of musical representation across established and unestablished relations: created either by the work (in its construction of a language) or indeed its historical moment’s sound-world (which the work may imitate). Having accepted this, we can see *WEAR* using the dialectic of spatialisation and temporality to elude both meaning and non-meaning, causality and contingency, relational and arbitrary signification: by establishing a contingent dialectic between both poles — sustained through each negating the other as they continually re-establish themselves.

As stated above, the primary instance of *the logic of the break* in *WEAR* is the way the narrative of the musical material runs parallel to that of the text, alienated from the drama and direct signification. Unlike the discrete scenic characterisations of *ROBE*, the underlying structure develops according to its own requirements. However, this is negated by the fact that the phenomenal surface of the music — that structure’s compositional realisation — forms a series of degrees of representation between the causal line and the arbitrary break.

For example, with regard to the former, the score contains a number of directly imitative gestures, such as the sound of a typewriter (with reference to journalism) where The Writer first crosses the threshold to grasp the underlying pitch structure.<sup>73</sup> This follows one of the only statements of the foundational row — by The Writer, in a moment of silence — a break — where they attempt to move beyond language to describe what cannot be caught in it. This, paradoxically, leads to a scene concerned specifically with language and the representation of facts (symbolised by journalism) which, through these mediating factors (of language as a mediator of reality; of journalism as a mediator of facts) paradoxically (again!) allows them an unmediated access to the underlying structure. In this, representation has counter-intuitively become a break itself (in the same way that consonance can operate as dissonance in an atonal piece): musical representation (of the typewriter) underscores the transgression of meaning into the contingent musical structure. Similarly, the leaping, splashing sounds of the piano in “The Salmon Duet”<sup>74</sup> function as a reference to the intrusion of the characters into one another — their de-alienation — their remembrance — via the aberration of representation, which parallels the extension of their musical palettes.

But, as stated above, these occupy the most extreme in a series of degrees between relation and non-relation. Furthermore, even at these points of representation, such readings become problematised: by their being caught in that scale of representation, the deployment of which is itself *spatial and non-developmental*. The experience of the work is one of the music throwing up

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<sup>73</sup> See *WEAR*: 13.51-17.40 on the video; page 23-29 in the score.

<sup>74</sup> See *WEAR*: 17.37-21.08 on the video; page 30-37 in the score.

confluences and aporias (and various degrees between these) as it sees fit. For instance, the mercurial stylistic realisation of “The Cashmere Aria”<sup>75</sup> is stylistically arbitrary — spatial — at a moment of great developmental — temporal — importance (this latter is emphasised by the use of the previous “journalism” material, thus tracking backwards, like a time machine, from the re-organisation of data to its creation); while “The Rot Aria”<sup>76</sup> could be said to represent the median of these.

This constant stitching, unpicking, and restitching, and then re-unpicking, and so on, both in the opera’s temporal progression, and across its compositional levels, has implications beyond the domain of signification — it is the textual ground for the contingencies that improbably hold the work together. In this way, the logic of the break operates not only upon the text but the work as a whole.

#### **5.4 THE LOGIC OF THE INFINITE**

That is, the alienation of parts from one another unleashes their generic infinity, allowing them to function as totalities rather than constituents. This is in opposition to the conservative tradition in opera of simplicity, clarity, and apprehendability, a hierarchy that privileges dramatic explication — with music and all other art forms reduced to being in its service. Fashion-opera rejects this completely. In it, each discipline holds the same central position; is each an absolute; is the fundamental, the origin.

The significance of this is considerable, and I want to begin by explaining it using the following thought experiment. For according to this logic, we may glimpse the awesome metaphysical power of the aesthetic.

*Imagine a person in a red dress at a bus stop. Imagine the most wonderful dress, and imagine the same person, the same dress, even, both on stage, and waiting on the street. On stage, it is the world that changes the dress. The costume only becomes what it is within the realm of signification activated by the artwork, of which it is a non-necessary constituent. But at the bus stop, it is the world itself that is changed, transformed by the power of the garment which, by aestheticising the scene, and through the negation of the negation of imposed fiction this enacts, creates reality.*

Until the contingent dialectic, the latter dress was always doomed to become the former. We now know that this does not have to be its fate.

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<sup>75</sup> See *WEAR*: 31.55-33.42 on the video; page 57-60 in the score.

<sup>76</sup> See *WEAR*: 24.20-25.32 on the video; page 44-48 in the score.

## **1. Setting**

*WEAR* provides proof of this in its set design, where The Crossing — a truly huge, imposing and distinctive space — was transformed through the simple placement of Lawlor’s work. Whereas costume would have turned its volumes into a mere (immersive) theatre, I hold that the garments did something far more powerful, like the red dress that makes the world itself real.

Fashion-opera is possible anywhere: in black-boxes, as in *ROBE*; or even within a screen, as in *WOAD*. But it is at its most powerful in a space that has not been sanitised for the rituals of theatre. In this way, three of the most successful stagings were *WEAR*, *RUNE*, and *Hareflight* due to the nature of their venues.<sup>77</sup> The latter two are old buildings, each marked by a very specific historical character. Despite this, for both of these we made the decision to keep the house lights on and not employ any theatrical lighting. This was a wager upon the power of the dress over the bus stop, on the garment’s capability to re-make its surroundings in its image. Without the enclosures and limits of the stage to carefully demarcate between the social and aesthetic realms, a contingent dialectic is formed: the work spills over through the windows, onto the streets, into the sky above as you watch a dancer become, for example, the waters of Khye-Rell — only to collide with a fire extinguisher, a man in jeans, an exit sign. A contingent dialectic between the world and its undoing, through which both are transcended.

I have no proof of this. In fact, it cannot be captured on film or video (and actually ends up looking almost a little underwhelming). But — it occurs. I have seen it. And if anything, this only reinforces my belief in its power: as a purely theatrical excess, one that escapes all documentation. The presence of the contingent subject itself.

## **2. Staging**

Just as, in being addressed to this agent, the texts wield a narrative excess too great to be apprehended by an individual, the direction makes this the case biologically.

This can be seen in how *WEAR*’s use of multiple “stages” makes impossible demands of audience members’ discrete perspectives. By staging vital events concurrently outside of a single eyeline, the work can only be “seen” in a physical sense by the group. This technique is similarly pronounced in *RUNE* and *Hareflight*: while *WEAR* was staged in such a way that freedom of perspective was encouraged, in *Hareflight* much of the dance took place *behind* the seated audience, and was only visible to those who were prepared to look backwards, through the

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<sup>77</sup> For more on *Hareflight*, see appendix 2.3.



audience, away from the stage. Similarly, the use of balloons to hang the garments in mid-air allowed for vertical as well as horizontal axes of perception.<sup>78</sup>

The methodology's multi-perspectival conceit was commented on by Dominica Plummer (2021), who, misunderstanding the nature of her individuality, wrote in a review that

if *RUNE* as a whole fails to connect in live performance, it is because each disparate part of the event commands the whole attention, whether it's the singing, the playing, the dancing, and yes, the fashion. It's a challenge to take in so much in one gestalt.

It is more than a challenge — within the fiction of one's own individuality, it is impossible.<sup>79</sup>

### **3. Collections**

This leads to a central principle of fashion-opera, which is the fundamental, absolute nature of each discipline. In this way, creative participants are free to work as they choose without (or, indeed, with) collaboration. It is fiercely anti-interdisciplinary in that each aspect of the work must be complete in and of itself: the creation of the contingent subject demands conflicting, mutually exclusive perspectives, reciprocally contained by one another through the work's power of producing structures from its immanent creative force.

This means, for instance, fashion collections that have already been made in a wholly different context can be featured within a work as both what they are and have been, and something entirely new: like the use of Lawlor's graduate collection in *WEAR*; or Renli Su's fashion design in *WOAD*. This is not a repurposing, or an archive display; rather, the contingent dialectic reinvests an (already) complete totality with another that is paradoxically opposed. Similarly, in creating new

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<sup>78</sup> It is worth contrasting this with its postmodern inversion. Jameson (1991, 31) comments on that cultural dominant's "paradoxical slogan: namely, the proposition that 'difference relates'" in that the heterogenous disjuncts of postmodern culture demand to be read through "differentiation rather than by unification;" thus, in a reference to *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (Roeg 1976), he claims that

the postmodernist viewer...is called upon to do the impossible, namely, to see all the screens at once, in their radical and random difference; such a viewer is asked...to rise somehow to a level at which the vivid perception of radical difference is in and of itself a new mode of grasping what used to be called relationship: something for which the word collage is still only a very feeble name.

In fashion-opera, like the relationship that the contingent dialectic organises, the difference is external to the individual, and can only be captured by the group.

<sup>79</sup> Rather than the gimmicks of immersive theatre, this is the tradition of the fashion show and early modern and ancient theatre: the amphitheatre that staged the festivals of Aeschylus, London's Globe Theatre, and even, as mentioned previously, opera houses — all remarkable technologies for producing contingent subjects.

collections, as with KA WA KEY's capsule release for *RUNE*, the house is freed to work according to the logic of the garments themselves, rather than creating to the impoverishing limits of a brief.

What is striking is the way that this manifests *contingency as causality*, rather than a *causality from contingency*. This is not the Hegelian notion of a retroactive synthesis where arbitrary fragments become re-invested with temporal direction.<sup>80</sup> Rather, pure spatialisation is revealed to contain its own logic — a meaningfulness shorn of causal relation. The dancer's garments for *RUNE* offer an example of this: not only are they at odds with one another in style and material, but are divested of their single scripted "purpose" (the transdimensional "Waters" through which Kes sails), and, similarly, exist only in a negative relation to the pieces worn by the staged singers. While the effect of this is not that of an organised whole or neat signifying totality, neither is it that of decentred plurality or meaningless assemblage. It is the organising force of pure contingency and the appearance of multiple absolutes, as the critic Mark Berry (2021) apprehended in the relation of the opera's elements to one another: "asking what came first was less beside the point than a question that never arose."

#### **4. Dance**

Like its counterparts, choreography is free to work according to its own demands — as an infinite, separate totality. But, because it bears the most similarity to the other disciplines, sharing elements with each of them (as some of the others do not), our production of the cycle used, in the choreography's global locations, a subtle positioning through the logic of the break.

To show this negatively: dance in fashion-opera does not function as an explication of the drama, as in, for example, ballet. But neither is it a random appendage grafted upon the music like much experimental opera and music's use of movement. On the other hand, though dance exists both in space and time, it cannot be deployed for synthesis, or used to bring a reconciliation, a dialogue, between fashion and opera, or the arbitrary and the causal. Such an act would collapse the contingent dialectic.

And so dance must become the opposite of a reconciliation — it is *displacement*; a cleaving, a cut, according to the logic of alienation: a separation of the drama from itself.

For though the singers are often presented as stationary, performing from scores, they are not in concert or semi-staged. Through the metaphysical insistence of the garment, they enact a static

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<sup>80</sup> "The key philosophical implication of Hegelian retroactivity is that it undermines the reign of the Principle of Sufficient Reason: this principle only holds in the condition of linear causality where the sum of past causes determines a future event — retroactivity means that the set of (past, given) reasons is never complete and "sufficient," since the past reasons are retroactively activated by what is, within the linear order their effect" (Žižek 2012, 213).

drama.<sup>81</sup> This, via the contrast of the activity of the dancers against the singers' inaction, works to displace the primary events onto the choreography: to form an antagonism between stasis-sound and movement-silence. Within this relationship, the dance occupies an infinite multitude of spectra in relation to meaning and signification. In *WEAR*, aspects of the choreography move between total dissolution and total signification of the themes, and the specific instances of movement themselves occupy a contingent relationship to the drama. In *ROBE*'s first act, the dance is mobilised to emphasise the "spaces" in the narrative, such as the Storyteller's intrusions, and in this way create signification through structure, while the content remains utterly separate. In *WOAD*, the movement is integrated into the sung performance as physical theatre, but remains estranged from the text. In *RUNE*, a similarly alienated relationship is created through game-choreography that is stitched to the opera's storyline only through the necessity of ending.

This intensifies the function of the displacement in the refusal to occupy a space — but which, through its occupation of a variety of relationships within the cycle, achieves immanence rather than postmodern "flight." It is the logic of the bombmaker rather than the nomad: a machine for infecting structure with movement, and movement with structure: the reciprocal containment of two mutually exclusive concepts — stasis and entropy.

## **5. Audience Participants**

It should be obvious that, according to the fundamental and absolute nature of each of the artworks, and the mutually exclusive perspectives of the audience demanded by the methodology, one is free not only to engage in interpretation, but in cataloguing the work within a genre — a tradition — and its strategies of meaning-production. *WEAR* may be a fashion exhibition; *ROBE* a score; *RUNE*, a ballet; *WOAD*, a play. Though this sounds like an abstract philosophical concern, it has a distinct material effect.

An example of this — which is so quotidian in its everyday reality as to be considered banal — can demonstrate its significance. It regards performances of *WEAR*, which was presented three times in two different venues. To take the 2019 run at the Bridewell Theatre as a case study: the two audiences for the two nights were audiences *for entirely different shows*. Friday night was a fashion audience, Saturday, an opera audience. This altogether transformed the work. At the former, participants wandered through the set, examining the clothes as the production was underway, colliding and interacting with the dancers, recording the experience on Instagram; at the latter, they stood motionless around the periphery, attempting to remain as still as possible, policing one another's perceived disruptions with the usual social tools.

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<sup>81</sup> We should not forget that stillness can be as thrilling as its opposite: throughout, there are always moments of interaction or performance — even in the most indefinite, vanishing ways.

Now, this is merely a description of the external habits that a practice fosters. But it speaks to a greater ontological question of how a work's being organises its manifestation, and further sustains the argument concerning fashion-opera's establishment of contradiction in the entity rather than (only) its analysis. For while this instance offers a clear break between two different volumes of individuals, and the visible impact of their respective characteristics, other evenings have included these audiences within them, with each containing the other's mutually exclusive perspective — such as the original 2018 performance of *WEAR*. Two individuals in the same venue at the same time, but like two versions of one person split across the multiverse, they are situated in two separate, mutually exclusive events, reciprocally containing one another by virtue of the fact that *they are the same*.

## **6. Performer Participants**

It should be no surprise that these logics impact performance practice also. Here I include a quote from an interview with Kelly Poukens (2019) following her performances of *The Designer* in *WEAR* in both productions and *The Storyteller* in *ROBE*.

When you take two things that aren't really connected with other, and you have to find a connection between them, your mind is going to have to work in a very different way. That's how I feel when I perform fashion-opera. It's not that you are just performing a piano and a vocal line, it's a series of ideas, colours and feelings that you have to exert creative effort to make connections between. The way I think of it is as a pencil and a pancake: two 'strange' things, and to connect them together you have to push yourself further than you normally do. It's very easy to find a link between a pencil and a piece of paper, but when you have two 'strange' things, your brain has to go further, you have to be very creative in a way you couldn't before. Every time I've finished one of your pieces I've learnt a lot about myself and my way of performing — and it's something unique, I always find something I've never done before.

## **7. Text**

Poukens goes on to reference not only the nature of the art forms but the compositional methodology, particularly with regard to vocal writing. One of the most important consequences of the logic of the break and the logic of infinity is the separation of text and music as fundamental absolutes. These imply a number of methodological principles.

First: *the poetry of the libretto must exceed that which can be caught in music*. Language may be strange, complex, unwieldy; the story multi-layered, fragmentary, excessive. The libretto is read from rather than projected, allowing the world of the text to be perceived according to its own internal logic — that of reading, of books, of the visual element of the line, and the internal,

imaginary monologue of the reader. *WOAD*, *RUNE* and *Hareflight* developed this further by incorporating typographic design into the poetry; for example, in the spaces between words at the end of *WOAD*, the dissolving sign of the hare in *Hareflight*; and the excess of both words, fonts, shapes and even un-scored dialogue that characterise the libretto of *RUNE*.<sup>82</sup> This is, of course, another demand upon the limits of the individual perspective — to move from the text to the drama, to the music, to the fashion, to the dance, and back, perceiving all of it at once. But, as with the excess of the musical material, such infinities only allow greater freedom: to traverse these worlds as one wishes — to trace one’s own path between textual apprehension and the ecstasy of abandon.

Second, *word setting need not obey the sense or perceivability of the language*. This is perhaps at its most pronounced in *WEAR*, where the vocal parts are written at the top of the range of both sopranos, with the bars often understood as blocks rather than organisers of strong/weak stresses for the metre. This creates a pervasive affect both of apocalypticism and brittle, luxurious beauty — thus conveying its own form of sense alongside the separated poetry. Rather than impoverishing it, such an act frees word setting to its own highly expressive, multiplicitous potential. It can be used developmentally, moving from, for instance in *RUNE*, isorhythmic overlays<sup>83</sup> to the poetry’s metre across the course of the work<sup>84</sup> before climaxing in impossible demands of speed (in performance), polyphony (in apprehension) and the dismissal of metrical realisation altogether.<sup>85</sup> It can also work non-narratively to control expression, as in *WOAD*, which is divided into two contrasting sections of processive and arbitrary organisations: the first four scenes see a gradual move towards traditional word-setting, as though the text were coming into focus; scenes five to seven use a variety of strategies in an arbitrary order. Though the shape of this has no specific meaning, the diversity of approaches (and the respective temporal and spatial organisations of the two sections) embody the opera’s theme of absolute change and contingency.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the following stylistic trait in the cycle: that vocal writing often occupies a different musical world to that of the ensemble, justified by core musical procedures. While not a strict principle, by creating a sense of its separation through immanence (rather than mere juxtaposition), the previous aspects are intensified.

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<sup>82</sup> *ROBE* and *WEAR* use very subtle elements of these ideas also.

<sup>83</sup> See *RUNE*: track 2 “The thing is, I don’t feel any older” on the album; page 16-46 in the score.

<sup>84</sup> See *RUNE*: track 8 “I clasp it. It is like touching a water-damaged page” on the album; page 109-132 in the score.

<sup>85</sup> See *RUNE*: track 11 “Transdimensional Canal II: “Sing it, then”” on the album; page 158-178 in the score. Specifically, the mezzo-soprano’s line between bars 1340 and 1388, taken up by the soprano from bar 1390 to 1412.

Ultimately, it is not a case of whether an individual understands the work, and then may go home, content with their entertainment. It is a question of whether the contingent subject is given the space to emerge. The piece is not a riddle to be solved. It is a process of enabling reality and revolution — produced by all participants, writers, performers and audiences.

These ideas relate the logic of the infinite to the logic of the break via the question of insurgent negativity. The dictum is this: to do the opposite of the prevailing liberal consensus regarding “opera” — to crush the meanness of its imagination, the arbitrary stupidity of its rules. We must reject it as we reject its reactionary politics, as we reject the institutions that facilitate such well-written rubbish. For the relation between the two logics is ultimately thus: *the break opens upon the infinite*.

### **5.5 THE LOGIC OF THE AXIS (CONCLUSION)**

Ultimately, all of these considerations can be considered historically by apprehending our contemporary moment as the production of the contradiction between modernism and postmodernism. In this way, we can read the previously stated manifesto on the contingent subject as a production of a historical truth, entirely “contingent” upon this moment in time, awaiting the production of a future defined by the material basis of the quantum computer. The artwork appropriate to this age is one that is both closed and open; and for meaning creation that is produced by the reader, but contained by the work’s logic. How?

The participant enters a system structurally orientated by the work’s immanence, beyond the limits set by the social, biological and physical. The work’s immanence nevertheless organises information which in its excess, complexity and use of breaks, aporias and spaces, demands that the participant themselves produce meaning through an original, creative effort. If this seems paradoxical, we must remember the Lacanian lesson on the lack as constituent; of Badiou’s on the in-existent and the generic nature of truth: all realities are composed of meaning and non-meaning; structure and its negative require one another. Thus, through the logic of the break and the infinite, the contradiction (that is named *the logic of the axis*) between the modernist monad and the postmodern assemblage is held in a contingent dialectic. There is no author (Barthes 2001), there is nothing beyond the text (Derrida 1976), and there are no grand narratives (Lyotard 1984); there is not even this postmodern negative grand narrative, for the revolution comes inevitably, even eschatologically (Marx 2008), and in “These fragments I have shored against my ruin” (Eliot 2010) and their “insolent challenge to the stars” (Marinetti 2011) the impossible occurs: meaning beyond meaning.

This is exemplified in the story of *WEAR*; but that narrative’s passage — to uncover the truth of fragments — is also the passage from the individual to the group. The methodology produces

conflicting interpretations through its own immanence; a structure that allows, even demands, mutually exclusive perspectives that in fact contain one another via their simultaneous incorporation into its formations.<sup>86</sup>

For me, the enduring proof of the contingent subject is the image of the audience at the world premiere of *WEAR*, curved around, watching one another as much as the show, looking from between the stages, to the fashion, dance, and drama, and up, finally, into the sky as the clouds parted to let a rush of violent light through the high attic windows. Alienated, splintered, smashed to meaningless pieces, we can never again be a community, or look to that sky as our ancestors did. But from those fragments — who can tell what wonders may emerge?<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> One critic explained the experience of being a part of *WEAR* in the following way:

It's not just a show you sit back and watch, it really is a show that you engage with, partly out of necessity but also out of a desire to immerse both in the world of the story and the design which surrounds it. Similarly, it's a show that you could take to any place in terms of transposing its themes; if I hadn't of read the online book, I might have taken a completely separate narrative away. Some might not enjoy that level of freedom when seeing a show but if you can get into the right head-space, it's a liberating feeling (Sam Lawrence 2018).

<sup>87</sup> Beyond fashion-opera, these logics can be observed at play in the supplementary work *The Drowning Shore*. See appendix 2.4.

## **6. IT'S PRADA, COMRADE: AUTONOMY AND INTERVENTION IN FASHION-OPERA**

The next meaning of the name of fashion-opera concerns the dialectic of autonomy and intervention. To locate this, we must first situate our models and concepts in the context of this debate: specifically, as a development of Hegel's and Adorno's ideas regarding the moral immanence of the aesthetic object.

The Hegelian argument against teleological value systems of aesthetic usefulness is dependent upon the concept of the antithesis of the particular and the absolute. This, Hegel (2004, 59-61) contends, under modernity, has been split irreconcilably — forcing a dual existence upon the subject. Art reconciles this contradiction within itself, through which the subject is liberated from its historically determined “amphibious” state into a higher mode of being. Importantly, this reconciliation is seen to take place within the aesthetic object. Adorno (2007, 159-160) extracts this from the logic of the Christian metaphysics from which it is derived by applying this same concept of immanent aesthetic morality to a Marxist framework, proposing a model whereby artworks mediate reality in how they subject historical reality to their formal logic (itself contingent upon history). As we saw earlier, changes in our understanding of material reality must have consequences for Adorno's reasoning: what does art's “negative knowledge of the actual world” (160) become when the “actual world” of our consensus reality is itself a negative knowledge of objective reality? The driving force of Adorno's above-quoted riposte to Sartre is the insight that an aesthetic commitment to reality — an intervention — is simply to posture through the motions of an ontological tautology that does a disservice to both sides of the equation, with political reality trivialised to the status of content and the artwork compromised into mere social document: “there is no material content...which did not originate in the empirical reality from which it breaks free” (190). We must therefore develop this argument one stage further by appropriating Adorno's logic into our new comprehension of the relationship between aesthetic fiction and the fiction model, that is, the imposition of fictions of necessity which govern subjective interactions with external reality. Rather than “artworks test[ing] their skill against the enigmas that the world devises for devouring men” (Adorno 2006, 102) it is precisely by their taking the guise of these enigmas that art's emancipatory power is realised: as Hegel (11) maintains, “art liberates the real import of appearances from the semblance and deception of this bad and fleeting world and imparts to phenomenal semblances a higher reality, born of mind.”

Reformulating this allows us to recognise the main difference between emancipatory fiction as a creative realisation of human productive capacity, and the fiction model as a passively accepted inhibition of human potential: artworks have a higher reality not because they take us closer to God, but because they negate passive, inherited necessity with active, creative productivity, and in doing so, allow for a new form of subjectivity at the edge of the noumenal real. As fictive as our



experience of external reality, art leverages the fiction of that imposed reality against itself through the success of its formal coherence in producing an individually creative totality of its own: the aesthetic object's creatively determined formal totality is thus, if strong enough, able to determine its own totality of the real defined by the creative, productive potential of society rather than the passive necessity of our biological, psychological and social inheritance and, consequently, as a negation of the fiction model's negation of external reality, constitute an active emancipatory process objectified in the artwork's immanent form.

But is this argument not disproven by the empirical data that every opera festival on earth provides us with? Look: George Osborne — who in his ideological class-war murdered 120,000 people in the 2010s<sup>88</sup> (Watkins et al. 2017) — strolling through the grounds at Bayreuth. *How is it so?* These great works which should, through their glorious immanence, produce the revolution, a higher consciousness, become reduced to neutralised accessories, excursions. This is the unacceptable heritage of autonomy. Of course, so many contemporary pieces demonstrate the endpoint of intervention to be politics-as-programme, as brand — offensively reducing issues or movements to baroque cladding for personal gain; but the implication of autonomy is this horror-inducing reduction of art to a sanitised space of leisure alone — where its enemies may tread without fear. We need, not a synthesis that resolves their contradictions, but a contingent dialectic that maintains each of their awesome powers. How?

The answer to this is the following meaning of the name of fashion-opera: *that fashion is the only practice to ever have achieved such a thing.*

It realises this through its deployment of the relationship between use value and exchange value; these, along with the fragile intersection between past and future<sup>89</sup> (not mohair, leather, plastics or gold), are the true “material” of fashion. The example of this *par excellence* is the Prada nylon bag (Miuccia Prada 1984) — of greater moral worth than any music created in the last half-century. It constitutes a cheap, worthless material that is transmuted into luxury through a price that bears no

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<sup>88</sup> The impact of the policies of successive Conservative governments in Britain across that decade puts this number at 330,000 (Walsh et al. 2022).

<sup>89</sup> “The conditions for the rise of the celebrity designer were the same ones as those which paved the way for the emergence of a modern consumer society in the west. Factors including the expansion of urban civilisations, a growing dependence on mechanisation, and the reorganisation of labour in industrial manufacturing provided a context within which innovation and productivity could thrive...The fashion designer was a product of this development rather than its initiator. The designer's practical skills in communicating novel ideas eased the smooth relationship between the production and the consumption of provision, and ensured that new products carried the requisite cachet to stand out in an overcrowded marketplace...Where the genius of men like Charles Worth and Paul Poiret or women like Coco Chanel and Madeleine Vionnet lay was in their ability to read the implications of cultural and stylistic change and incorporate it into a characteristic and very well-promoted personal vision” (Breward 2003, 22-23).

relationship to its material. In this way, exchange value becomes use value: becomes aestheticised. It is beautiful by virtue of this abstract, non-existent quality that has been made now powerfully real. This represents a simple, direct aesthetic intervention into the capitalist laws of experience. It is both absolutely political and interventional, but achieves this through its own autonomous logic. There is no submission or capitulation, but rather both work together independently via their separate, discrete strategies to effect a transvaluation of values, a crack in realism's all-encompassing logic.

Alongside the fact that some fashion objects, such as this, contain the autonomy-intervention contingent dialectic, fashion as a practice is *interventionist* in opposition to opera's *autonomy*. Like the red dress, fashion exists in the world; it responds; opera exists in the theatre; it preserves. Furthermore, as we have seen, fashion's astonishing interventions into reality are achieved through how it foregrounds *exchange value*; while opera derives its power from the *use value* of unquantifiable labour. Together with the space-time dialectic, we are then given the original definition of the name of fashion-opera mentioned at the opening of this thesis. Understanding this also allows us to disclose its true, hidden meaning: that *fashion-opera is a brand*.

It thus operates within the laws of the late-capitalist marketplace while preserving the power of its aesthetic autonomy to destroy and transcend it. A contingent dialectic: between the work (beyond the limits of the structure) and the work's position (within those limits). It is a trojan horse; a letterbomb. It must be — who cares if an opera is performed to a handful of miserable composers? As it is the external relation that matters in the establishment of the contingent subject, we must demand greater volumes of audiences: through the radio, TV, cinema, the grandest stages in the world.

This is achieved, first, by incorporating brand strategies into the methodology: encouraging its profile through traditional notions of marketing such as luxury, desirability and emotional connection. Second, by press campaigns that are themselves a part of the work: using the complexity of the philosophy, narrative, and global organisation as “brand newness” that gains media attention and air time. This has had considerable success: we have sold out our shows, been featured on television, radio, international (including non-musical) publications, and drawn audiences from all walks of life, beyond the specialist world of new music. That the New Complexity of *RUNE* may be described as “perfect” by *Vogue Italia* (Calabrese 2021) dismisses all arguments about the accessibility of the modernist heritage. Because the market will take *anything* if you let it. This is a moral law for the neoliberal artist — to compromise in every way except the work itself: an inversion of the classist, ableist notion of an “accessible” style is that of the populist mandarin. To be as impossible as the six-winged Seraphim; as cunning as a rat.

## **7. THE FALSE CHOICE OF CHOICE: STRUCTURE AND CONTINGENCY IN WOAD**

### **7.1 THE SEVEN-SIDED DIE**

But we now have an aporia between the arguments of the last chapter and that of the theory of the contingent dialectic: between the need for a structure powerful enough to negate the structures of reality, and the prohibition of a Master-Signifier. This can be understood by returning to the theme of the chapter before last, for spatialisation and temporality directly implies a subsequent antagonism which names this very paradox — that of structure and contingency. The answer to this is simple, a mere handful of words. A contingent dialectic between: absolute structure; its absolute abdication.

The historical relation between the two antagonisms can be demonstrated through a reading of works from the experimental tradition which grapple with both contradictions: Earle Brown's (1962) *Novara* and John Zorn's (1984) *Cobra*. I propose the variable that unites their historical relationship in the following hypothesis: that the previously examined spatialisation of time becomes most characteristic through the introduction of certain aspects of late capitalist ideology regarding democracy into music. Specifically, in the paradox between capitalism's dependence upon the ideological assertion of the subject's ability to act as a free and rational individual and the simultaneous negation of that very claim through the same system's ideological practices.<sup>90</sup> Central to this, as maintained by Žižek (2011) and Badiou (2015), are the political, moral and philosophical dimensions of democracy in which the acceptance of democratic procedures as the sole framework for any possible change precludes radical transformation of capitalist relations of exploitation. It is no surprise then, that liberal notions of freedom — which are in fact anything but — give rise to an aesthetic in which choice functions as a masquerade upon disjunction and disempowerment. It will be shown that experimental attempts at such freedom actually erode its possibility by merely replacing one limit with another. To quote Lacan's (Zabala 2018) famous warning to the students of 1968: "what you aspire to as revolutionaries is a new master. You will get one."

Zorn's *Cobra* constitutes a musical game which, through the communal participation of the musicians involved, creates a series of arbitrary juxtapositions of unrelated material in an extreme intensification of the spatialised Stravinskian aesthetic apprehended by Adorno.<sup>91</sup> This is justified

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<sup>90</sup> The reproduction of the relations of production is dependent upon interpellation, the creation of centred subjects which assume roles within the system under the illusion of individual freedom (Althusser 2008).

<sup>91</sup> All of what we saw Adorno say about Stravinsky, and Jameson about postmodernism, is here: simulacra, in the mask-play of stylistic quotation; disjunction, in the arbitrary succession of blocks; and, through these, the liquidation of temporal perception into object-like spatialisation.

by the democratic, game-like nature of the work, where the arbitrary juxtaposition of blocks becomes a practical and ideological production by the various subjects engaged in the piece. And, of course, one that directly corresponds to the nature of those subjects: Susan McClary (2009, 146) has celebrated the way in which “the disintegrated subject so decried by Modernist theorists of Postmodernism (e.g. Baudrillard and Jameson) here flaunts itself without apology”; while Kenneth Gloag (2012, 103) relates Zorn’s general “juxtaposition of unrelated fragments of sound” to an “engagement with aspects of popular culture and the attempt to relate musical sound to visual imagery”. He remarks how “the fact that Zorn can bring together the music of Stravinsky and Carl Stalling in one statement of influence provides yet another reflection of the wide range of his highly personal and musical and cultural perspectives”. But the latter is indicative rather than idiosyncratic: Stalling, the composer for the Warner Bros. cartoons, can be understood as a direct development of Stravinsky’s nonlinear disjunction.<sup>92</sup>

There is nothing radical in taking the forms handed down from capitalist realism; nor certainly, in providing those forms with justification through their realisation in a supposedly “radical” aesthetic reality. Such music is easy to produce, undemanding to experience and, ultimately, encourages a co-option of the disempowering structures that produce the subject of postmodernism. *Cobra* is redeemed from much of its counterparts that simply regurgitate this style in that it attempts to use it as a formal justification for communal participation and engagement. However, as we shall see, this too is an ideological sleight of hand whereby, in the words of Althusser (2008, 269),

The individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection ‘all by himself.’ There are no subjects except by and for their subjection. That is why they ‘work all by themselves.’

Like *Cobra*, the processual nature of Brown’s *Novara* actually comprises an admirable attempt to resist reification through a democratisation of the creative process, that is, by creating a living process which is dependent upon the human individuals involved alongside other contextual variables. In this way, the piece is supposedly able to accrue new meaning through a circumstantial redeployment of its material, which basically constitutes the work’s form. This is justified by Brown’s use of material throughout: notably, certain chords and gestures which develop

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<sup>92</sup> Jameson (1991, 299-300), again, is instructive here:

What MTV does to music, therefore, is not some inversion of that defunct nineteenth-century form called program music but rather the nailing of sounds...onto visible space and spatial segments: here, as in the video form more generally, the older paradigm – that lights up in genealogical hindsight as this one’s predecessor (not the basic influence on it) is *animation* itself. The cartoon...was the first laboratory in which ‘text’ tried out its vocation to mediate between sight and sound (think of Walt’s own lowbrow obsession with highbrow music) and ended up spatialising time.

between the blocks along certain possible trajectories that – could – be taken through the score. However, the fact that the sequence of blocks is still arbitrary replaces the artwork's musical form with one that is in part ideological, in that the participation of the musicians and the event of the work itself become part of the aesthetic object that is contemplated. Furthermore, these blocks are ultimately the arbitrary concatenation that Adorno recognised in Stravinsky whereby the plurality of juxtaposition replaces meaningful temporal development. The aesthetic act is found in the combination of chaotic uncertainty provided by the democratic engagement of musicians and the certainty of arbitrary succession through the spatialised structure; these two work hand in glove to justify one another. How this engagement functions as a mask for the work's fragmentary and spatialised conception is of particular interest. The musicians create the illusion of continuous development and transition from shifts in material that is fundamentally block-like and arbitrary. This interplay is fascinatingly realised in the notation itself. As Brown instructs in the performance notes regarding his "time-notation": "it must be understood that the performance is not expected to be a precise translation of spatial relationships but a relative and more spontaneous realisation through the involvement of the performers' subtly changing perceptions of the spatial relationships." Thus, time becomes not only space but a contextual and human interpretation of that phenomenon. In this way, democratic interplay and spatialised time work as cyphers for one another's meaning, mutually dependent on their joint realisation.

This demonstrates how the incorporation of choice is doomed to collapse into the logic of spatialisation via the arbitrary. But the fixing of choice is equally unacceptable. For though a closed work may engender infinite possibilities, it nevertheless contains a limit that would forbid the creation of the contingent subject. Take even the most extreme example of plurality through immanence, the work of Ferneyhough: this is music that transcends the dialectic of spatialisation and temporality — only to become caught within the unipolarity of "structure." Ferneyhough's creation of materiality and even subjectivity in his works has offered the possibility of subjective freedom through a multiplicity of the possible. In his pieces, the radical materiality of the score works directly with the body to overcome given forms of experience and, in doing so, incorporates

free subjectivity as a vital part of the aesthetic event.<sup>93</sup> This is a remarkable achievement, and a vital ancestor of the theory of contingency dialectics. But his scores are destined to collapse the antagonism of structure and contingency for the simple reason that wrong performances are possible. The score contains itself as its own limit. No matter the magnitude and amount of its infinities, they possess a horizon — worse, a ceiling. As we saw earlier, the contingent subject allows for no Master-Signifier, no matter what infinite variegations and pluralities a work may authorise. An impossible task, then: the work must exist beyond the Badiouian points, beyond any form of ultimate stable localisation in its relations; and must constitute an immanent structure through which to negate the structures of reality.

This requires two steps.

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<sup>93</sup> Essential to this is the notion of the *Figure*, a concept designed to overcome the reification of musical energies into pre-given systems of meaning that reduce music's expressive and signifiatory power (Ferneyhough 1995, 23). By giving time a unique materiality, compositional opportunities are afforded for the experience of temporality outside the process of spatialisation. These include, first, the practice of (I) *Smearing* where, instead of traditional temporal development, parametric aspects of an event spill over into the surrounding music: juxtaposition is given new propulsive logic, in that concatenation serves as a background against which a foreground of parametric separation can operate. (II) *Multiple Directionalities*, where the spatial apprehension of time is reintegrated back into temporal motion through "depth perspective" (41). Relating the work to itself gives a multidimensionality to time's movement and an abundance of pathways through the music for the listener to take: a subjective freedom. Here too, in the anticipation of the music's perception, Ferneyhough intervenes via the concept of (III) *Temporal Tactility* or the subjective apprehension of time as a physical presence. This is effected through density of musical information, the relationships established between hierarchic levels and, crucially, the relationship between the body and the physicality of the material and its notation. Like the establishment of multiple directionalities, the utopian premise of such an approach comes from its service in the emergence of a physicality, perhaps even a sense of subjectivity, from the musical material itself (162). This can be clearly identified in the *Second String Quartet* (1980). Bar 1 contains the initial event, which is developed in bar 3 by inverting the contour of the line and the transformation of the second chord into a glissando, which combines the idea of both the event and the silence — or the break — between bar 1 and 3. This development is then divided into its constituent elements and transformed in a variety of ways, with the rising melody of bar 3 developing in bar 6 before repeating itself and then developing this subsequent transformation into the repeated notes at the end of bar 6 and 10. The chords of bar 1 are developed through the glissando of bar 3 into an interplay between the two, as in bar 11. These constituent elements are then brought together at the entry of the second violin to create a new musical object through the combination of the original element's various developments. This is the process of reciprocal containment whereby *the very aspects of the musical event become events — objects — themselves and, within this, function as contexts for one another's progress*. In this way, even the disruptive silence that distinguishes the opening is itself developed across the work as a variable absence of gesture amongst excessive musical density. The arbitrary breaks, characteristic features of the trend towards spatialisation, are repurposed here within a new form of development that foregrounds the agency of the listening subject: though the work is marked by arbitrary concatenation, the reconfiguration of the musical process — as a meaningful totality through which multiple logical paths can be taken — resolves the contradiction between spatialisation and temporality — and permits a structure that offers meaningful multiplicity. Subjective freedom is reclaimed as an intrinsic constituent of the artwork through the music's objective materiality.

The first is to move beyond choice and chance to grasp true contingency. Meillassoux (2007, 71–74) illustrates this by contrasting contingency with indeterminacy through the example of a die.<sup>94</sup> Indeterminacy, and also choice, even the infinite interpretations of structure, allow us options only from within the realms of the possible: in the case of the die, one to six. Whether we roll it, interpret it or fix it, the alternatives are the same. Contingency is what exists beyond these limits: the fact that the die may grow a seventh side.<sup>95</sup> Like Badiou's lesson about the generic nature of infinity, Meillassoux here teaches a vital contemporary truth regarding the materiality of the impossible. But we must be careful. Such a concept shares the extra-Symbolic prohibitions of the Lacanian Real:<sup>96</sup> it is impossible to capture within a work's web of signification, and any attempts to do so are disingenuous.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> "I will call *contingency* the property of an indexed set of cases (not of a case belonging to an indexed set) of not itself being a case of sets of cases; and *virtuality* the property of every set of cases emerging within a becoming which is not dominated by any pre-constituted totality of possibles...If we maintain that becoming is not only capable of bringing forth cases on the basis of a pre-given universe of cases, we must then understand that it follows that such cases irrupt, properly speaking, *from nothing*, since no structure contains them as eternal potentialities before their emergence: *we thus make irruption ex nihilo the very concept of a temporality delivered to its pure immanence*...time creates the possible at the very moment it makes it come to pass, it brings forth the possible as it does the real, it inserts itself in the very throw of the dice, to bring forth a seventh case, in principle unforeseeable, which breaks the fixity of potentialities" (Meillassoux 2007, 71–74).

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Badiou's event: "An event is simply that which interrupts the law, the rules, the structure of the situation, and creates a new possibility" (Badiou 2016, 133).

<sup>96</sup> While there is not a body of Meillassouxian musicology or composition, we may take a cautionary tale from the bastardisation of the work of Lacan in the former of those domains. Lacan's almost complete silence upon music has not deterred a field emerging which Kenneth M. Smith (2011, 353-354) has championed as an effective new branch of criticism. In a survey of existing approaches and manifesto for his own, Smith serves inadvertently to summarise the two primary issues with this area of research: on one hand, the misapplication of concepts, which he minimises, and on the other, the contextual impropriety of their use, which he repurposes as a strength. The former, "that Lacan's ideas are employed on an ad hoc basis in order to explicate compositional ideas" (354), refers to the indiscriminate reification of the Lacanian orders of the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic into mere empirical descriptors: Lacan's project of stressing the process over the object is undone, with these concepts becoming instead formal categories of aesthetic organisation through which a composition's elements can be catalogued. And so when David Schwarz (1997: 23-27), in his writing on The Beatles' (1969) "I Want You (She's So Heavy)", or Smith (2010) himself on Zemlinsky's (1921) use of quartal harmony in *Der Zwerg*, attempt to locate the Lacanian Real in an element which clearly functions within an artwork's system of signification, the concept of the Real, though useful within that particular critique, becomes otherwise meaningless. Reilly Smethurst (2017) makes this point rather more forcefully, going so far as to contend that a serious Lacanian musicology will only be founded by an entire rejection of Smith's approach (264), which he (248) portrays as being marked by the false conflation of Lacan with Žižek and a fundamental confusion regarding the concepts' meaning. We must not forget the simple meaning of this lesson as we progress: the Symbolic is not (and never can be) the Real.

<sup>97</sup> Not to mention dangerous: as we have seen, they lead back to a collapse of the spatialisation-temporality dialectic into the arbitrary or the anti-historical; and the collapse of the structure-contingency dialectic into the meaningless or the limited.

Having accepted it, to deploy the logic of contingency, we need a second step.

For this, we may turn again to Ferneyhough, whose music has developed the concept of polyphony to include earlier moments in a work's subjective history. This creates multiplicities of potential perspectives through an additional vertical dimension.<sup>98</sup> If we apply the logics of infinity and the break to this, we are given a topography of the work in time: like the global organisation of genre, in which each practice is fundamental and absolute (the logic of the infinite) and absolutely separate from one another (the logic of the break), we may imagine each stage of the composition's history as its final, ultimate realisation, whether: philosophical research; poetic composition; generation of compositional data; creation of structure; composition; rehearsal; promotion; performance; reception. This sequence is without end, and as many new stages may be added as can be imagined, and more, beyond even these limits. The most important consequence of this is that rehearsal becomes utterly separate (and equal, in its infinity, to) composition; as do, for instance, reception and promotion, as were addressed earlier.

Thus, the immanent structure of a work, and its open contingency, may exist in a contingent dialectic with one another: mutually exclusive by their very nature, but containing one another reciprocally via their alienated infinity in that: the absolute detail of the symbolic excess of notation, which itself creates its own contingencies and choices, becomes reinforced by the wager that all of it can be divested while retaining its identity. And that such absolute, extra-Symbolic contingency, may indeed become a part of the structure's meaning whilst still retaining its cthulic power. Such a contingent dialectic, itself as impossible — even nonsensical — as Meillassoux's seventh side, is summed up in the simple formula mentioned at the opening of this chapter:

*That the absolutely closed and immanent structure of a work must be infinitely open to change and contingency.*<sup>99</sup>

This is the possibility of “the space between,” the absence at the heart of the contingent dialectic that is the inheritor of the Badiouian inexistent, the Lacanian Real, and Meillassouxian contingency. Though all the operas contain this dictum, *WOAD* took it as its content and theme: to

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<sup>98</sup> See footnote 93.

<sup>99</sup> The text must be closed to create immanence through the infinity it contains; the text must be open for contingency and infinite change. One must create the most rigorous of structures, the most complete of texts; one must allow, and encourage, its entire transformation: absolute detail that exists with the negation of all detail.

Appropriately, this was never defined as a law or anticipated, but rather simply occurred and was named retroactively as a feature by the operas' music director, Ben Smith. My background is in rock and roll, and I always thought it was entirely natural for musicians to change, intervene in, improvise, re-imagine and re-score music.



seek a way of dramatising absolute change, and the potential this implies, without it being neutralised to mere indeterminacy or simply another signifier within the work's limits.

## **7.2 WOAD**

*In the medieval Scottish Borders, a boy is bewitched — into an ape, an adder, a speck of dust. But is it his shape that twists and churns, or that of the world around him?*

*WOAD* is the third part of the fashion-opera cycle. An opera about metamorphosis and parallel worlds, it is the only one of the four to adapt external material — in a re-reading of the Scots myth of *Tam Lin* (Acland 1997). Through this, the work poses questions about the implications of contemporary cosmology: separated from other versions of ourselves in a metaphysics where all eventualities are accounted for (no matter our intentions) how can we claim any kind of identity at all? And, in this schema of endless possibility, what becomes of us, our desires — our longing, regret?

*Tam Lin* is a Scottish border ballad from the middle ages that represents a traditional myth of metamorphosis. Through its imagery, it can be read as an exploration of the mutable, transformative nature of the body: how, in adolescence, for example, our bodies are recast and divided through time as a series of separate versions of ourselves. In *WOAD*, these notions are used to aestheticise the social implications of multiverse theory: where versions of events coexist in different areas and types of space. It further uses this to contextualise the social change foregrounded by COVID-19, the health crisis that took place during its writing, realisation and recording. In doing so, it relates the themes of metamorphoses and quantum “flickering” to socio-historical revolution and the possibility of a break with the horrors of multinational capitalism. As such, it encapsulates many of the continuing themes of the cycle: of new forms of logic emerging where we least expect them — and a belief in the possible beyond the limits of social (and even physical) reality.

Central to these ideas is the opera's attempt to incorporate contingency into every aspect of the work through the impetus for change and intervention by the performer within the score. Thematically, then, the adaptation of the ballad becomes a method for considering how fear of translation manifests human anxieties of limitlessness. On the one hand, that scores persist through any interpretation; on the other, the endlessness of space rests upon pinpoints of quantum particularity. Thus the plot of *WOAD* is not so much that of the folk legend, or even its reimagining, *but the process of adaptation itself*: that is, *change*. Through this, *WOAD*'s text draws influence from models of annotation within older artworks, for instance: Lear's fool;<sup>100</sup> Edward Gibbon and

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<sup>100</sup> In their creative linguistic exuberance, Shakespeare's (1997) characters often reach beyond the confines of the text to become annotative.

T.S. Eliot's footnotes;<sup>101</sup> more recently, Gonzo and Rizzo in *The Muppet Christmas Carol*.<sup>102</sup> Here, this becomes a double focus that — similar to the interventions of the performers, or the aforementioned conceit of a work spilling into its surroundings — brings the work out into the world with its edges intact. Accordingly, unstable fragments from the characters' lives are encircled by a commentary that, like the writhing backdrop against which the protagonist is caught, obscures and merges. Annotations, digressions and rewritings feature heavily throughout both score and the libretto,<sup>103</sup> the narratives of which are realised through transformations between highly stylised poetic and musical forms — and the underlying framework which unites them in their diverse plurality.

The structure works similarly to that of the previously examined *ROBE*, but here immanence is generated via the kernel of the formula “3124,” which is interpreted across a multiplicity of rhythmic, harmonic, melodic and structural strategies. This gives the all-interval rows that contain this sequence, which are then transformed and developed according to the procedures outlined earlier. Similarly, it provides rhythmic organisation in note lengths, bars and tuplets, as well as through its extension (i.e. into “5237” and various rotations). However, while *ROBE* favours discrete scenic characterisation, *WOAD* explodes this by, (in the same way that *ROBE* layered multiple philosophies of listening and composition upon one another) interleaving, juxtaposing, jumping through different domains for expressive purpose — dancing through the underlying compositional structure in a way that resists delineation. Consequently, while the effect is the same of establishing ontological contradiction at the heart of the work (for instance, the tensions in “Superposition”<sup>104</sup> between the intervallically-characterised vocal and saxophone lines, which together form total chromatics, and the saxophone's characterisation via the “343” pitch fragment which allows it to shape tonal triads), the tensions between plurality and immanence are far more pronounced: for they are exacerbated by the themes of contingency and transformation on one hand, and that of structure and identity on the other.

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<sup>101</sup> Both disrupt the text that they surround, whether through humour in the former (Gibbon 2000), or a specific strategy of confusion through red herrings and misinformation in the latter (Eliot 2010; Mambrol 2020).

<sup>102</sup> Though it may seem pithy as an example, the movie adaptation (1992) of Dickens realises the ingenuous strategy of investing its annotations with a dramatic narrative of their own as significant as that of the book. It serves a vital structural function through its absence at the climax, where Gonzo and Rizzo abandon the viewer in fear — forcing a lonely encounter with “the text itself” to explicate Scrooge's confrontation with his own mortality.

<sup>103</sup> See *WOAD*: track 1 “Everything Is Always Possible” on the album; no. 1 in the score — specifically, how the end (page 8-9) rewrites the beginning (page 1).

<sup>104</sup> See *WOAD*: track 2 “Superposition” 5.35-7.02 on the album; no.2, page 6-7 in the score.

The totality of these processes *as structure* then enters into a contingent dialectic with another: that of *contingency*, according to the score's opening instruction: "you may — and are encouraged to — change anything." In discussing the effects of this and their meaning, I would like to begin by quoting again from the interview with Poukens, for whom the work was written alongside saxophonist Suzy Vanderheiden.

With contemporary music, it is as though you are outside a box, but with fashion-opera, I learned that there is no box at all. So despite the complexity and demands of the vocal writing, I feel a real sense of freedom, and when you feel free, there is no complexity anymore. The freedom gives you ability to achieve the complexity.

The effect on performance practice is in the creation of a paradoxical double-absolute between the score and the performer. This frees both to work according to their own strategies — whether human or anti-human. By way of illustration: "Scene" contains an example of vocal writing detached from human concerns;<sup>105</sup> and Poukens' realisation of this is the opposite of Ferneyhough's concept of "noble failure." Notation and the body each go their own way. There are instances of writing like this throughout the cycle which are either divested (as here) or — far more often — realised. From a personal point of view, what I've found most surprising is that the music performed and the music that is re-composed is *almost never what the composer expects it to be*. By renouncing your biases of the limits of the possible and writing against rather than for the human body, the individual may transcend those limitations — through its incorporation into a contingent dialectic with its opposite. That is: through the antagonism of the biological (practice) and the symbolic (notation). For the avoidance of doubt, I assert my total commitment to the radical freedom that this instruction represents, whatever its consequences — which so far, as we shall see, have been far-reaching and pivotal.

The interventions that the performers make in *WOAD* offer two sets of examples of how the dialectic of contingency and structure works in practice: the first regard the effects of contingency; the second, the insistence of structure.

The former consists of two structurally significant re-compositions that transform the work entirely.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> See *WOAD*: track 3 "Scene" 4.53-5.02 on the album; no.3, page 8, bar 77-19 of the score.

<sup>106</sup> I should be clear that these were in no way encouraged. In fact, so dear to me were the laws of the composition, so hard-won and long-worked upon was the structure's manifestation in these key aspects, that I broke the rules of the score and pleaded with the duo *against* these decisions. A lesson in the importance of submitting oneself to the objective power of the multi-dimensional work, rather than the meagreness of the individual — and its short-sighted vanity!

The initial example of these constitutes the formal climax of the work.<sup>107</sup> This is the final transformation of the compositional data from “spaces between one another” “to spaces from a central point,” which in turn stitches the musical and linguistic grammar together; in this way, it prepares the way for the return of the adapted text, and through this, the desecration of the musical (through the poetic) grammar and in this the emergence of “space as space.”

This process turns upon a change in perspective: from “all-interval” as all intervals *between notes* to “all-interval” as all intervals *from a single note*. This perspectival shift (from interrelating points to a single point of gravity) has been foreshadowed by the interplay between mutually exclusive serial and tonal fragments reciprocally containing one another by functioning as one another’s negatives earlier in the scene (as demonstrated previously in the analysis of *ROBE*). Then, at this critical moment, the work enunciates the series of the all-interval (from a fixed point) chords characterised by containing the interval sequence “3124” at their beginnings: such as the vocal line at bar 201-203 that writes B, A, B  $\flat$ , C (against the grounding G $\sharp$  played by the saxophone) before articulating the rest of the row. This change in gravity stitches the musical to the textual grammar — now, the retrogrades of the rows retrograde the text, also: into a question. Thus, this inversion of perspective around the gravitational centre prepares the way for the presence of the original text of the ballad, which, in turn, re-affects the musical surface. That is, *Tam Lin’s* appearance occurs through the libretto’s poetic desecration of its original text into nouns alone — and their subsequent arrangement according to degrees of homonymity through a purely textual map.<sup>108</sup> This poetic logic is then stitched to that of the musical by transposing the columns of the text into the score. The text and its absences — now sewn (due to the effects of that original gravitational perspective-change) to the music — create a final climactic image of the “spaces between” that break apart the musical language into silence: the advent of contingency, of the empty spaces at the work’s thematic heart.

Thus, this particular aspect functions as the embodiment of pure change, vital for everything that has gone before, and everything that goes after. But Poukens rewrites this as a single note according to the logic of her own performance practice: that is, the desire for a crescendo of expressivity in a deeply personal, subjective human moment. This is completely at odds — *in every way imaginable* — with the entire structure, meaning, and purpose of the work, and with this moment in particular, perhaps more than any other. At a point where the individual should be wholly erased, revealed as a bubble upon the flotsam of endless transformation, it instead

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<sup>107</sup> See *WOAD*: track 7 “The Transformation of Tam Lin” on the album; no 7 in the score — specifically, the vocal passages on page 5-7: bar 201-207; bar 221-226; bar 246-252; bar 268-274; bar 294-298; bar 303-308; bar 315-322.

<sup>108</sup> See *WOAD*: track 7 “The Transformation of Tam Lin” 11.52-16.01 on the album; no.7, page 11-13 in the score.

appears, in a personal, emotion-laden, almost folk-like rendition. This emphasises the recomposition that has made it possible: a single repeated note, the “individual” identity asserting its reality through this changeless repetition.

The second example regards the musicians’ re-composition of “Interim: The Painted Ones.”<sup>109</sup> In the score, this is a structural representative of “the space between,” a pause, or break, in the progress of the scenes to something entirely different: a presentation of the changing iconography of William Wallace — from the historical, to the mythical, to the filmic, to Tom Church’s statue (originally) at the Wallace monument — presented in alienated juxtaposition with that of a boy dying in meaningless violence: watching a snail, at the threshold between life and death. Though at a glance, this sounds tragic, even mythical, “Interim” is in fact a comedy, something that would be obvious to a Scottish listener.<sup>110</sup> This finds expression in the ridiculous *buffa* honking of the saxophone line, which disturbs the seamless flow of the poetry with movement that is clumsy, lurching and repetitive. Poukens and Vanderheiden, oblivious to the joke, re-scored this as something emotionally expressive and texturally subtle. As such, the “interim” — the space — that the piece tries to explode in the centre of opera through the force of unreconciled grotesque comedy becomes instead something very different. Though marked by space and silence, its function is one of repose and centrality rather than violent exteriority. This is such an extreme innovation that it alters the entire course of the work. This can be seen in Colin Clarke’s (2022) interpretation for his review in *Fanfare*, where he writes how “the fifth scene...seems at once a ‘slow movement’ and a still centre around which the rest of the work orbits.” Indeed, this later leads him to imagine the opera as being about *liminality* rather than *contingency through alienation*, which, dealing in polarities rather than their synthesis, is an altogether different thing.<sup>111</sup>

And so, through such intrusions, the score is absolutely transformed in a manner abhorrent to the identity of its construction: it has grown a seventh side. Yet no one would say that it is not the same work. It remains itself — due to the immanence and creative power of its structure. The proof of

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<sup>109</sup> See *WOAD*: track 5 “Interim: The Painted Ones” on the album; no.5 in the score.

<sup>110</sup> Tom Church’s (1996) statue of Wallace is a notorious joke in Scotland for the fact that it is a representation, not of Wallace, but of the actor Mel Gibson, who played Wallace in his 1995 film *Braveheart*.

<sup>111</sup> “It is worth following the libretto for the final scene in the booklet as one listens, as the spatial layout of the text is markedly deliberate. This includes an extended solo sax “song,” plaintively, touchingly given by Vanderheiden. Here, White comes as close as he can to stating the liminal heart of his piece, as he talks of the “space between before and after,” and names several other examples of liminality before setting text that moves across white gaps in the space of the printed page, where just as our eyes traverse the page’s whiteness, the performer’s phrases traverse silence, only to be taken up again. Another Webernian parallel, perhaps, that silence becomes such an integral part not just of the musical experience but of the musical phraseology itself” (Clarke 2022).

this requires nothing other than the fact that it is still itself; that the score endures through — not only interpretation but — the contingency that has violated (and in doing so preserved) it. This is the answer, then, to what becomes of us in the multiverse: we are changed, changed utterly; we remain.

However, there is an interesting story from *WOAD*'s creation that speaks of the silent power of structure to maintain itself in its own dissolution. *WOAD* was created during the pandemic and its lockdowns between myself in England and the two musicians in Belgium. Videocalls were used for communication in creating and workshopping the piece, which, along with the language barrier between Belgian and English, created many misunderstandings. This was particularly pronounced due to the fact that the saxophonist had never played contemporary music before, and there were frequent mix-ups in my poor explanations of various techniques and possibilities. This led to many of the drafts being re-written (often in their entirety) time and time again — which, unconsciously, reinforced its theme of absolute change and parallel worlds — as though the project itself was working towards this according to its own nonhuman strategies. One instance of this was the use of multiphonics in the second scene “Superposition” at a particular stage following an error in communication. Seeing the draft, Vanderheiden told me she had no idea with the notation meant. I re-wrote it, removing the multiphonics, and forgot about them. When the musicians intervened, however, they described to me after a practice session that Vanderheiden had changed one part to “blow air through the saxophone and make an interesting noise.” When I heard the recording, I realised that it was, in almost the exact same place — a multiphonic.<sup>112</sup>

Of course, this is not empirical evidence. It is only as much proof as the tarot provides when, from random fragments, it shows you nothing less than the future. Like any black cat or planet ablaze in the sky, it offers an elegant glimpse of the contingent dialectic between what is, and what may be.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> See *WOAD*: track 2 “Superposition” on the album; no.2 in the score — specifically, 7.50-8.10 for the appearance of the multiphonic in recorded performance, which is an improvised addition to the score between bar 136-140 by the performers. In the first, rejected composition of the scene, the notation for a (different) multiphonic appeared at bar 140-144.

<sup>113</sup> These ideas were developed in the supplementary work *The Snake That Eats The World*. See appendix 2.5.

## **8. A FIRST AND FINAL DIALECTIC: ATMOSPHERE AND INTEGRALITY IN RUNE**

### **8.1 KNOTTED CAUSALITIES**

By this point, we have covered the original four dialectics I first proposed in my application for this research project. These were: spatialisation and temporality; plurality and immanence; structure and contingency; autonomy and intervention.

But as the cycle progressed, I gradually realised that these implied a fifth dialectic which, though unanticipated, is both their beginning and end. Its name is *atmosphere and integrality*. It does not strictly contain, in and of itself, a new identity. The antagonism could easily be enveloped within any of the other four: by withdrawing its temporal axis, it becomes plurality and immanence; seen as teleological and ontological descriptions of an artwork's morality, it represents the relationship between an artwork's interventional purpose and autonomous being; as inherent meaning and its erratic diffusion, it shows the correspondence between a text's structured closure and its infinitely open contingency; finally, its organisation of logical centres and decentred logics can be mapped across the border between spatialised postmodernism and modernist temporal subjectivity. Despite this, it does not unite them; they differ markedly. Like the phenomena it describes, it is an excess that becomes the retroactive genesis of the other four: a kernel of their origin produced right at the end of the process, like an acorn from an oak. Previous discussions should have prepared us to not be surprised by this. Indeed, it makes sense: contingency produces its own structures, causalities and forms of time.

Atmosphere and integrality is a phenomenon which can be seen in many unrelated domains. I will allude to three by way of introduction: cosmology, economics and literature. Beginning with the first of these, we may recognise the dialectic in Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow's (2011, 227) interpretation of the big bang. They write that

because gravity shapes space and time, it allows spacetime to be locally stable but globally unstable. On the scale of the entire universe, the positive energy of the matter *can* be balanced by the negative gravitation energy, and so there is no restriction on the creation of whole universes. Because there is a law like gravity, the universe can and will create itself out of nothing...Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist. It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going.

This is a description of the model of atmosphere and integrality, which I define as follows:

*an initial event leverages or "bets on," a temporally third (but causally second) event to create a temporally second (but causally third) event.*

Such is the structure of Keynesian economics, which holds that you can paradoxically create growth through debt by using the borrowed capital to generate stimulus via “countercyclical fiscal policies...[such as] deficit spending on labour-intensive infrastructure projects to stimulate employment and stabilise wages during economic downturns” (Jahan, Mahmud and Papageorgiou 2014). As with the universe, the relation between the first, second and third events in the two strata is the same — a knot in the threads of causal and temporal trajectories. In literature, this can be witnessed, too: in the phenomenal experience of reading Marcel Proust’s (2003) *In Search of Lost Time*. There are frequent moments of narrative drive when the Rosicrucian detail of the language creates a disconnect with the mental image it produces. The effect of this is one of reading the words *after* you have seen the thing that they describe in your mind’s eye. Causality and temporality are unwoven in an encounter where the (perceived) effect is in fact the cause, and vice versa.

As a primary theme of the cycle’s last opera, it is clear why this might be understood as the methodology’s final dialectic. But why the first? A justification for this can be given in a Lacanian reading of the music of Michael Finnissy, who in the development of a tradition of lyrical complexity has had considerable influence on fashion-opera’s strategies. Finnissy is a composer who denies the possibility of an original, integral heart to composition, arguing, “how can you have an original idea in something as socially determined as music? All the notes have been used before, so at best you can deceive yourself that you are starting from scratch, but you never are” (in an interview with Fox and Pace 1997, 2-3). Such comments are indicative of the postmodern turn whereby the world becomes a pre-given Symbolic expanse of what Lacan refers to as the big Other, the system of signification which speaks through us (Homer 2005, 44-45): as Lacan (1977, 207) insists, “a signifier is that which represents a subject for another signifier.” What is compelling about Finnissy’s compositional approach is how originality is seen to emerge through an intersection between the composing subject and the trans-subjectivity of the compositional process, in that it is the product of a historically determined tradition of Symbolic discourse. Though the big Other of the Symbolic may be a “radical [anteriority] which mediates our intersubjective relationships” (Evans 1996, 202), the possibility of their mediation and construction points the way through and out of that confining interiority. Thus Olivier (2005, 145-146) holds that the only way to avoid entrapment within the Imaginary’s illusion is actually through a renunciation of the possibility of any homegrown originality: by adopting the subjective position of the Symbolic register rather than the alienating ego-position of the Imaginary. For Finnissy, this means that, while we cannot imagine a musical idea without it being in some way interpellated through the social determination of the big Other of the Symbolic order, we are able to go beyond the confines of our determined subjectivity by enlisting the Symbolic: i.e., for composers, the processes which extend beyond the limits of our



socially determined imaginative and Imaginary abilities. The external periphery has become the causal origin.<sup>114</sup>

This is realised in Finnissy's use of a notation which contains the negation of its own constrictive tendencies. That is, Finnissy's notational language which, though inherited rather than devised, and determined by systemic means realised through a traditional, determined language, still, in its demands upon the performer, effects a process which reaches beyond Symbolisation. As Roger Redgate (2018) observes, Finnissy's (1995, 31, 67-73, 100-109) *Verdi Transcriptions* deliberately "blurs precision" through, for instance, long complex irrationals interwoven with grace notes, or lines of graces notes, and complex rhythms which reach across the full length of the keyboard: such a notation produces the chaotic effects with which its constrictive dictates are transcended. Crucially, this is accomplished through those constrictions rather than in their evasion in a vague experimentalism. If anything can be said to define New Complexity it would be this particular concern with leveraging notation against itself to open up individual insight within a world of nigh-total determination.<sup>115</sup> Here, then, is the heritage of the contingent subject's destruction of the fiction model: realised through a dialectic between internal and external strategies of creation — a form of *atmosphere and integrality*.

This dialectic, the hidden origin of the other four, is also their dissolution. For this names, and ultimately bars, an unconscious prejudice of my original proposal's understanding of the dialectics: that is to say, by seeing them as *foundational, inherent, and characteristic*, I succumbed to a modernist prejudice of monadic interiority, of *integrality*. Rather, we should apprehend the other four according to the logic of the fifth: that is — also — as an effect which becomes the cause, rather than — alone — the limiting, conservative notion of a meaning to be locked in an artwork and preserved (though, of course, it is this, too). Embracing this concept has vastly improved their

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<sup>114</sup> In order to fully appreciate the significance of this turn we can compare Finnissy's approach with that of his forbear Busoni. In his trailblazing work *A sketch of a new esthetic of music*, Busoni (1962, 85) presents the unity of the musical idea as the Real of the late Romantic aesthetic. The composer's imagination is seen to be the Romantic locus of authentic, pre-Symbolic insight which is necessarily qualified through its inscription into the Symbolic order. Notation, on the other hand, is presented as the transformative filtration of that individual unity into a determined textuality. Busoni (84) avers that such a unity can only be restored through the insight of the performer into the extra-notational concerns which the work must still contain. This foregrounds a theory whereby creative, living processes become paradoxically dependent upon their objectification into a notational document, with the Romantic individual forming the cypher between truth (the inspiration) and knowledge (its inscription). Finnissy intervenes in Busoni's procedure to replace individual imagination with canonical memory as a means of acquiring this same insight into the extra-Symbolic. Busoni's anxieties regarding the restrictive conditionality of transcription here become the location of a post-Structural attempt at originality through an inversion of the original formula.

<sup>115</sup> Historicising this allows us to see an important transition here: the location of emancipatory power moves from the individual composer as Romantic artist to the canonical material as found object; and from the individual performer to the score-text itself.

methodological use. To name but a few: the retroactive naming of structure and contingency by Smith;<sup>116</sup> the logic of the brand implicit in fashion constituting — which I certainly never would have expected — a revolutionary mechanism; the compositional accident as containing its own strategy of meaning; even finding the logic of infinity in venues. In all these ways, the dialectic functions as a vessel, a ship for traversing spacetime through the unwinding of causal and temporal logics.

## **8.2 RUNE**

And it was this that formed the story of *RUNE*:

*On a planet where history is forbidden, a young girl dares to tell her story. A voyage across galaxies and millennia, hers is a tale of the archipelagos of Khye-rell and their matterwork — the ancient spellsong that bends space to the singer’s will — through transdimensional canals and sea-lanes to the RUNE of the universe’s origin, before coming to a reckoning with the ancient, disastrous fate of humanity. As she pieces together the events of her life’s journey, links between these three impossibly separate events begin to emerge: the basic data of the infant universe, technological hubris in the face of ecological collapse, and her experience of traumatic familial violence — all marked by traces of the RUNE.*

*RUNE* engages its thematic content in its narrative through the hypothesis that, in the moments following the big bang, the universe passed through a subatomic state and that here the arbitrary fluctuations of quantum data imprinted upon it: like a rune. It is appropriate that the “suturing” act between the irreconcilable realities of quantum and Newtonian physics takes the form of such a mark. For, as the universe expanded, this printed, frozen fluctuation became the inconstancies in the emptiness of cold space, which in turn became matter, galaxies, life, thought, language (Tegmark 2014). The most important formal consequence of this is the separation of temporality and causality: where, as we saw in the previous examples from cosmology, economics, and literature, *an initial event leverages or “bets on,” a temporally third (but causally second) event to create a temporally second (but causally third) event.* This formula can be applied across the compositional process, and affects everything from dramatic structure to the generation and handling of musical material, as well as organising key concepts. These include: the originary centre’s retroactive creation by its periphery; temporal disjunction via the material/phenomenological split; and the affect of Proustian “epic intimacy.”

Such ideas coalesce in the libretto’s compositional techniques, the most crucial being that of *subtracted lore*. The term refers to the use of an excess of extra-textual processes which create effects in the poetic work. This procedure involved building the history of the entire universe of the opera, starting at the big bang, going to our own present time, through to the A.I. singularity/

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<sup>116</sup> See footnote 99.

internet of things (which, in the narrative, creates a time-loop with the universe's origin), on to our impending ecological collapse, onward, to the imaginary establishment of a web of worlds throughout the universe, one of which was Khye-Rell, and then, in turn, the history of this planet before humanity arrived there, and the subsequent society it creates. These include cultural histories of other beings, for instance: the Vor, Khye-rell's ancient, extinct "wilderdragon" culture; the post-Anthropocene machine civilisation of Earth; and the transdimensional *MA* (and their descendants). There is deliberately no direct exposition of this. Rather it manifests itself within the work in the same way that truth emerges within the limits of knowledge, and that external reality collapses into consensus reality. In this way, the "history" appears in the libretto as archaeological remnants and remainders. For example, the significance of the social norms and rituals regarding the use of the knife and the *matterwork* on Khye-rell.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, the only references to the Vor are in the (literal) artefacts Kes recounts discovering during her time as a scavenger: "a toothbrush, like a sandpaper wedge, riddled with tusk-marks and grooves. Fossilised sextons. Trails of paraphernalia from ball-based games."<sup>118</sup> Note that how, in their explication, subjective histories (such as that of Kes) function like their cosmological and social counterparts, revealing themselves in broken intensities rather than encyclopaedic finalisations.

The extra-terrestrial languages that appear in the work operate within this domain.<sup>119</sup> These foreground the discussion of language and its materiality in the opera, and in turn, questions of temporality and the aesthetic object as a world. Further to this, it draws attention to the otherworldliness of English, and in doing so blurs fiction and history, levels of "reality" — between, for instance, "Ar'shall'vee," and "Solomon's copper throne." Often, the English is pushed into either its own mythic registers,<sup>120</sup> an impossible density of information,<sup>121</sup> or at times even just pure sound ("bubbled water like roll boiled pots a blue pall").<sup>122</sup> This effects a change in perspective as

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<sup>117</sup> See *RUNE*: track 2 "The thing is, I don't feel any older" on the album; page 16-46 in the score.

<sup>118</sup> See *RUNE*: track 10 "In the beginning..." 1.39-2.32 on the album; page 147-150 in the score.

<sup>119</sup> I had also started to create a language for Khye-Rell, but time constraints meant I had to content myself with basic names. To give, as a way of example, a quick explanation of The VAL'NAK'SHA: as the youngest of the three transdimensional beings, it's not disrespectful to render their name in the polite form of a regular Khye-rellian name — which is this three-part construction, i.e. Kes'Cha'Au. A comparison might be the difference between "God" and "Jesus of Nazareth." Otherwise, they work similarly to many human names: Kes'Cha'Au (of the...) — polite; Kes'Cha — affectionate and intimate or very impolite; Kes — mythic or conversational i.e. Kes, come over here, or *The Song of Kes*.

<sup>120</sup> See *RUNE*: track 1 "O..."; page 6-15 in the score.

<sup>121</sup> See *RUNE*: track 8 "I clasp it. It is like touching a water-damaged page" 3.09-5.51 on the album; page 118-130 in the score; and track 11 "Transdimensional Canal II" on the album; page 158-178 in the score.

<sup>122</sup> See *RUNE*: page 155-156, bar 1273-1275.

though it were Khye-Rell that was home, and terrestrial English was the fiction: a redrawing of cause and effect between the audience's centre in the most literal sense (their position in the universe i.e. on Earth) and the periphery of imagined, non-existent planets. This is emphasised by a related strategy whereby the strangest settings become the most familiar ones; as in the "transdimensional canals," where memory, dream and reality are superimposed — something we have all experienced when reading a book, or staring out of the window on a train. In all of this, the alien language (and everything it implies) becomes less dependent on our knowledge of it.

These ideas imply two key points.

First, I argue, again, that it is through such methods that an aesthetic totality is achieved. Like the structure that emerges from contingency, or logic from alienation, the unknown (different, of course from the nonexistent) offers a being that is unreconciled into the dominant order of things — like stelae marked with Pictish ideograms, cave paintings, Sapphic fragments, the songs of whales. By rejecting the notion of perceivability, the dialectic of atmosphere and integrality allows us to surpass the limits of knowledge, and capture the infinite power of truth.

Second, such a procedure manifests the work's thematic dialectic. In the absence of the centre that is this multi-world, universe-long historical narrative, the audience encounters only its "traces of passage." The centre's absence establishes a peripheral effect which becomes the causal antecedent (temporal consequent) to the centre's causal consequent (temporal antecedent): the integral appears through inductive apprehensions derived from its atmosphere. The logical and temporal trajectories become wound and knotted.

Needless to say, this operation is related to *plurality and immanence*; but it also concerns *structure and contingency*, in that it demonstrates how each stage of the process of the work's realisation becomes absolutely separate and hierarchically equal, from conception to material, structure, composition, rehearsal, performance, manifestation in society, and so on. The creation of a world is almost entirely divested during the act of composition, as the strategies of both stages are infinite: absolute and fundamental. In this way, it represents also a poetic development of the tradition of Modernism and New Complexity, where the realisation of material is often markedly different from the layers of structure from which it emerges.

Compositionally, *RUNE* continues to use the cycle's methodology as demonstrated in the analysis of *ROBE* to create ontological contradictions in the work. It has a few key differences from its predecessor in that, where *ROBE* develops plurality from immanence (at a pre-compositional level) *RUNE* uses its thematic strategies to show the retrograde of this: integrality from atmosphere. Similarly, while *ROBE* portions out its mutually exclusive strategies at the structural stage before combining them in composition, *RUNE* uses the unrelated, arbitrary, abstract data of various

compositional techniques, and develops them according to processes that intermingle through shared strategies and lines of relation. This is to collapse any notion of centrality in the structure, even in the structure's procedures for organising content (as well as that content itself).

*RUNE* assembles its material thus.

First, it takes, like *WOAD*, all of the all-interval chords that contain a kernel: here, the sequence "567" (in a reduction of *ROBE*'s mirror chords). This gives eight identities across 50 variations. Second, it takes all all-interval rows with a tonal polychord at their edge. This gives 34 polychords over 114 variations (with one half of these forming the serial inversion of the other half). Alongside this, it takes all inversions of major and minor tonal triads possible; these are then Boulezian-multiplied against one another to produce a series of chords. Similarly, it takes all the interval combinations that are possible (between 6 and 11, so *all* intervals if we are to read inversions as identical) and then arranges them according to a structure that minimises repetition; these, too, are treated by Boulezian multiplication to create a pitch-domain matrix. All these strategies are, therefore, not linked by content (which is, here, ultimately, *content without content* — the arbitrary data of mutually exclusive compositional ideologies separated out: triads; intervals; rows) but by the nature of the processes that organise that (absence of) content — which form lines of relation. In some ways it is an inversion of *ROBE*; the content is mutually exclusive while the processes reciprocally contain one another.

Such changes of perspective occur similarly at a compositional level. For example, the use of triads in "The Song of Anger" obscures their origin — what they are — and they come to be perceived as texture and the effects of gesture (or its lack);<sup>123</sup> this occurs in the piano writing in the scene that follows, this time with rhythm rather than pitch in the dissolution of the poly-isorhythm through the extended technique.<sup>124</sup> As with the rest of the cycle, *RUNE* uses negatives and remnants of pitch. In the first scene,<sup>125</sup> for instance, the material often generates intervallically-defined fragments, which then go on to create random "negatives" through their remnants. Similarly, the polychordally-edged all-interval chords in the second act<sup>126</sup> have their constituent parts split across the ensemble to create different streams of perceivable units, either separate (as tonal units, or fragmentary negatives), or combined (as total-chromatic statements), thus incorporating the possibility of multiple perspectives within its musical framework, as did *ROBE*.

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<sup>123</sup> See *RUNE*: track 5 "The Song of Anger" on the album; page 84-85 in the score.

<sup>124</sup> See *RUNE*: track 6 "Transdimensional Canal I" on the album; page 86-93 in the score.

<sup>125</sup> See *RUNE*: track 2 "The thing is, I don't feel any older..." on the album; page 16-46 in the score.

<sup>126</sup> See *RUNE*: track 7 "Man made earth, made furrows in the earth" and 8 "I clasp it. It is like touching a water-damaged page" on the album; page 94-114 in the score.

However, here, the wholly separate, unrelated groups of material at the structural level (and their mutually exclusive approaches to music) are, through dissolution and combination (in both structure and composition), used to effect the sense of a suspended centre.

In keeping with the opera's theme regarding the originary moment at which the quantum and Newtonian worlds were one, the work imprints the venue of the Round Chapel upon the mutually exclusive logic of the score. To realise this, it apprehends its space and reverberatory potential in a technique that sees the remnants — traces — of sound in the space as causal organisers. This occurs in the second act,<sup>127</sup> where the reverb, rather than the note itself, becomes the causal structural element, though temporally it follows rather than precedes its counterpart. This is achieved through the three pianos working together to enunciate these aforementioned polychordally-edged all-interval rows (the divisions and overlaps of which can be seen in the pedal markings) in broken, non-gestural language; the idea is that the effect of the sound combines only in space above — in its reverberation from the walls — rather than from the instruments themselves.

The implications of atmosphere and integrality also organise the opera's rhythmic (and formal) construction. The piece employs throughout an isorhythm of 312, the data of which similarly designates much of the work's gesture (in rotations of High, Low and Middle). In the first scene,<sup>128</sup> a simple configuration of this is enunciated by the soprano, with occasional rhythmic variations; this is then spread across the pianos in tuplets of increasing size: 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, 17;<sup>129</sup> and uses the same formula to both remove notes and sections, and so govern the points of its emergence (as well as the polyphonic interplay between instruments). Though in fact an obsessive, repetitive structure, the phenomenal encounter with the work is, as described by Opera Magazine, one of "white-hot improvisation" (Reed 2021); such a result is striking given the presence of the original, central, isorhythmic line in the soprano — both the dramatic and textural foreground — and that this becomes secondary to these remainders, these "traces of passage" — this *atmosphere* — by which the work is apprehended. The integral, originary minimalist mark is made absent by its effects, through which it must be inductively derived.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Again, see *RUNE*: track 7 "Man made earth, made furrows in the earth" and 8 "I clasp it. It is like touching a water-damaged page" on the album; page 94-114 in the score.

<sup>128</sup> Again, see *RUNE*: track 2 "The thing is, I don't feel any older..." on the album; page 16-46 in the score.

<sup>129</sup> There is a nod here to Elliott Carter's portrayal of instruments as characters (Schiff 1998, 88-89) as in *String Quartet No. 4* (Carter 1986) — here intensified into actual named Characters).

<sup>130</sup> Research into this continued in the composition of the supplementary work *Music Against* —. See appendix 2.6.

Perhaps *RUNE*'s most potent example of this occurs right at its end. This involves questions of interpretation and creation — fundamental to the cycle and its methodology — which here manifest as a potential reading that is included in the work's narrative, only to be subtracted (in line with the previously explored technique). This is so that, as the methodology necessitates, the opera may still permit and contain a plurality of perspectives via the breaks and spaces that it preserves within its structure. However, three “atmospheric” traces of it remain, through which, like clues, its absence can be filled in its induction (as one of many possible alternative creations of meaning by participants).

The first clue is given during the epilogue in the opera's final moments,<sup>131</sup> when Kes declares,

*Here is another.  
It is the song of my father, my brothers  
as they call out from the citadel, filling my sails with song.*

*It is the song of my people,  
hear how they call out in the darkness!*

*At the bottom of everything is just things happening —  
yet look how the sails fill with their sound —*

The second regards the delineation between Kes' lines and the lines of the other characters. One might notice that throughout these are not quite split neatly between the soprano and the mezzo-soprano (and perhaps, also, that the new font at the end references intrusive text-styles that appeared earlier in the libretto, and that its language corresponds to the speech-like rhythm of the pianists' playing the pianos with their faces).

The third concerns the ambiguous name given to the mezzo-soprano, which is that of Kes' planet, Khye-Rell.

Together, these imply a reading that the opera itself is as much a dramatisation of the story as it is a dramatisation of the telling of the story, which, included in the primary dramatic narrative, has a direct effect upon this. That is, *RUNE* can be seen as the song sung by Kes and her people (including her family, her father, her brothers), who sing out to her across the universe, “filling her sails with sound” and in this, together, they create the possibility of a new future, or the possibility

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<sup>131</sup> See *RUNE*: track 12 “The Song of the Rune” on the album; page 180-181 of the score.

*for history to begin*<sup>132</sup> as Kes, in this song, with her people, drowns out, perhaps, or crashes into (it is left deliberately untold) or unmakes the legacy of the *MA*, the *VA* and the *VAL'NAK'SHA* — with the singing of both the *RUNE* and *RUNE*. Or does she? When, returning to the beginning (passing, perhaps from the story, to its telling) they too have been constituent elements of the song and its singing? This poses, again, the question: how do we break free from the drab causality within the limits of the possible? How do we create the potential for something never before imagined — particularly at *this* moment when everything seems hopeless — as the world *literally burns* — a revolutionary moment — now, it needs to happen now — where everything is remade? To enact the fact that *everything is always possible*. But how? It leaves it deliberately without didactic answer, apart from the idea that, beyond ourselves, where we are something else entirely, we are never alone.

Thus the work forms a superposition of the work and its interpretation; this, in turn, is subtracted from the work so it may enter into a superposition with the audience's interpretation: which, must necessarily, like Kes, surrounded by the song of her people, if still divided by whole worlds, galaxies, dimensions — be realised through alienated, divided community: mutually exclusive perspectives reciprocally contained by one another through the agent that they form: the contingent subject.

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<sup>132</sup> “Only in communist society, when the resistance of the capitalists have disappeared, when there are no classes (i.e., when there is no distinction between the members of society as regards their relation to the social means of production), only then "the state... ceases to exist", and "it becomes possible to speak of freedom.” Only then will a truly complete democracy become possible and be realised, a democracy without any exceptions whatever. And only then will democracy begin to wither away, owing to the simple fact that, freed from capitalist slavery, from the untold horrors, savagery, absurdities, and infamies of capitalist exploitation, people will gradually become accustomed to observing the elementary rules of social intercourse that have been known for centuries and repeated for thousands of years in all copy-book maxims. They will become accustomed to observing them without force, without coercion, without subordination, without the special apparatus for coercion called the state” (Lenin 1918, 62, quoting Engels 1972, 44).



## **9. CONCLUSION: EVERYTHING IS ALWAYS POSSIBLE**

It is hoped that, taken together, the collisions of these strategies — of fashion, music, poetry, dance, philosophy, performance practice, sculpture, politics, typography, and so on — through their logic and contradiction, structure and chaos, presence and absence, singularity and multiplicity, create a paradox that rivals the truth of our world; that, in doing so, they may overcome the horror and control of that world's present structures, to allow a space whereby utopia still, or even now, can be imagined to exist. Art's relationship to the present is identical to that of the future: the space that this future traverses is both contained and excluded by the structures of our own time. It is in their negativity, their defeat, their disproving, their un-imagining — that it becomes immediately and significantly real.

Of course, it could well be asked: as capital drives us inexorably towards nothing less than apocalypse, what sense is there in imagining such potential? Recent history is littered with laughable predictions regarding the significance of technology. Why should quantum 2.0 be any different? First, as every fortune-teller knows, to predict the future is to create it. The act of naming gives materiality even to the nonexistent. Cynicism is nothing more than the policeman of the limit, and in the old proverb where “we plan, God laughs,” the nature of his joy is not made clear. It is praxis enough to say: this will happen. Second, all limits are imaginary, even the end of the world. At any moment we decide, we can dream something different: a society without the madness and greed of endless accumulation, or the horror of its abattoirs. We imagined this, and we can un- imagine it: all we have to do is speak the words. In everything — from the dance of quanta to the roll of the dice, from the devastation of accidents, or love-at-first-sight, to the whirligig of history and its everyday revolutions — we are reminded that: even tomorrow, the world could change utterly, into a beautiful, wonderful thing for all.

But let's, for a moment, be honest. All of this — it passes in the theatre like fluorescence upon a river, shimmering colours caught and held by something else entirely; something of which its movement, substance and fundamental realness are wholly unconcerned with — even opposed to — the immaterial dance of flickering signs, claims and promises. Logic and knowledge may preserve them; but their value emerges only from the water upon which they — almost accidentally, the anticipation of which is inconceivable — fall. For theatre is a rush of chaos, a flow of ever-changing perspectives that fill art's structures with the richness of fear, love, memory and dream, and so transform their rigidity and abstraction into nothing less than the world itself. This transformation is brutal, all-encompassing and, quite frankly, the point. So, while it is held that the formal constructions, philosophical flights of fancy, and poetic excesses are all vital to the reclamation of our subjectivity against a historical moment of drudgery and apocalypse, we must assert that *it is only through the possibility of that very subjectivity that they exist at all*. Ultimately, all they do is

reflect upon the surface of the miracle of emergent community: of frothing universes coexisting, stacked within one another like tides within a river, separate as the tips of its waves. And perhaps it is only in that separation, that negativity, that potent darkness — in both the subjects and objects of the aesthetic exchange — that the potential for meaning exists. Ultimately, this is where we exist, where the work takes place: in the spaces between each other.

This, the contingent subject, has been glimpsed throughout history; perhaps nowhere more powerfully than in the concluding cantos of Dante's (2007) *Divine Comedy*, when the poet — made speechless by Beatrice's beauty — is led before heaven's rose.

*This light became a circle in its form,  
 extending its circumference so far  
 as might a belt too generous round the sun.  
 All that appears is made there by a ray  
 reflected from the curve of that First Sphere  
 which draws its life and movings from that light.  
 It is as though the incline of some hill  
 were mirrored in a lake below, as if  
 to view itself adorned in flower and richest green.  
 Above that light, and standing round, I saw  
 a thousand tiers or more as mirrorings  
 of those of ours who've now returned up there.  
 Imagine, when the least of all these grades  
 could gather to itself so great a light,  
 how great the wealth is at the rose's fringe.  
 My eyes, despite such breadth and altitude,  
 were not confused or blurred but too all in —  
 the kind and sum of this light-heartedness.  
 Nothing's gained here or lost by 'near' and 'far.'  
 For where God rules without some means between,  
 the law of nature bears no weight at all.  
 Into the gold of that now-always rose,  
 which grows from arc to arc, dilates and breathes  
 the scent of praise to always-springtime Sun,  
 she drew me —*

Our destination should be nothing less than this, where *the law of nature bears no weight*. This means letting go of our selfhood — and, equally, its disempowering renunciations — in a surge of futures and utopias, in the optimism of a community where our imposed individualities combine, like this, the white rose of heaven, in the technologies of artworks. Where we reject imposed fiction to become the world and its future. Here, in *the sum of this light-heartedness* is where we shall be free — that is, beside one another. Each night, in those gulfs of cold space between the chairs of the auditorium — through the agency of something that none of us may ever understand — a beautiful new creature grows; its knowledge set to make the limiting prescriptions of polemics such as this one petulant and quaint.

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### **10.3 PORTFOLIO**

#### **CORE**

The Fashion-Opera Cycle

I. WEAR

II. ROBE

III. WOAD

IV. RUNE

#### **SUPPLEMENTARY**

*A Boat in an Endless Blue Sea*

*Hareflight*

*Music Against —*

*The Drowning Shore;*

*The Snake That Eats The World*

**WORK**

## **11. APPENDICES**

### **11.1 APPENDIX 1 ANALYTICAL EXAMPLES**

Fig. 2.

[A\*] 14235 6 e8t97

Polychord  
D#ma / B mi

Total Chord  
Negative Chord

Example of Negative chord  
turning into intervallically-defined Carterian row:  
14414 6 14414

Piano

D# Maj A maj 7 B min

C# Maj 7

Example: [A\*] Inversion

F#ma / D mi

D min F# Maj

Domain Tetrachords for 'Negative' Addition and Melody Matrixes:

18 121 222 212 323 515 656 838 828 919 727 616 424

Piano

Inverted, and pairs of intervals separated (also for Matrixes):

23 494 4t4 3e3 5t5 6e6 e7e e9e ttt tet 9t9 7t7 6t6

Fig. 3.

2

[A1\*] 53241 6 79t8e

Polychord  
F min / A Maj

Total Chord  
Negative chord

[A1\*] 8e88e 6 e88e8

Piano

D# Maj 7 A Maj

F min

Example: [A1\*] Inversion

C Maj G# min

Domain Tetrachords for 'Negative' Addition and Melody Matrixes:

42 323 212 222 131 151 616 727 919 828 838 656 515

Piano

Inverted, and pairs of intervals separated (also for Matrixes):

47 5t5 3e3 4t4 494 676 7e7 9t9 tet ttt e9e e7e 6e6



Fig. 4.

Etc:

3

Without Sevenths

[A] 14325 6 7e98e [A] 2 - 5 - 6 - 5 - 2 - 5 - 2 - 6 - 2 - 5 - 6

50 Pno. C# Maj (7) D#5 A5 G Maj (7) Negative chord

Without Sevenths

[A1] 52341 6 e89t7 [A1] 7 - t - 6 - t - 7 - t - t - 6 - t - 7 - 6

58 Pno. G min (7) C# min (7) Negative chord

Without Sevenths

[B\*] 4,3,1,2,5,6,8,9,11,10,7 [B\*] 2 - 3 - 2 - 2 - 3 - 3 - 3 - 2 - 3 - 2 - 3

66 Pno. D min C Maj A# Maj 7 Negative chord

Without Sevenths

[B1\*] 5,2,1,3,4,6,7,10,11,9,8 [B\*1] 45455 454555

74 Pno. G# min F# Maj Negative chord

Fig. 5.

4

[B] 4,1,3,5,2,6,10,7,9,11,8 [B] 6 - 3 - 6 - 1 - 6 - 1 - 3 - 1 - 6 - 1 - 3

82 Pno. G Maj C# Maj Negative chord

Inversion:

90 Pno. E min A# min

Domain Tetrachords for 'Positive' Multiplication, Addition and Melody Matrixes:

98 131 121 323 232 262 646 737 727 929 838 626 424

103 494 3t3 5t5 595 868 t8t t9t 9t9 etc e9e 8t8 6t6

Fig. 6.

106 [B1] 2,5,3,1,4,6,8,11,9,7,10 [B1] 6 - 4 - 6 - 3 - 6 - 4 - 6 - 4 - 3 - 6 - 3 5

Example: [B1] Inversion

114

Domain Tetrachords for 'Negative' Addition and Melody Matrixes:

122 232 323 121 131 424 626 838 929 727 737 646 242

Inverted, and pairs of intervals separated (also for Matrixes):

127 595 515 313 494 616 818 919 etc etc 919 t8t 18t 686

Fig. 7.

[B] Melody Matrix (Extract)

6

130 131 121

132 323 232

134 262

135 646

136 737

137 727

Etc.

## **11.2 APPENDIX 2: ON THE SUPPLEMENTARY WORKS**

### **1. A Boat In An Endless Blue Sea**

The methodology described in chapter 3 can be shown at work in an altogether different environment in this piece. Here the notion of separate, mutually exclusive totalities that nevertheless contain one another was employed in a pedagogical setting: to imagine new strategies of learning and creation during the first COVID lockdown in the spring of 2020. At this time, it was no longer possible to create live work, and the possibilities available in the classroom had been drastically reduced. I was commissioned to create an opera with Rathfern Primary School and, rather than translating traditional performance online, tried to see this as an opportunity to reimagine the form. I thus leaned into the separation and alienation that was the material basis caused by the pandemic: this necessitated participants being separate and apart — linked digitally through videocall, projection and isolated recording. From this, new forms of relationship and community emerged: a plurality of experimental theatre, graphic scores, film installation, and poetry, combined together *through* their difference and exclusivity — both aesthetic and physical. The literal separation of the composer/teacher from the participant/pupil became a processually formal realisation of the methodology's claims, with positive results for: the documentation of an often over-looked perspective (the child's) of the pandemic; pedagogical outcomes regarding the enabling of creativity and musical ability; and the production of an original form of experimental documentary.

### **2. WORK**

*WORK* was created as an experiment to determine the smallest indivisible form of “fashion-opera” using aspects of the methodology, including a contingent theatrical element. It is useful here in how it shows linearity emerge from (and through) its non-linearity: in that the material's encounter with the divisions that furrow through it shape and mould the music into units, then lumps, and finally lines of meaning; and, in doing so, the work's identity is paradoxically dissolved.

The first section (page 5) is marked by cuts and spaces. Each block is characterised by a temporal organisation that is subdivided by various other processes: a series of arbitrary divisions generating spatialised time. These are created by rotating the prime number series on top of itself: triplets are assigned to one beat divisions; quintuplets to two beat divisions; septuplets to three beat divisions. Similarly, the blocks proceed by developing this logic; thus, we have the bars' subdivisions as: 1, 1, etc, 1+1; 2+1, 3 1+2; 3+2 2+3; 3+2, 5, 2+3; 3+5, 8, 5+3. Silences and pauses cut material and gesture until this dissolves into peak spatialisation without sequence or direction (page 6; bar 19-37); we are presented with shards of material that the performer is free to re-assemble in any way they see fit. As will be affirmed in chapter seven, this is not a form of

democratic freedom, but rather the ultimate expression of late capitalist disorientation — functioning here within the work’s structure as a point of crisis.

The music is further divided via the score’s dramatic element, the relationship of which is semi-arbitrary. For this, the cellist is instructed to use two different restrictive gestures that work often against the material; over the course of the first section, this begins to align with the music, before being subsumed into the piece.

The pitch material across the work constitutes the simple, gradual unfurling of an all-interval row, 1,2,4,7,3,6,e,t,8,5,9: from its closed, un-stated form into a full articulation at the end. This is presented at the beginning of the score in its closed form across a very simple gesture: up, then down. Over the first section (page 5), this gradually becomes wilder and more complex as it opens out in a development that runs counter to the work of the furrows and divisions’ creation of spatialised blocks.

The second section (page 6) contains such reassembly within the notated music itself, with the row often separating into constituent elements like intervallically-defined characters or athematic subjects; these begin to combine and stretch into longer phrases before breaking off in a climactic crisis point. The third section (page 7) sees the previous pitch material developed further into a single long line that transforms its identity — now skirting tonal centres and traditional figures, all of which are, however, derived from the previous material rather than such systems. The line’s freedom from spatialisation, realised through linear development, dissolves its previous distinctiveness into a tendency towards similitude. The reclamation of temporality neutralises identity.

From here, the line is reduced back into the basic material of the all-interval chord in vertical dyads, before they reduce in turn into a statement of the unfurled row itself (page 8).

### **3. *Hareflight*.**

*Hareflight* is an opera about the relationship between truth and knowledge. It expands upon the structuralist tradition that informs my previous work, dramatising motion, light and even affect by invoking the mythical figure of the hare across five “lessons.” Through these, I propose an aesthetic of the only-just-vanished, the thought or dance that moves faster than its crystallisation into sentence or gesture. In doing so, the work proceeds from *The Discovery of the True Cross* by Tiepolo (1745), taking the painter’s radical apprehension of what the opera terms the “unbound bound,” a dialectic between the infinite and the apparent. This idea is unpacked through a musical language of developmental speed, interpretive complexity and contingent dialectics. Through this, it hopes to offer evidence of the imperceptible (or that which is beyond the listening individual’s apprehension) as a significant aesthetic force.

It uses this to deploy the power of the second law of contingency dialectics: i.e. through an object's reality, a (material) relation may be formed which allows an object to surpass that reality. In opposition to a dominant trend in British new music which wishes to sanitise collisions of meaning between opposing historical models,<sup>133</sup> *Hareflight* celebrates the dramatic potential of the irreconcilable, whether in: the co-existing yet mutually exclusive art forms of fashion, poetry, drama and music; compositional techniques and the philosophies of listening that they imply; or logical paradoxes in literary and musical syntax.

The opera's text draws influence from the earthy naturalism of works such as *The Owl and the Nightingale* (2001), Chaucer's (1912) *The Parlement of Foules*, Wu Ch'êng-ên's (1973) *Monkey*, Blake's (1994) *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and Kit Williams' (1979) *Masquerade*. It used this tradition to eschew traditional narrative altogether, consisting instead of a poetic and philosophical argument.

The performance featured garments by the designer Issey Miyake from the UU Studios archive. Made from pleated polyester hung in silhouettes that combine sculptural classicism with flowing, energetic weightlessness, Miyake's work is an ideal example of the "unbound bound." The performance exhibited these dresses hung from multicoloured helium balloons, the "choreography" of which, along with that of a dancer, formed a contingent relationship with the drama.

#### **4. *The Drowning Shore***

*The Drowning Shore* is a 14-minute cantata scored "for a mezzo-soprano in a screen" which incorporates Sholem Asch's (1918) *God of Vengeance*, and its contrasting themes of written holy Hebrew and everyday Yiddish vernacular, with an original Scots-English text. The piece was performed by Asch's great-great granddaughter Clara Kanter, and devised in conjunction with her and her father David Mazower (Asch's great-grandson). In this, I was interested in the idea of reading the present through the past, and the implications this holds for a work's construction. Alienated juxtaposition — whether of the past and future, or of musical traditions, or of poetic material — is instantly powerful. But, as posited in section 5.1 "The Logic of the Axis (Introduction)," it can have the effect of objectivising — spatialising — material, which becomes a series of mere stylistic fragments rather than meaningful argument. Indeed, the implications of filmic language in musical and poetic strategies, and in turn the effect of this upon the way that we think and reason, could be said to be the story of 20th-century art. So the challenge in this piece was to harness the technique of spatialisation — and its logics of the break, the infinite and the axis that its dialectic implies — without ending up in the same meaningless pluralism that much

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<sup>133</sup> For instance: microtonal infinity captured in the meanness of scales; talk of a 'reconciliation' between tonal and pantonal syntax; experimental techniques applied as baroque coating to inherited structures.

music falls into when attempting this. One way of doing this is problematising the binaries that are inherent in some of the themes of the work at a structural level: turning dichotomies into axes, or even constellations, clouds of meaning. Like the infinite complexity of the planet and its deafness to the dull, invisible lines we draw across it, art should transcend organisational principles of “this-and-that.” Another is by questioning Pavlovian (in Ferneyhough’s (1995, 23) use of the term) association of stylistic reference by challenging whether one is hearing: for instance, a historically-laden scale that corresponds to a thematic tradition, or a near-identical total chromatic pitch set derived from a vocal analysis of a reading of the libretto? Finally, by using negativity, utilising the parts of a musical object that are left out i.e. the pitches not played in establishing a theme, and then turning them into a consequent that is both random/juxtaposed but also integral. Fundamental to these strategies is the question: what is the experience of finding meaning in a screen, of living life according to this logic, something that is absolutely central to all of our lives. The logic of screens did not pop out of nowhere: it is the logic of late capitalism and its objectification of time. During the pandemic and its lockdowns, we had nowhere to hide from this. Even performance had become television, like the fulfilment of some kind of ancient doom. (A brief personal trajectory: watching *Robocop* (Verhoeven 1987) as a child; Harry Hill (2001) vanishing off the left of his screen and walking straight into *Eastenders*; then, that year, 2020, on a video call, the image warping as my fingers touched the glass of the laptop). Through video, I wanted to comment on the still, reflective beauty of live performance. Though of course, like the flower in the glass pane, or the undead masses summoned by cinema from long ago, it was no longer itself.

### **5. *The Snake That Eats The World***

Here, the excess of complexity requires an annotative intervention that extends to the graphic. Scored for solo flute, the work insists upon three parts that must be played simultaneously. Like Meillassoux’s dice, the only way for the solo performer to realise this is to grow six lungs, hands, and three lips — or draw a “snake” across the material that obscures and transforms it further: a contingent dialectic between notation and its desecration, structure and contingency. In this way, the score’s anti-human demands enter a superposition with the bodily finality of performance.

### **6. *Music Against* —**

In *Music Against* —, the dialectic of atmosphere and integrality is transferred to hierarchic level’s of the music’s compositional structure: between the events and their organisation. In doing so, the piece imagines negativity as *the adjacent* in the tradition of English Pastoral — Sherwood, Arden, Rooster’s trailer, Tom and Gerri’s tomato patch<sup>134</sup> — and its power to bring unity from chaos and

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<sup>134</sup> In reference respectively to the folk legend of Robin Hood and the pastoral comedies of Shakespeare’s (2022) *As You Like It*, Jez Butterworth’s (2009) *Jerusalem* and Mike Leigh’s (2010) *Another Year*.

nothing. That is, a cruel empire's pastoral unconscious, its lack, its in-existent — that which it does not count and is not counted — offers a method of construction outside the horrors of its dominant order. The piece thus demonstrates how a gestureless, flat space of effects, where global and minute compositional structures give rise to a pandemonium of separate instances, gradually reveals orientation: through lack of organisation at the phenomenal level. (Again, we are shown how contingency offers its own language of meaning). In this, the "centre" of musical experience — the musical events themselves — are absent, and it is their atmosphere, their global organisation that, though secondary in a temporal sense, becomes their causal determiner.