

An Exploratory Conversation with my Younger Self

I've wanted to write something like this for a while now. The original paper 'Defining a Language: Composing at the end of the Twentieth Century' was for the graduate seminar of the University of Western Australia music department. I spent 1999 there as an exchange student as I began my Masters of Music degree which I subsequently upgraded to a PhD upon my return to the Sydney Conservatorium of Music the following year. In truth, a long-distance relationship motivated the move to Perth, but very quickly, the mentorship of Roger Smalley became its own justification, and ironically, email correspondence with Bozidar Kos, my main influence up to that point, became more personal and open too.

At any rate, as a graduate student I was required to present a paper to the graduate seminar. Musicology lecturer David Symons (another mentor during my time in Perth) provided a brief for what would work, and the paper I now engage with was the result.

I think it's an interesting document for a number of reasons. It's a snap-shot of the times from the point of view of a developing practitioner and observer trying to find their way in a provisional and uncertain cultural landscape. For me, it's also a document of where I was at twenty years ago. The young man I encounter, my history and baggage clearly displayed, explain a lot about the travails of the recent past and the journey that has led to the where I am now as a person, itself a new point of departure.

I also hope it may be of interest to any emerging young composers who may stumble across it. Perhaps they may identify with the persona expressing itself in the original document, and find, perhaps, interest or inspiration or solace in the words of that same person twenty years later. I hope it may be of some use or interest; it certainly has been to me.

Throughout, black text is the original document, and green text is the commentary, the conversation with my younger self. Rather than hyperlink the URLs of various webpages and links, I've highlighted each in yellow. Simply copy and paste into your web browser and you'll be there! A full list of resources cited in both layers of text is included at the end of the document.

Brad Gill, locked down in a nice, clean, safe small room in Blacktown, 3 March, 2020

Defining a Language: Composing at the end of the Twentieth Century

Brief introduction about me, and talk

- I am from Sydney, where last year I completed a Bachelor of Music degree majoring in composition (etc. ...)
- Over here for the first year of a master's degree.
- David Symons asked that this talk – if it is to be about my music – be largely concerned with placing myself in a context (hence the title of this talk) and some discussion of my music and ideas in relation to concepts such as postmodernism.

[Type text]

It's so interesting. To know the limits of one's own thinking, to know our blind spots resulting from culturally parochial constructs and tastes, knowing our context is of course essential. I was being asked to position myself in the Australian contemporary context and define my approach in relation to prevailing discussions in currency in 1999: where did I stand in relation to postmodernism? By extension, where did my music dwell on the spectrum of tonality, accessibility? How could such a starting point for a discussion of my music but amplify a totally honest and authentic modernist affinity in a way that now reads more as a post-adolescent seeker grasping ideology for a secure identity.

And there is something to that observation. More sympathetically, the amplified hyper-critical tone and self-involved mindset is more truthfully an earnest effort at finding a home – intellectually, culturally, socially. Finding engagement, interest, challenge and acceptance. I'd come from four years of undergraduate study at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, and it is well documented that there was public and private tension both between the prominent composers and musicology staff of the University of Sydney music department and the Sydney Conservatorium of Music as well as within both schools. The conflict ranged from style (so-called new complexity opposed to more accessible approaches), teaching approaches and significantly, perceived Euro-centric models of thinking viewed as being in opposition to an effort to develop a genuinely Australian music. This of course entailed further, more truly ethical issues, particularly around the appropriation of Asian and Australian Indigenous material. I see many of these tensions still flowing beneath the surface.

These conflicts were real and the students, of which I was one, could not but become involved, and the environment could be genuinely toxic. It could also be truly affirming and positive, and I made professional friendships that survive to this day; it was always provisional. Acceptance or support by a group of more academically oriented mentors, such as Bozidar Kos and Richard Toop could mean social ostracising by others and their sympathisers, particularly if you were extremely socially awkward and introverted like me. For some, negotiating this social context was not a problem (or so it seemed to me, at any rate). But collectively these considerations left me feeling a total outsider, with total confidence in my compositional and music theory knowledge and ability, but largely shattered as a person. Interestingly, the mentors in the final two years of study, in particular Bozidar Kos and in hindsight Gillian Whitehead, Richard Toop and finally Roger Smalley, who I met around the time this original paper was presented, helped me grow into a path that I came to build, along with my now ex-wife. I'll not discuss that relationship further in this exploratory response to my earlier writing, except to say that it too, for a time, contributed to a confidence and clarity of musical direction, but ultimately that all changed.

I can see the seeds for the failure of balance creatively and as a person in a lot of the fixed views and identification of self-value with musical work underlying a lot of what is expressed in this paper. And there are so many things I might say if I could magically transmit them back to the 'me' of 1999. But of course, I'd be a different person now. And I like much of where I am now. So instead, I've decided I'd like to undertake the much more practical task of engaging with my earnest, idealistic younger self, engaging in a dialogue. Partly this is for my own benefit. I recently have begun a second doctorate, and reflection on my musical past is an important element of fully grasping where I am now, and how I came to be here.

I also like the integrity and earnestness I see in this paper. Looking past the clear stylistic modelling in how I write/speak (Carter, Goehr), much of the aspiration to expressing and discovering truth remains with me, as do many of the actual composition approaches. In a

[Type text]

sense then, I am also getting back in touch with the ‘inner younger Brad’. I think that’s a useful and interesting thing to do, and it also highlights the truth that we are processes, not things, and that even moment to moment, there is continuity but at the same time, we really are totally different people.

I also hope this exercise may be helpful for younger composers or musicians. It’s most interesting to gain perspective from someone who was once in a similar position and is later in life honestly and openly interrogating that position. If nothing else, it’s also an interesting document of a perspective on the Australian and international new music scene at a certain point of time, so long ago, it seems, given how much has changed.

Rather than expand on the initial bullet points, I have provided links to my official current biography, other writings mentioned in what follows, and project pages:

[<https://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/artist/gill-brad>]; [www.sideband.com.au];

[<https://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/article/mind-on-fire>];

[<https://www.chloechung.net/single-post/2019/08/03/In-conversation-with-Brad-Gill>];

[<http://www.sideband.com.au/zen-music-gill.html>]

Form of the talk:

- I will begin by playing a composition of mine (*Stones Growing*) [<https://soundcloud.com/dr-brad-the-bard/stones-growing>] – just to give the audience a sense of my music before I begin talking.

I consider *Stones Growing* to be my first real composition, and even now it has a special place for me. It so clearly evinces an authentic ‘voice’ even back then at the beginning; the opening piano chord and rising minor third is a transformation of the beginning of Bozidar Kos’ Violin Concerto, a wonderfully expressive and rich work. But my ‘version’ is at the same time totally itself. *Stones Growing* was the perfect choice to introduce me in a new context, as it not only was a beginning for me, but in it were/are seeds and material, approaches and ideas that still come up today, twenty years later. It also was my first Composer Performer Workshop (CPW) composition. This is a course run for undergraduate composers at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music (now much diminished). For any students doubting the value of that subject, this is one of five such CPW pieces that received multiple performances. One of them, ‘Crickets’ which soon followed *Stones Growing*, has been released on commercial CD.

Stones Growing was also a gateway into having the confidence to put difficult microtonal music before conservative performers, and convince them of its worth. Largely, this came from being totally prepared in every rehearsal, having alternate fingerings prepared, being able to sing the microtonal lines, and conduct and internally hear the music. A final thing to say is that the piece epitomises an approach I have adopted from the beginning of my efforts at composition: synthesising and personalising the various compositional techniques I was learning about in Compositional Techniques and Analysis class and music history, whilst reading and listening extensively and absorbing influences and concepts. This was supplemented by music I was exposed to as a percussionist.

[Type text]

I always found this type of process – learning; exploration; experimentation; genuine personal synthesis – completely natural. Many of the student cohort (then and in 2015, when I was still working at the Conservatorium) complained of being forced to write a certain way or with certain aesthetics being judged more highly. This was never a problem for me. Perhaps my recollections may temper the views of students who may read this now, feeling afflicted by exposure to music they don't connect with. The truth is that for most people in most societies, people are attracted to what they are familiar with. It's a deep evolutionary trait and for any authentic creativity and flow of novel ideas or access to 'truth' in art (or 'originality', whatever that is) it needs to be transcended. Learning and experimenting with a variety of techniques often stemming from alien music is just necessary. If you have a real 'voice', it will shine, regardless.

In this piece, the use of harmonic and subharmonic series is manipulated to create fixed register modes. But I combined them with personally constructed modes akin to Messiaen's, which were unrestricted in register and combined with the spectral material intuitively. Isorhythm is a key technique, as well as the extrapolated concepts of permutation and rotation. It's all couched in an effort to write a Zen-inspired work (again, another abiding interest) somehow combining the above technique-oriented processes to create a sound-world I genuinely loved and connected with. I could also have begun the original talk with my first orchestral piece, which I am listening to as I write this. It's audacious in many respects, two parts are missing and the audio quality is poor, but if you've read this far and are interested, please listen. Here is the link to *Piece for Orchestra*: <https://soundcloud.com/dr-brad-the-bard/piece-for-orchestra>

An interesting aside is that in writing this conversation with my younger self, I reviewed the section in my PhD in which I discuss these two works. I wrote that I considered them immature as explorations of Zen through music, slow and meditative but somehow shallow and superficial (this could have been written any time between 2000 and 2005 when the PhD was finally completed and submitted). Whereas I now see the approach as totally authentic.

- Secondly, I will discuss the current general composition 'scene', both in Australia and elsewhere. Issues touched upon will be modernism and postmodernism, complexity (or not), and I will include brief quotes from some other composers on these issues.
- Next, I will discuss my ideas about composition in general (and in general terms).
- Also discussed will be influences (playing perhaps a few brief excerpts, time permitting).
- Next I will examine specific pieces of my own in light of the above discussions of ideas about composition and influences. The pieces I intend to look at are: *Light, Snow, Suicide* [<https://soundcloud.com/dr-brad-the-bard/light-snow-suicide-live>] and *Undertow* [<https://soundcloud.com/dr-brad-the-bard/undertow>].

Undertow was my second commission, by Claire Edwards for a group she formed at the time. The recording linked in this paper is the second one which I really like, by members of Elision and conducted by Barry Webb. It was one of the pieces I wrote in my fourth and final honours year of undergraduate study at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. *Light, Snow, Suicide* is a solo piano work originally composed for my ex-wife Roxanne Della-Bosca. Despite the extreme technical challenges of the work, she premiered most of it and gave a nice performance. From recollection, it was performed by a prominent Australian pianist around the time of the original paper in 1999 (badly – it was thrown together in a week with

five other pieces, but to their credit, the performer didn't pull out). To my disappointment, I didn't withdraw the piece from the concert. I was caught up in the reputational lift having a performer of the calibre involved could bring. I regret that and haven't made the same mistake again, and I never list that performance in my academic professional CV.

The link here is to the beautiful live performance by Kerry Yong. It's also released on CD. It was the most recent fully completed, workshopped and performed piece at the time I gave the paper and I still consider it a major and favourite work.

- If there is time, I would also like to mention some extra-musical concerns and influences, as well as what I have recently been working on.
- Conclusion, attempting to tie everything together.

I began my discussion of context with observations by the now very well-known Australian composer Elena Kats-Chernin.

Imagine you are an Australian composer born in the 1950s. As a curious teenager, you were aware of an Asian-Pacific influence dominating your music. You listened to gamelan before breakfast, heard the works of Peter Sculthorpe and Richard Meale, or the 'next generation' of Barry Conygham and Anne Boyd during the day, and then at night went out and played in a rock band.

I think the assertion or societal assumption that Sculthorpe and Meale represent some kind of vanguard and Conygham and Boyd are an exciting next generation is interesting. I wonder who current young Australian musicians would view in the same light, if it's even an issue for them. I do remember that for me, the Conservatorium/Sydney music department antagonism extended to student peers and there was a high-school like competitiveness I now regret. In particular, a talented young composer Matthew Bieniek and I seemed eternally at competitive loggerheads and these rivalries, for me, at least, precluded the type of cultural scenic awareness Elena describes. Having said that. There were key representative figures, some Australian, such as Warren Burt, Vincent Plush, Michael Smetanin, Matthew Hindson, Bozidar Kos, others international. I remember particularly being interested in Nigel Westlake and Carl Vine, initially. Both interests faded over time. I do remember the composition department at one point had visits and presentations from British composers James Dillon, Richard Barrett and Michael Finnissy. I was super-interested in these visiting seeming giants

[Type text]

(Dillon less so) of the composition world, yet I always remained somewhat aloof from such influence. Perhaps that is a factor in less context-aware mindset at the time, probably perceived by colleagues as arrogance. Perhaps there is truth in that. If so, I hope it has passed.

Later in the 1970s, you went onto tertiary study and your world was turned upside down as you discovered the severe modernism of Boulez, Stockhausen, Kagel and Ferneyhough. Obsessed, you spent much of the decade after graduation writing their kind of music and being loathed by your miniscule audiences.

Then during the late 1980s and early 1990s you started to wonder if the music you'd been writing, credible though it might have been, was really the sort of music which meant something to you. You were left pondering what to do with your formidable composition technique.

You even started thinking about tonality, about a large audience; about the possible loss of esteem should your style revert, as you know it should, to something simpler, something that you, in your late-30s or early 40s, felt you needed to say. With tremendous trepidation, you said damn the torpedoes and you started writing music that anyone could understand and even like. At last you felt a cautious happiness, not yet entirely free from guilt and self-doubt. And now as maturity looms, you confront more challenges, as you yourself become the mature artist leading a new generation into a new millennium.¹

It's interesting to consider this in the light of recent interviews with Elena (in particular with Phillip Adams, on Late Night Live).

[\[https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/latenightlive/23-may-2019/11143714\]](https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/latenightlive/23-may-2019/11143714)

She's a phenomenally talented musician (pianist and composer) and it's interesting in the light of my reservations about 'placing myself in context' with which I began this exploratory 'conversation with my younger self', that she was affected by the same considerations at a point in her career when she was already well established as a theatre composer internationally. I had the fortune of having her as a lecturer for music analysis for a semester as a senior undergraduate, and it's interesting that at that time (1997 or 1998) the focus in her class was on high modernism, particularly the German composer Helmut Lachenmann. I remember her as a generous, thoughtful, gifted and charismatic (if somewhat frenetic and chaotic) teacher, unsure, amazingly, of herself in her first formal lecturing role, but totally self-assured in her musicality and who she was as a person, at least in what she allowed us to see.

It's true that all genuine creatives probably by necessity undergo trials of confidence of some kind at some point. Perhaps I am wrong. But I think it's telling that in the post-colonial outpost without an embedded established cultural heritage (I refer to the currently dominant Western based society, not Australia's true custodians) that Elena came to call home, she was compelled to struggle with pressures that for a time inhibited her natural creative flow.

I find it personally fascinating that in the interview section I originally quoted she describes feeling compelled to write in the way of Boulez and other modernists, engendering and resenting the resultant 'war' with what audience there was/is. As I mention above, I never felt such a compulsion per se. Perhaps I was fortunate that my tastes and interests evolved in tandem with my studies. I wonder if the traditional Soviet-style education Elena received in her formative years, based as it was on syllabus mastery and emulation of models, was a conditioning factor that predisposed this approach. I recall discussions with Elena (and a Ukrainian trained composer and conductor Anna Pimnakhova who was doing a PhD in

¹ Buzacott, Martin (1999) Wearing Maturity Well in '24 Hours', ABC, pp. 40-41

composition when I met her) around this topic, and whether the freer, Australian way was better. Both women thought both systems had their merits.

I'd like to note also, that although I cite Bozidar as my primary mentor and teacher (previously Trevor Pearce), a theme that emerges through my original paper is of the significant women mentors in my development. It's something I have always been aware of and talked about, and I wanted to highlight this, given the current efforts at balancing things for emerging women artists in particular. I've been so fortunate in the figures that roamed through my musical development over its course.

A final ironic, for me, recollection is of a series of conversations with Anna. I am very interested in the music of Elliott Carter at the time (and for many years since). Anna favoured both the approach and sound world (more correctly 'sound-language', to use his own term) of Witold Lutoslawski. Over time, I've become much more attracted to the ideas and sound of Lutoslawski, myself. Or more correctly, I'd say my sensibilities have shifted more in the direction of his music. Which is interesting for me, because I'm not so sympathetic to some of his assertions about the relationship between composer and listener, what I perceive as the reification of the score even in his aleatoric music, at least in his writings about them, and some of his conclusions from his explorations in sound-language. I highly recommend Skowron, Z (ed.) (2007) Lutoslawski on Music, Scarecrow Press, a comprehensive English translation of his writings I periodically dip in to.

This quote is from a recent article on Elena Kats-Chernin, one of Australia's prominent contemporary composers and representative of the generation preceding mine. Although her statements generalise and perhaps exaggerate, they paint a realistic picture of many Australian composers of many Australian composers of Elena's generation today – and indeed some of the previous generation mentioned, such as Meale and Sculthorpe, who have arguably faced similar dilemmas in a similar way. For example, Meale's early, experimental style of composition suddenly changed – after the archetypal mid-life crisis mentioned in the article – into a much simpler and more easily understandable musical language. Similar progressions have also occurred internationally in the recent work of composers such as Louis Andriessen, Peter Maxwell Davies, and Alexander Goehr. In some cases – such as Goehr's – this appears to be a genuine attempt at redefining style and 'language', but in other cases the reasons are less clear.

Obviously, this is just one of many trends occurring today. Another is the composer who, after forming their mature language, has pretty well stuck to their guns, following whichever path they may have forged for themselves. Some Australian examples include Michael Smetanin, Martin Wesley-Smith, Bozidar Kos, Roger Smalley, David Lumsdaine and Nigel Butterley. Internationally, some of these might include Elliott Carter, Pierre Boulez, Brian Ferneyhough, John Tavener and Steve Reich. This is not to say that any of these composers are writing the same piece over and over, so to speak, but they do exhibit a continuing sense of purpose and direction: Boulez and Carter for instance, in their modernist concerns with developing new means of language and expression, and Stockhausen's constant search for new sounds; Tavener's perusal solely of Russian Orthodox inspired music since his conversion to that faith in 1977, and Reich in his explorations and further developments of 'minimalism' (more so than any other composers of that style).

It's interesting to see how the notion of 'selling out' was so deeply ingrained in me at that point. There is something to it, but there is a cynical, even combative undertone to my

[Type text]

description of all of this. Or suspicion. I can also see great care not to appear to be ‘bagging’ any particular composer or school of thought explicitly, although I know (being me) that I was totally unsympathetic to the radical style shifts of composers like Meale and Maxwell-Davies to a more direct, accessible style and was scathing of composers like Paul Stanhope and Matthew Hindson.

In retrospect, much of the venom was a result of the inter and intra departmental politics I mention above. But as any perusal of the Australian Music periodical of the time (‘Sounds Australian’) will reveal, these lines ran deep. I wasn’t just buying into this blindly or with an agenda, though. I was fervently anti-popularist in my mindset and perceived music so obviously influenced by popular culture to be some kind of intellectual ineptitude. Certainly, I saw it as representing a diminishing of the composer, and I took a dim view of the music. Pretty extreme as a standpoint. And amusing to me now, given that I liked then and like now a lot of the music of Billy Joel, a point not lost on, and equally amusing to those who know and knew me well.

My perspectives are much more nuanced now. Carefully reading Charles Rosen’s ‘The Classical Style’ since this period forced a recognition that Baroque and Classical music took the popular music forms (various dances and songs) of their time and, putting it crassly, ‘prettied them up’ for the aristocracy and church. There has always been a deep connection between popular and art music, and in waves through history, the relationships shift from symbiotic to combative and back again, and the deep connections get lost in the bickering of people who should all know their history and provisional relative positions and roles in it better, my younger self included.

I think my explorations into meditation, performing, improvising with jazz and non-Western musicians and working on compositions as one node in that mutually connected and conditioning nexus of creative ‘becomings’ has radically changed my perceptions. In fact, I have been motivated to undertake a second doctorate to largely figure out what it all means. I now feel there is a very clear distinction between art as craft and art as path. Art as craft entails career development, establishment of a public identity, the total or near to it, investment of personal ego in the craft. Positioning, self-labelling and self-limiting in a marketplace that requires clarity also become important. I bought into this for a period, most certainly at the time of writing this paper. I also believe now that the reification of the ‘piece’ (for the last two hundred years meaning ‘the score’, although technology is changing that) becomes fundamental and totally distorts the relationships between performers, historically the most important element, the composer, and the truth of the provisional, transient relational becoming in sound that emerges from that interaction as ‘the piece’, or perhaps more precisely the experience of ‘the piece’.

For someone who really, deep in their bones, sees art as path, the focus in day to day cultivation of technique, skill, clarity, access to truth flowing from silence. It is its own reward, and the artistic work is a by-product, a faint echo, a vestige of the moment of change or growth of the artist, not its goal. That’s not to say it’s of no value. I deeply value my creative output. I enjoy listening to it, and there is a feedback between existing work, listening, contemplating new material and my increasingly dominant activities as an improvising vibraphone player. But it really is the time alone and day to day, week to week, year to year time spent with my instrument, trying to maintain a meditation routine and working on notated pieces as a series of interconnected activities that is its own reward. And suddenly, not totally, as I have a long way to go to in letting go, but largely, the entire

[Type text]

conversation is irrelevant. The notion of positioning myself in relation to modernism and postmodernism is suddenly uninteresting. And the harsh judge within is a whole lot quieter. But not completely quiet. Crap is still crap.

The reason I have begun with this discussion of the current ‘compositional scene’ with the previous generations is that [obviously] the present one is shaped by these, both internationally and in Australia, upon which I will now be focussing. One need only look at the latest *Sounds Australian* periodical (which I won’t regurgitate here), where several young composers and others were asked to contribute their views on Australian music over the past twenty-five years, for clear examples. One major difference to Kats-Chernin’s generation is that rather than having to follow the path of composers such as she – who give the impression that in their days of studying with the like of Lachenmann, they HAD to write complex modern music, but are only now writing what they really wanted to all along – many are simply adopting a simple, accessible style from the beginning. This seems to ensure many performances (a brief examination of Matthew Hindson’s recent performance list, including a recent performance by the WASO, confirms this). Various articles by Hindson articulate the view that ‘writing music without belief is riding the very fast train to mediocrity’.² Much of this ‘rock-inspired’ orchestral music bears a superficial resemblance to that of Michael Smetanin, whose response is typically scathing: ‘It’s cheap game-boy music [...]’.³ The point I am making here is that the problem with writing such neo-Smetanin/Andriessen music, is that although writing this music seems valid partly because of the previous generation’s work, it is written without the social factors, and LENGTHY periods of self-exploration which led to the results, thereby weakening not only the music’s effect, but also the whole philosophy underpinning it.

I’d like to publicly acknowledge that Matthew Hindson assisted me at a time I was vulnerable (a debt still to be paid) and supported my institutional critique of the diminished Compositional Techniques and Analysis course at the Sydney Conservatorium, when he was unit chair. I was tasked with designing and implementing an ‘Advanced analysis’ course for honours students as responsible lecturer, unusual for a causal. He’s a nice man, and I now know genuinely believes in the music he composes. And so, the quips I quote above about ‘cheap Gameboy music’ are unfortunate, although again, it highlights the malice of the times, which has hopefully passed long ago.

Having said that, I feel antipathy to a number of Matthew’s educational positions, specifically the encouragement of competition between students and the emphasis on the use of technology. The former, I see as intrinsically harmful and counterproductive, regardless of its current normative role. It leads to a lot of the negatives I mention above and fosters self-interest and the ridiculous notion of some kind of ‘pecking order’, and without betraying confidences, I’ve seen such perceived hierarchy influence marking panel decisions. It’s a real thing, and a real problem.

The use of technology, I feel is a larger issue. If a young composer can’t internally hear music, how can they connect to it and get a sense for its ‘truth’? If they learn to compose in conjunction with notation software that has defaults and unusual parameters as extras or special features, it’s totally clear that these developing composers can’t avoid being conditioned by these initial constraints. I’ve seen it personally and read about it in

² Hindson, Matthew (1999) *A Golden Age?* *Sounds Australian*, Australian Music Centre, p. 18

³ Buzacott, Martin (1999) *Tough or Tender?* (in *24 Hours*), ABC, p. 46

publications, forums and correspondence. Both issues – competition, music technology and the addition of wanting the music to be widely heard NOW, are core to Matthew's philosophy, and I am totally unsympathetic. But I am approaching art as a path. As a career, as a craft, I can see that it would seem perfectly reasonable.

Moving on, another example of a young Australian composer influenced by the preceding generation is Liza Lim (nine years my senior, at 32). She is currently at a career highpoint, both in terms of forging her own style and international reputation. To quote Richard Toop:

[Over the past nine years] she has broken away from the early Ferneyhough influence which had been clearly useful, but yielded rather short-winded results, in favour of something more personal and visceral.⁴

Her Music is certainly complex, as is that (to a lesser degree) of others, such as Kirsty Beilharz and Finsterer, and it perhaps represents the other pole of activity in Australia at the moment.

In between is an extremely diverse mix, with a growing focus on electronic music. In the eastern states particularly, the interest is largely in algorithmic computer music composition (Greg Schiemer, Warren Burt and the younger Thorin Kerr are some examples).

This brief discussion of the very eclectic 'general compositional scene' of the present brings me to the subject of so-called postmodernism, a description often applied to the times we are now inhabiting.

It's interesting that postmodernism is what I was specifically tasked with addressing in my paper. What assumption, what **presumptions** on the part of my peers at the time does that evince? From memory, perhaps the request was to balance my assertions that I was most aligned with or sympathetic to modernism. I was about to suggest that that whole expectation of affiliation with a position now seems foreign. But the sound-world of my music, even the improvised music working with jazz musicians, at the surface *sounds* modernist-inspired. And then maybe it doesn't. It's difficult to say, but at the time I presented this paper in Perth, Western Australia, in 1999, postmodernism vs modernism was a significant intellectual dispute.

Perhaps Roger Smalley (my supervisor for that year in Perth) being the chair of the composition unit was a factor. He had performed in Stockhausen's experimental ensemble, studied with Alexander Goehr and was totally modernist in his outlook as a composer. He was an incredibly cultured man, well-schooled through his piano training in classical and romantic music to a level I found astounding. And he was a phenomenal piano player, one of the best three piano players I have ever seen perform live, and that says a lot. In a sense he embodied the modern/post-modern dialogue.

Now I would like to address how I relate to concepts such as postmodernism. The first thing one discovers when attempting to apply the term postmodernism to music is that no one is very clear on what exactly it means. Modernism in music is fairly well defined, and so is the actual theory of postmodernism, but the application of the latter to music vague.

⁴ Toop, Richard (1999) The Heart's Ear – review (from *Sounds Australian*) ABC, p. 39

I'd venture that perhaps, modernism in music per se, is less well defined than it seems. Definitely it is less clear than the Carter quote, below, suggests. Clearly much of the music of composers ranging from Schoenberg, Berg and Webern share a lot. Embrace of functional and acoustic dissonance, experiment with form, more angular lines, and a clearly more than average occurrence of the 0,5,6 trichord (a perfect fourth and a semitone – C, F and F#, for example). One could argue that in the mature music of Webern, such groups begin to function as autonomous musical 'objects' that logically lead to the sound masses of Varese (taking sound as concrete physical entities) but also the total serialisation of some of Messiaen's music and what that led to (which is more a total abstraction of sound properties rather than the physicalisation of it). But I'd argue the romantic Berg, that sounds more like late Mahler, seems a long way from Stockhausen or Elliott Carter or Milton Babbitt. Perhaps a workable list of qualities would encompass the break from the past, introduction of increasingly autonomous or 'independent of function' sonorities (in which case, Ravel, Debussy and Stravinsky all are eligible), and a sense of the new being a priori of value. This would be the 'extended vocabulary' aspect Carter cites below.

Modern music has its emphasis on the new, on construction, rationality, integration and abstraction. It is (to quote Elliott Carter) 'the concern with an extended vocabulary which Stravinsky, Varese and Schoenberg introduced before the first world war – and after – not only in the whole field of dissonance, but new points of view about rhythm and sonorities. That was one aspect of it. Another one was that we were living in a world that had been completely changed by the writings of Freud, and the whole sense of how the sub-conscious and conscious were much more intricately linked than we had thought'.⁵

This is certainly and obviously true of the first generations of modernists, particularly, I'd suggest, Mahler (who knew Freud) and Schoenberg, and probably Richard Strauss as well. Perhaps the preoccupation with science of many contemporary composers today of a modernist bent (as very broadly and provisionally outlined thus far) is an extension of this? But I see an ironic twist to it all, one that is true of me, for sure. Webern, in particular (he was an early music scholar), Peter Maxwell-Davies (exploitation of European medieval techniques), Harrison Birtwistle (classical Greek theatre and theories), Stravinsky (incorporation of Russian folk tunes). Varese (a fascination with the archaic and arcane – he even called a piece 'Arcana').

These immediately come to mind as core key examples of modernist composers preoccupied with culture of the past. It's so interesting. Looking to the past to find something new to say or explore. I think this is another aspect of modernism, at least the first waves of it, that is often minimised in the discourse. Even Elliott Carter is on this spectrum. He studied history, mathematics and Latin and Classical Greek at College, incorporating it all into his music just as much as he does the new vocabulary.

Other composers such as Boulez exhibit similar concerns, although he and other so-called 'high modernists' emphasise the rational, integration and polemical aspects.

These principles, 'with emphasis on single, integral compositional procedure'⁶ fulfil many of the criteria for modern art expounded by such writers as Adorno, as well as other criteria such as the continuance of enlightenment values, and that notions of beauty and aesthetics are

⁵ Ford, Andrew (1993) Composer to Composer, Hale and Iremonger, p. 3

⁶ Williams, Alastair (1997) New Music and the Claims of Modernity, Ashgate Publishing, pp. 46-47

deeply tied with matters of formal purity and truth.⁷ Modern music, therefore, is concerned with the new, and with forging a way forward within these enlightenment values.

I wonder whether Boulez, Stockhausen, Milton Babbitt and the following waves of approaches incorporating spectral analysis and composition, sound art, chance and aleatoric music all both flow on from the above trends and waves of further social and cultural trauma (WW 1, then WW2, and successive conflicts), and are at the same time totally different. I'd respectfully assert that the total serialisation of Babbitt and others, seeks to totally transcend existing notions of music, and entails what Lutoslawski describes as the abolition of the qualitative differences between intervals. A total 'flattening out' of all previous means of expression through pitch.

The so-called 'new complexity' composers (I don't accord to the spurious notion that they form a unified school, of course) share the aspect of hyper-complex notation designed in part to effectively disable all traditional inherited expressive performance approaches, and arguably takes total serialisation to its conclusion – every component of music from pitch to rhythm to its performance or performativity is prescribed in total detail. Perhaps finding freedom or a means of expression or a new means of expression within what might initially seem a prison, is a goal. I've never been sure, but I see this as going well beyond what a lot of the earlier writers who considered themselves modernists envisaged. And yet the reference to the past (Michael Finnissy) can be seen ('Verdi Transcriptions'). And both he and Richard Barrett are politically vocal, something which, along with extra-musical associations, cannot but feed into their work. And one cannot help but become excited or affected by this music, which I've always felt (Ferneyhough and Barrett in particular, for my taste) is somehow highly expressive and emotive. And exhausting!

The mention of postmodernism elicits varied responses from composers. When asked what he understood by the term, Ferneyhough answered:

Everything and nothing. As far as I can make out, it seems to stand for some sort of society in which the Hegelian 'grand narrative' has been succeeded by something approaching Schoenberg's directionless à propos *Die Jacobsleiter*.⁸

Boulez states:

I find these people are tired; they are afraid of complications, of complexity, and they say we cannot communicate with an audience because our music is too complex. Okay, so what are they doing? They are looking back to something.⁹

According to Andreas Huyssen, in his *Mapping Out the Postmodern*, postmodernism must fulfil certain characteristics, the main ones being:

1. A sense of rupture and discontinuity with the past.
2. An attack on autonomous art as an institution with a dominant aesthetic.
3. An interest in popular culture.¹⁰

⁷ Williams, Alastair (1997) *New Music and the Claims of Modernity*, Ashgate Publishing, p. 11

⁸ Ford, Andrew (1993) *Composer to Composer*, Hale and Iremonger, p. 150

⁹ Ford, Andrew (1993) *Composer to Composer*, Hale and Iremonger, p. 23

¹⁰ Williams, Alastair (1997) *New Music and the Claims of Modernity*, Ashgate Publishing, p. 103

[These are drawn from observations on developments during the Dada period, and Bürger's *Theory of the Avant Garde*.]

Whether what is colloquially described as postmodern fits all these criteria is questionable. However, 'the postmodernism of the '70s and '80s, with its reclamation of traditional techniques through pastiche and quotation – both in their conservative and radical vein – reacts strongly against that core of high modernism which rejects the past in favour of a technological future.¹¹

Perhaps now we are getting closer to a definition – a concern with an audience and its comprehension; anonymity; the abandonment of judgement based on aesthetics; a return to techniques of the past and rejection of enlightenment principles. In the current environment, it also seems to be equated with a throwing out of the rule book as such, and it is this notion (not strictly part of postmodern theory), combined with some elements of this theory, that is often labelled postmodernism, in music.

I wonder now about some of this. As I understand it, the open work – starting and ending rather than beginning and concluding (or is it vice versa?!) is a common ground of the twentieth century avant-garde and explored by both nominally modern and postmodern composers and authors. The same goes for the authorless work; work unfixed in form; reference to the past to move forward. Perhaps postmodernism's concern with transcending the alienation due to un-comprehension of audiences, and placing authorial input in those audiences is a key factor, along with a disregard for 'operational purity' as it were. Mixings of systems by someone like Thomas Ades may work as an example in this regard. It's definitely seen as philosophically antagonistic to modernism, which is seen itself as a vestige of a certain period unwilling in a sense to relinquish its ahistorical grasp on culture.

It's ironic to me now that my first public effort at presenting my work and myself in a new context (the University of Western Australia) is itself an exercise in self-definition and opposition to tonal music. I'll note that tonal vs atonal (trivial when articulated in such a way) was a major undercurrent of tension at the Sydney Conservatorium when I was an undergraduate student, and clearly coloured a lot of what I thought at the time. Or more precisely, thought I thought, and thought I knew.

My straightforward list of goals – to generate autonomous art music logically conceived in terms of self-consistent structure, form and 'language' – is probably as close to a meaningful definition of modernism in music that encompasses all of it, as I've seen anywhere. Perhaps expressing alignments and taking combative positions is part of finding oneself, or part of youthful efforts at trying to find oneself. Certainly, one's knowledge, skills in articulation of argument are honed, and a clarity of thinking and intention can express itself if paradoxically, an open mindedness and willingness to learn and be wrong are also present. They certainly are now, along with a willingness to parade my younger misguided self before interested readers with his folly spelt out in clear green font. It's fascinating to have arrived at a point of real quiet confidence in what has over time emerged as a path, and to contrast this with the equally firm and confident but radically misguided positions of my younger self that follow below.

¹¹ Williams, Alastair (1997) New Music and the Claims of Modernity, Ashgate Publishing, p. 125

In the context of the above discussion, I imagine I would be termed a modernist (not that I have thought about it until being asked to!). I am interested in trying to develop my own style and language, within the framework of the concept of abstract, autonomous art music, and am very concerned with trying to develop logically such concerns as form and structure. As will become obvious, I am not terribly concerned with immediate audience appeal either – whilst not necessarily an ideal of postmodernism, it seems to be a logical consequence of several of its aims, unlike modern music, which often seems difficult to understand. To quote David Lumsdaine:

It's totally irrelevant. A person who has to make their music accessible has got no music to make accessible. There's nothing more to say.¹²

Now I come to a discussion of my music in general. The first thing I would like to say is how difficult it actually is for one to talk about one's own music. When developing a style, and the associated compositional techniques, the whole aim is to integrate them to the point where they are almost a matter of habit, as natural as other forms of communication. Yeats has said: 'When I come to write poetry, I seem – I suppose because it is all instinct with me – completely ignorant'.¹³ Whilst this level of fluency is usually not achievable, it is invariably an ideal, for although much thought and planning is engaged in before beginning a piece, the desire is to 'forget all that stuff' and just compose. That being said, even when one does discuss the 'nuts and bolts' of their work, these do not make the piece – yes, it is the sum of the various parts, but it must transcend, and be much more than mere technique if it is to mean anything. Despite the above considerations, I will nevertheless try to address some of the broad concerns in my music, with more detailed discussion a little later.

As an aside, it's interesting to see my first effort at writing something like this and how 'modelled' or 'model imitative' it is. This first paragraph is a virtual paraphrase of a page from Alexander Goehr's 'Finding the Key' and the style is totally in imitation of his.

One important concern is complexity. This does not mean difficulty (though the music often is difficult), but complexity of idea/thought – in the sense that good poetry is complex and can be responded to and approached at a number of different levels, ranging from the most superficial, to a moving and deeply personal experience. What is more, if poetry or music are to be in any way a reflection of the world around us, one must acknowledge that this is hardly simple. As Brian Ferneyhough says: 'You don't need to seek complexity; it's all around you'.¹⁴

From my current vantage point just over twenty years later, I see an interesting paradox here. I was definitely attracted to complexity in the sense of dense, multilayered textures consisting of multiple but perceivable harmonic and tempi strata. The works were constructed from number series and related tempi and groupings of pulses, and the pitch content was often microtonal. Somehow, despite this, notions I would now articulate as consideration of voice leading, self-similarity, deep structural unity and the expression of a unique (to the work) 'truth' relating material at the surface to deeper structure are all elements of this work. Then, as now, intuition, and 'following the path of the piece', along with 'stepping outside' the pre-compositional systems to freely work with the material when internal hearing blossomed forth at a certain point, kicked in when the process 'took off'.

¹² Ford, Andrew (1993) Composer to Composer, Hale and Iremonger, p. 76

¹³ Source unknown (Goehr?)

¹⁴ Ford, Andrew (1993) Composer to Composer, Hale and Iremonger, p. 151

I find it interesting that now, rather than work out each detail of a piece (for example, organising an elastic rhythmic passage by expanding and contracting Fibonacci sequence fragment patterns) around a predetermined colour, or using isorhythm, I will now do a ‘deep dive’ analysis of the harmonic material I may have chosen as the basis of a piece, then alternate freely composed sketches based on this with vibraphone improvisation and sitting in silence. And out of that, a piece emerges much more freely. I think this is also much more in line with the ‘art as path’ notion, where the score and its details are less important in a sense than the spiritual or personal-musical growth entailed in its development. I’ve also been a core performer in all but two of my composed pieces (and played in all the improvised ones) for over five years now. It’s all connected, and I realize as I write that the renunciation of my identity as a vibraphone player for several years coincides with the hyper-critical, constructivist approach that came to dominate my work for a time and definitely colours every aspect of the original paper.

That fact bears mentioning because *Stones Growing*, composed when I still did a lot of playing and percussion practice, is in a lot of ways more connected to what I am currently developing, which even more so flows out of my performance, improvisation and private practice. This makes a lot of sense. Although I did have piano lessons as a child and teenager and developed an interest in classical music and composition through high school, my identity as a musician flourished from the first time that I tried playing the xylophone in year 9, when I would have been 14 years old. My few friends had joined the school concert band and I followed. I could ‘sort of’ get a sound out of the tenor horn, but I was terrible. But I took to the xylophone instantly. I had no confidence as a person, was socially awkward, unhappy at home, unhappy at school, but I was immediately really good. I can see now that of course my flow and creative freedom was/is tied up in my keyboard percussion playing. Hesitantly resuming regular disciplined practice roughly ten years ago was the best thing I’ve done in terms of personal and musical growth and it now forms the basis of my musical path which flows through and around it.

Having said that, perhaps the years focussed totally focussed on composition accelerated certain aspects – the analytical skills and interests (further encouraged by teaching commitments and always wanting to improve and learn), and the craft or ‘nuts and bolts’ aspect. Really taking my time to see all the potentials and possibilities in material, really knowing it. Exhausting the abstract sides of things – multiple tempi; static dense texture-based music; complex microtonal musical spaces. All of it internalised and understood through ‘doing’. Working through my demons. Giving up, trying again. Struggle.

Now it isn’t a struggle. Not in the tortured sense. I work, hard. I practice a lot. I try to meditate and try to keep meditating. I improvise with jazz musicians playing my music, it’s fun. I play well, I learn from the good and the bad, I work, Hard. I practice a lot. And on and on and it’s fun and it’s affirming. The period leading up to my year in Perth and the ten years immediately following were not fun. But perhaps they were necessary way posts. Struggle now is personal, not musical. But that too is a more enjoyable journey. I still enjoy complexity in music, sometimes in my thinking. But even more, I enjoy peace, silence. Complexity is still everywhere, but I no longer feel compelled or driven to seek or to manufacture it.

Another concern –and this relates to complexity also – is with developing several tempos and rhythmic ideas simultaneously, and with the exploration of the relationships between these

[Type text]

and to the overall work. This is simply because I am generally bored by music moulded around one rhythmic foundation (pulse/beat/meter). Also, unlike traditional tonal music, for example, where two or more ideas usually in functional tonic/dominant relationship are stated, then developed and opposed, returning in the end to the established musical locus, I am interested in having several ideas developing separately and simultaneously over the duration of a work.

Reading Charles Rosen's 'The Classical Style' (I have the second edition) radically changed my understanding of Classical music (as in Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven), tonality, form and the social place of Western art music. A major realisation, the consequences of which are still unfolding for me – in conjunction with the discovery of the Chinese literati, for whom the whole relationship of artistry and economy is flipped – was the irony of chamber music, composed for amateurs to play privately now being fetishized by 'hero-musician' professionals in huge concert halls, whilst in these composer's times, the professionals for whom the more challenging music was produced were the orchestras who, along with composers, were in a much more subservient relationship with their employers and audiences.

More significantly for me, is Rosen's utterly convincing taking apart the notion of sonata form as my younger self described it (two or more themes in tonic/dominant relationship). Much of what we commonly talk about when we describe sonata form is actually the musical grammar, if we mean the formula of movement from the tonic to a dominant or dominant substitute. The theme-based description is woefully inadequate and inaccurate: Haydn would often use a single theme; Mozart could use several. The modulation to the dominant often was not marked by a new theme, anyway. Rosen is talking about the Classical sonata, before it's adoption by Romantic composers, who often actually did adhere to the widespread understanding of the form. But for Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, it was an unfolding of a logical and expressive path building out of the unified musical ideas of a work. It was about unity, coherence, expression, need. The form isn't an empty vessel, as Roger Reynolds would have it (in his 2002 book 'Form and Method') or a series of connected vessels of different sizes and shapes, to be 'filled' with material. It IS the material as it unfolds over experienced time. Or to express it differently, the form unfolds with and is an extension of the material. I think that's perhaps obvious in the work of someone like Varese, whose material is conceived as sound masses (even when it could be described as thematic, as in the solo wind passages in *Integritas*). But it's probably true of most music, and definitely the case with the music of the three composers who are the focus of Rosen's great book.

An understanding of this has radically altered my listening and understanding of this music, as well as complemented lessons in music rhetoric I received in analysis classes the semester it was taught by Gillian Whitehead. It also puts the huge works of Mahler, Bruckner and others in a different light, and brings into question, for me, the value of pre-determined proportion in the music of Stockhausen, for example (as outlined in Johnathan Kramer's 'Moment Form in Twentieth Century Music' – and his analysis of works by Bartok as being predetermined formally by the golden section). It's fascinating, and at one level makes a lot of sense; but arguably, the whole way of thinking flows on from 'form as vessel to be filled by material'. This change for me – a moving away from working under the influence of such notions – is a big one, and again stems largely, I would say, from the focus now being time with my instrument. Naturally a more visceral and physical sense of sound, duration, unfolding of sound in time and how this relates to and informs form and structure results,

with much less reliance on abstract construct to control or shape relationships of material in time (perhaps a workable definition of the form/material relational unity).

And repetition does not have much place in my music, as the various materials are constantly changing. The result is almost diametrically opposed to what Percy Grainger imagined as music comprised of ‘all theme, no development’ – I prefer all development, no theme!

This was written by someone under the sway of the musical surface of Elliott Carter. I in fact conceived my material as different ‘types’ (‘motion’ types, such as regular pulses, elastic, long elastic ‘blips’) and ‘character types’ (filigree, hypo, static, isorhythm). Often, I’d generate a series of related colours (separate, abstracted pitch patterns) to be connected with *talea* (separate, abstracted durational patterns generally not lining up with the colour, so a ‘same but different’ cycle is initiated) or patterns constructed from the ‘motion types’. Obviously, this doesn’t result in linear musical material one would characterise as a theme. But past a certain point, if the music is ‘all development’, or as Grainger would aim for, ‘all theme’, the result will be the same, in relation to the traditional accepted notion of theme and development. Perhaps, as with the division of form and material as a concept, the whole premise for such discourse is flawed to begin with. An additional later realisation has been the degree to which the music I wrote in this period that survives has a sort of ‘woodenness’ or ‘squareness’ about it. It *was* ‘heard’ – I sing even the most angular lines when I am composing to see what it ‘feels’ like to execute the material, if I can put it that way. But the material is still conditioned by the initial limits and controls in the same way I suggest earlier that music notation software can be a limiting factor if the initial defaults and more basic learning environments are normalised internally, a process that can happen without self-awareness. I think the long nature walks and brief entries into real inner silence have resulted in much more a ‘hearing first’ approach, with the result of a more fluid and flexible feel of even the most precisely notated and carefully thought out music.

One definite change in my outlook is the acceptance of repetition, when it suggests itself during the process of creating a piece. Again, this stems partly from improvisation activity, where repetition is a useful factor to shape often complex music in the quicksilver flow of time as it passes (as opposed to score based music which allows one to work ‘outside time’ and explore connections impossible to fully process in the moment).

—

An aside. That’s interesting discussion itself. My score-based music of 1999/2000 was increasingly complex and increasingly detailed. Largely this was an evolving influence of my mentors and models such as Bozidar Kos and Elliott Carter. But it also was a flowering of pre-compositional ‘technique’: very much a constructed, de-physicalised approach rooted in notation and working things out on paper in detail based on a ‘cloudy’ or ‘unfocused’ germ of inner hearing. I think it is a totally valid approach if that is what appeals. And from my current standpoint, I also recognise a fairly common progression of innocent enthusiastic beginning, training, consolidation associated with exploration and limit-pushing cascading into maturity and a sense of ‘this is just the beginning’. This period achieves a lot and focusses things. A real working out and knowing of material, working with sound in abstract and concrete ways. A privileging of the intellectual side of the music (for me, in hindsight, there were good reasons for this, given the emotional state behind the for then, unstable personality).

I note that this period for me was the one where there was no performance activity of any kind and I perhaps decided to really focus on fleshing out the ideas I'd been working with. Having Roger Smalley as a supervisor – an esteemed composer who was also a fine performer – encourage me in my sometimes impractically challenging music gave me permission to experiment in a way I previously wouldn't have dared.

It's telling that the only works performed of those composed during this period are the chamber orchestra work *Shadows* and the piano solo *Light, Snow, Suicide*. Remaining unperformed are: a major work for B flat clarinet and two percussionists (*Still*); a work for guitar, clarinet, two horns in F, cello and double bass (*Prime Sonority*); a twenty minute-long piano quartet written for the Australian Piano Quartet which Roger played in at the time (*Subterfuge*); a twenty five-minute experimental work for bass saxophone, harpsichord and two percussionists (*Kalpa*).

Also unperformed is my only full orchestral commission, *Feu Sacre* (as part of the Symphony Australia New Voices program). It was an unpleasant experience where an aggressively combative conductor made a point of humiliating me in front of the symphony orchestra, refusing to take any suggestions from me to make the piece practical. He'd scrawled 'impossible' all over the score, and neither he nor the organising body made any effort to communicate any problem to me. Interestingly, much of the material was recycled and reimaged into *Pneuma*, which was performed at a high level by a student orchestra (the Sydney Conservatorium New Music Ensemble under the direction of Dr Anthony Clarke). In hindsight, the modifications I made to the original ideas flowed out of my beginning to perform again, a theme recurring throughout this response to an even greater extent than it is absent from the original paper presented by my younger self.

Returning to the 1999 paper, my comments on repetition being largely absent in my music now make me smile. The best thing I did for my musicality, other than resume serious vibraphone practice and build the confidence to enjoy improvising in performance, was complain to then unit chair Matthew Hindson about the observed and tangible diminished analysis skills in Sydney Conservatorium honours and postgraduate composition candidates. I was asked to design and 'Advanced Analysis' course, and took the opportunity to do so, preparing and ultimately running that course for four years.

I wrote in 2015 in the introduction to an unpublished experimental essay of:

memories of having ideas about music different from my Compositional Techniques and Analysis teachers that were treated as interesting but less important than the 'correct' answers e.g. the interpretation presented by the teacher of, for example, the use of a row and the tri-chords (or whatever) in say, a Webern piece. In fact, the method of 'teaching' was that the analysis was written on the board and/or presented in handouts, and there was a dynamic of our being guided to and thereby limited by the approach presented. Of course, this conditioned the students, me included, to a particular approach, predestining the results of analysis and greatly limiting critical thinking. This was especially troubling to me in retrospect both because this was my initial mode of teaching until I undertook the first year of a Graduate Diploma in education, and because extensive personal research has revealed the limitations of the modes of analysis taught in such classes and the 'fear-based' effect of such a learning environment. Expressing these realisations arouses mixed feelings, as I feel great gratitude for the expansion in thinking and awareness of different approaches to music I was exposed to in my undergraduate classes. For me this coexists with a desire to learn from what I now see as problematic teaching and learning methodology.

[Type text]

The undertaking to interrogate my knowledge of music analysis led to a re-examining every piece I introduced to that class. Reading much more widely outside the sources I'd originally been guided to as a student myself and also discovered, resulted in a dawning of insight into my previous limited analytical insight and knowledge, and the discovery of connections between and within even my earliest music I'd never even imagined to be present. The extent of embedded connections and repetitions was initially surprising, and given that, and my more mature current understanding of analysis and structure, I smile at some of the possibly naïve assertions the younger me makes with such conviction.

Regarding the critique mentioned above, I should mention the exception of the semester spent with Gillian Whitehead as teacher. To some extent, the 'knowledge giver' teaching was still a factor, but she introduced the tone clock theory and New Zealand composer and theorist Jenny McLeod's unpublished book 'Chromatic Maps I and II: Intervallic Prime Forms and Array Steerings'. Along with the publication of Elliott Carter's 'Harmony Book' my life changed. I'd put it that strongly. Also, the nuanced orchestration teaching and, for me, the deeply affecting area of classical rhetoric. Gillian was a student of Peter Maxwell-Davies for a time, too, so she had a deep insight into his music and a whole world of medieval techniques, strategies like magic squares, and was extremely generous in sharing how all of this manifested in her own music.

From the discussion so far, you may suspect that I am not a composer of tonal music, and that is correct. Whilst I prefer Schoenberg's term 'the emancipation of the dissonance', for practical purposes my music may be termed atonal. There are several reasons I do not see the point in writing tonal music any more:

1. Whilst great subtlety and diversity within the tonal idiom is possible, I find listening to musical opposition centred around the simplistic opposition of tonic and dominant boring. And since, as some composer (I cannot remember who) once said 'one writes [or should write] the music one most wants to hear', I don't write it!

The truth is, I didn't know what I was talking about. I'd adopted a position, simplified an enormously complex nexus of musical styles and language/s to categorise them in relation to my own intellectual needs and lost how to listen. I think there is something to my point – there is a lot of cliché in tonal music (which after reading Rosen I understand a lot more); there is a lot of, to me, overly direct, uninteresting, pompous, just plain badly conceived tonal music. But there is so much that is wonderful in it too, and this is simply 'the angry young man' speaking. Even Boulez who rhetorically advocated burning down all the opera houses ended up conducting productions of romantic music in those same houses. I am very glad to have outgrown the polemic impulse.

2. I don't believe that either myself or anyone else for that matter, is going to write tonal music as convincing as the past masters such as Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schumann.

This point, for me, is totally valid. The language isn't natural to me. Even as an improviser, whilst I do a lot of practice over changes, working on melodic development and chord tone melodies etc., it isn't natural and isn't something I put myself out there as wanting to do. I really think to write tonal music of a remotely comparable standard at any level requires a commitment and understanding I rarely see in others. And I think that working with a sound-language, to borrow Lutoslawski's term again, and formal constructs, models and principles

[Type text]

from periods so socially, culturally and technologically different to ours may be an interesting exercise, but I wonder what the point is.

3. I also find the whole theoretical basis behind tonality questionable to say the least. The argument basically goes that the tonic/dominant relationship, as well as the associated hierarchies, are representative or, or replicate the basic structure of the naturally occurring overtone series, and is therefore grounded in natural scientific laws. Firstly, as Schoenberg has commented, the development of pitch organisation in Western art music can be charted by the overtone series: early organum used only the first four harmonics, tonality rose up to the sixth, and later a few higher ones (tonality in this context is just a point along the way to a much more developed realisation or exploration of the harmonic series). Moreover, all overtone justification for tonality was rendered nonsense when equal tempered scales were introduced, and the actual pitches used were UN-natural, and artificially distorted to allow and make feasible the extensive modulations of key which were beginning to be explored at the time.

I think there is something to this too, but it's couched in ideas of Schoenberg I received through the filter of my teacher Bozidar. I'd also been researching spectral composers (primarily Radulescu and Grisey), and given the polemicist phase I was going through as outlined above, interest, passion and a beginning of knowledge easily coalesce into agenda and to some extent, that is what the above comments represent.

Having said that, there is something to the arguments about flawed anti-scientific justification for tonality when we get into the area of twelve-note equal temperament where there is a real ironing out of qualitative difference in favour of the capacity for extensive modulation. It's an interesting area much more nuanced than I grasped, but the foundational questioning has led to interesting fruit.

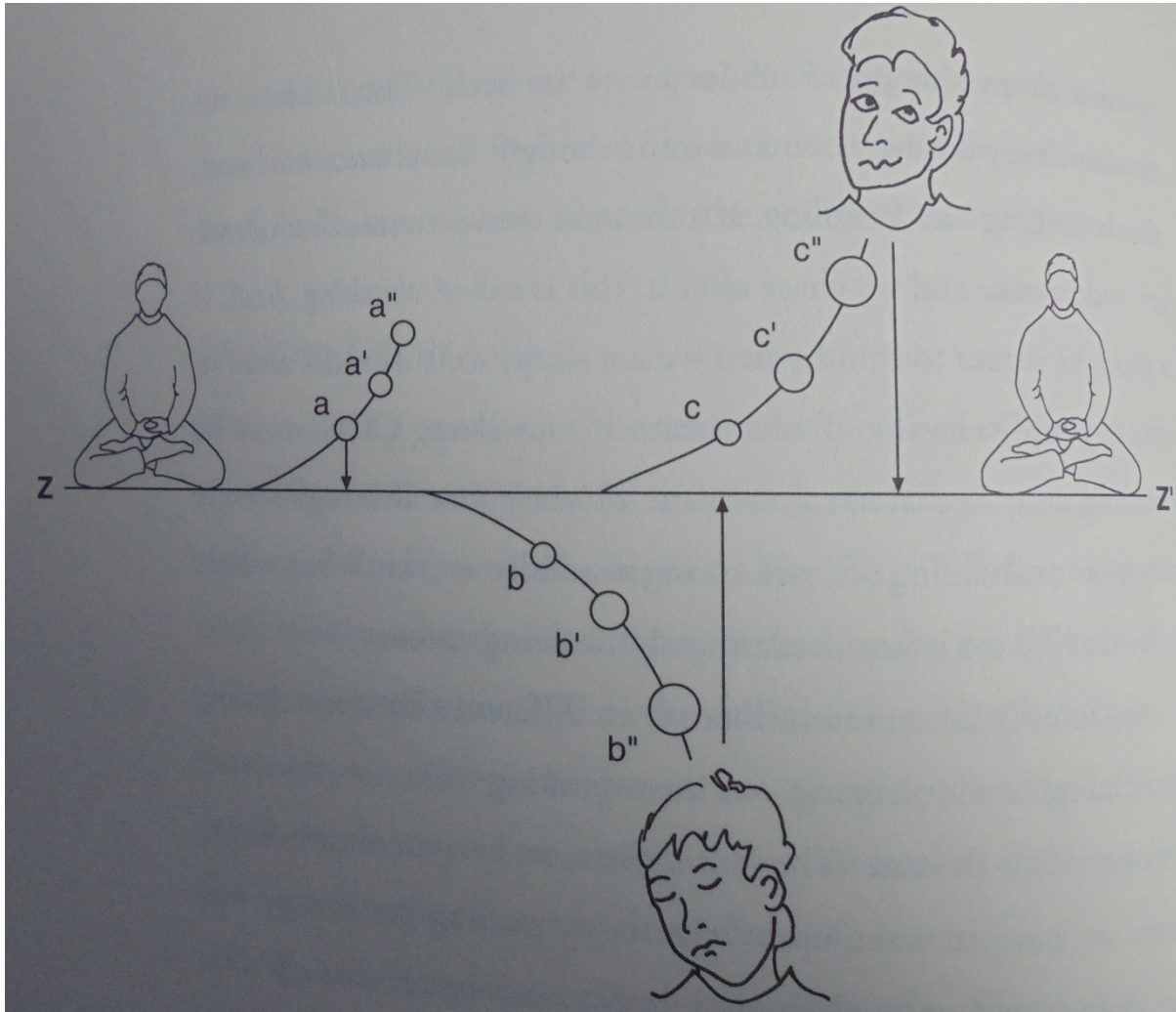
To conclude this section of my presentation, I ought to mention the general sense, or mental images I often have of my music at the time of composition. There are two recurring images:

- 1) One is of the ocean – effectively a pulsating mass of energy and motion, with certain features becoming prominent or surfacing, such as waves breaking out at sea – only to become part of the texture again.
- 2) The other is that of sitting on a park bench (or more precisely, the experience resulting from this). All the unrelated birdcalls, winds, manmade intrusions (lawnmowers, cars) and the ocean (if the park happens to be by the beach) – have no apparent sense or relationships. Yet, if you sit long enough, an underlying order is sensed. This sense of underlying order is, I think, quite important, and this is what I try to give my pieces.

I've come to formalise the second of these two experiential models as 'still' form. I later came to read the fascinating paper by David Lumsdaine titled 'Chaotic Harmony' (1996, unpublished). He describes a notion of musical form inspired by his experience making field recordings in the Australian bush, of collectively evolved ecosystems of sound. It's a reality – different territorial species of bird and insect have co-evolved in a specific landscape (itself changing over deep time), resulting in a deep 'belonging' of chaotically co-existing independent collectives of sound. It's a more elegantly expressed vision of what I try to communicate through the 'sitting listening on a park bench' analogy. The 'still' form also approximates something of the experience common to the meditation technique I engage

[Type text]

with, silent illumination (also known as ‘just sitting’). You sit, with full awareness of the total sensation of the body as a whole, eyes open. Thoughts, sounds, sights arise and pass, and you sit noticing all of it. It’s well represented in a graphic in the well-known book by Kosho Uchiyama ‘Opening the Hand of Thought: Foundations of Zen Buddhist Practice’ (2004). Here is a reproduction of that graphic, from page 54 of the book:



Hopefully the diagram is self-explanatory.

The ‘still’ form in effect explores this experience musically. A second major influence, particularly since the piano composition *Like Writing on Water* of 2015 (commissioned, performed and recorded by Daniel Herscovitch) is an article I was introduced to by a friend (Agnes Chow of DDM Sydney) by now disrobed Chan monk Venerable Chang Wen: ‘Music from the Chan/Zen Mind’ (2014). He asserts the possibility of listening to music “like listening to water flow”, attending to each sound as it arises, letting it go as it passes, and not grasping any of it. As a performer, some ideation obviously is required, but the aim in this context is to let that go immediately. Total engagement whilst listening/improvising/performing; total letting go after the event, much as thought and sensation is ideally to be approached in meditation. Here is the link to a live performance of

[Type text]

Like Writing on Water by a different performer, friend Kerry Yong:
[<https://soundcloud.com/dr-brad-the-bard/like-writing-on-water-live-performance>]

Lutoslawski writes: “If the work is to be listened to in such a way, it is the task of the composer to impose this way of listening upon his audience. The ability to do this is the composer’s sense of form.”¹⁵ Lutoslawski is talking about writing his music in such a way that the audience is led to listen in a certain way that he hopes they’ll engage with. I do too, and anecdotally and personally (composer as provisionally ideal listener), the listening experience of this and subsequent fully composed pieces (*The Stones are Dead* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZc8witiK4w&feature=emb_title] and *Drop off the Body* [<https://soundcloud.com/dr-brad-the-bard/drop-of-the-body-wav>]) elicit a ‘listen like listening to water flow’ listening. I mention all of this because upon reviewing my 2005 PhD concluding remarks, I find that the prediction that new directions suggesting themselves at that point entailed a devotional orientation, possibly an effort at musically representing meditation-related experiences, and an engagement with Pali texts, all of which has come to pass.

Now I would like to briefly discuss some of my influences. Several earlier influences – and for someone as early in their career as mine, that means the first few years of university and the year or two before – include jazz, Charles Ives, Javanese gamelan, medieval composition techniques and the tabla. Of these, the most important were jazz and the tabla (and increasingly North Indian, or Hindustani music in general), both of which I studied seriously until the middle of last year. Jazz was influential particularly in its rhythmic elasticity (usually a soloist stretching and contracting the tempo over a more regular rhythm section), and harmony (both vertically, and in terms of modal thinking). From learning the tabla, the most immediate influence was transcribing the actual compositions. As a greater understanding of Indian culture and music developed in me however, several other elements were absorbed, such as the arrhythmic and meditative ‘alop’ section, and the soloist and accompaniment (usually the tabla) going completely out of synch, but coming back together again after a number of rhythmic cycles (such as in a ti-hi figure, usually ending a section, where one player repeats a pattern three times (or 3x3) over a different number of times through the basic rhythmic pattern (tala), but landing on the last beat of the piece. In addition to this is the notion of ‘gammak’, similar to the idea in Japanese music and others where sonorities are always shaped or inflected.

At the same time that I was exploring these ideas, I became interested in the Fibonacci sequence (0,1,1,2,3,5,8,13 ...) partly through Bartok – he was interested in it due to its presence in nature, such as the way trees grow – but also through hearing *Quazar*, a piece by one of my teachers in Sydney, Bozidar Kos. I asked him to explain his use of the series so I would not copy, and experimented with this, and transcriptions of sections of tabla compositions in *Tenuous Connections*, which I now consider an exercise, but will play a little bit of. [Play as an example]

Unfortunately, I seem to have lost my recording of this piece in its original form. It was another CPW piece. It was subsequently re-written as ‘Pillars I’ (2007). It was performed by the Sydney Conservatorium percussion ensemble but for some reason, not recorded. It is published through the Australian Music Centre. Here is the link, if anyone is interested to

¹⁵ Skowron, Zbigniew (2007) *Lutoslawski on Music*, Scarecrow Press Inc., p. 132

check it out: [\[https://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/product/pillars-1-for-percussion-quartet\]](https://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/product/pillars-1-for-percussion-quartet)

Another way Bozidar influenced me was by his use of the harmonic spectra as a musical space. Again, I have tried to develop my own way to explore this, different both to his, and to that of the ‘French spectralists’ such as Gerhard Grisey. [\[Play excerpt of Kos *Violin Concerto* slow movement and *Partials* by Grisey\].](#)

Links to both these wonderful pieces can be easily found on Youtube.

I demonstrated what tempo modulation and interval segregation are during the original presentation, probably making up an example in the moment. Briefly, tempo modulation (also known as metric modulation) is a technique where pulses are regrouped to suggest a different tempo. For example, in m.60, one may be hearing a passage based on semiquavers, i.e. there is a clear crotchet (quarter note) beat occurring every second, and there are rhythms based around a division of this beat into four. These semiquavers (sixteenth notes) might then be grouped into threes, with a strong accent. The beat is now perceived as being m.80, so there has been a ‘modulation’ to a faster tempo.

Interval segregation simply means that different layers in the music are assigned and limited to specific musical intervals. One part may only play minor seconds, minor thirds and augmented fourths. Another may only play major thirds, Perfect fifths and semitones as links. Generally, these would be distributed in different tessitura so the distinct sonic character of each layer is perceived by the listener. Both these techniques have become known as foundational attributes of Elliott Carter’s earlier music, his second string quartet being a prime example. However, the seeds for these techniques lie as far back as Mozart and Verdi, probably much earlier. I’d argue – in fact, this just occurs to me as I sit writing – that the principles are apparent in the isorythmic motets of Philippe de Vitry and the *Ars Nova* (14th Century), although here, the duplum and triplum layers are ‘smashed together’ and weave through each other in the same register and aren’t made distinct in the way the later examples are. Here is an example, in fact the example I studied in music history as an undergraduate: [\[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slgZInGMKaU\]](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slgZInGMKaU)

In the percussion except played before, I realised I was becoming interested in having several subdivisions of a beat occurring at once, and this was only a short step away from having several regular longer pulsations (which I was beginning to explore anyway).¹⁶ I decided then to closely examine the music of Elliott Carter, whose early mature pieces in particular are characterised by this. Two other techniques of his I have adopted are **tempo modulation** [\[example\]](#) and **giant pulses** – used as a ‘clothesline’ upon which to ‘hang’ the music. Also gleaned is the use of **interval segregation** [\[example\]](#). Despite all this, I think overstating Carter as an influence is somewhat superficial, for our musics do not sound alike. I use the techniques differently and for different reasons, and they are only part of my vocabulary. That being said, I do find myself drawn to his writings, and sharing a similar standpoint on many issues. And I just like listening to his music.

¹⁶ This is a little confused – I think I meant that the regular pulsations, consisting of different groups of different subdivisions (arbitrary e.g. 11 semiquavers: 12 quaver triplets) were working my way into my music as a result of reading an essay by Carter and wanting to experiment – and that I then decided to properly familiarise myself with Elliott Carter’s exploration of this in his actual music, which until then, strange it seems now, but I somehow had avoided. [12/10/2015]

[Type text]

One thing I don't make much of in the paper, perhaps because it is all about 'Defining a Language', is the influence of the serious study of North Indian tabla and Javanese Gamelan. Again, they both are extensions of my activity as a performer. The cessation of active engagement with those to activities also coincides with withdrawal from vibraphone and the music being much more 'in my head' than embodied. I think there is an obvious link between familiarity with gamelan and multi layered musical textures, and the use of isorhythms and other cyclic approaches connects to both Indian and Javanese music. And the complexity is paralleled by significant quiet music within even the densest of these works, speaking to my interest in Zen and Buddhism, but also the interest in Japanese culture.

Another composer from whom I have learnt a great deal is Tōru Takemitsu, largely through examination of his application of Japanese cultural/philosophical ideas to essentially Western art music (particularly *Rain Spell*, which I analysed for my honours thesis last year). Above all however: his use of silence.

An interesting recollection from my junior high school years is an obsession with ninjas and the TV show *Monkey Magic*. For one of my birthdays I received a book by the first Western trained ninja Stephen K Hayes about the spiritual roots of the ninja and shugendo (ascetic practices). Zen is one of its spiritual roots. And the television show *Monkey Magic* featured a huge Buddha character – more like a Greek God in how he functioned in the show – that appeared from time to time. One day in art at school, I made a clay medallion, perhaps the size of a coaster for a mug, with something like a Buddha image and an inscription in it. It was a catholic school, and amusing as it seems now, the art teacher was very concerned when she saw this come out of the kiln. As was my mother. At any rate, it evinces a curious fascination with Japan, even superficially, Buddhism, and East Asian culture more widely from a very young age, and it persists to this day. A scholarly interest in the music of Takemitsu and the influence upon me of that engagement is another aspect of that fruitful connection. And it's an authentic and deep connection, for me. It's alienated many colleagues who can't make sense of some, to them, quite alien ideas, but has been and continues to be a foundation that is key to my path as a person and artist.

Very recent influences – within the last six months, and mainly on my thinking¹⁷ - include David Lumsdaine, Varèse (whose music I always seem to come back to), Boulez, Alexander Goehr (his writings in particular), and most recently Barraque. And Alban Berg – I don't know his music quite as well as I thought I did.

These days (March, 2020) I don't listen to a lot of music. Right now, in self-isolation during the CV-19 crisis without any access to a vibraphone, either my own or the university's, I sure am, but in general I seek silence when I am not practicing. And so, the influences on my work tend to be primarily the performers I collaborate with either as a composer or improvising vibraphone player, nature and that silence I enjoy. I am in the process of beginning to methodically draw out these connections in a Doctor of Creative Arts, but I can say that many ideas from the writings of David Lumsdaine ('Towards a Zen Music', 'Chaotic Harmony' and his interview with Andrew Ford in 'Composer to Composer') are often on my mind and returned to.

Over the past few years, I have listened to a lot of traditional Korean court music, Japanese music and found a source of inspiration in translations of classical Chinese poetry and in

¹⁷ As opposed to directly influencing my music in any ways obvious to me at the time [22/10/2015]

Japanese poems. Most of all I have been spurred on by a quorum of supportive musicians, the most significant being my brother Sam (with whom I continue to perform as Mind on Fire), Peter McNamara (with whom I co-direct the Sideband project and who has motivated me several times when I was close to giving up), Daniel Herscovitch (who has commissioned, performed and recorded a few works now and become a good friend) and more recently flautist Chloe Chung (through collaborating on my improvisation based piece *Tomb* for percussion and dizi), sopranos Chloe Lankshear, Deepka Ratra and Zoe Drummond. Finally, both personally and musically my partner Martha Sidik, who along with my efforts at meditation and its extension as vibraphone practice as path, grounds me.

Full list of resources cited or background to both the original 1999 paper and the current exploratory ‘Conversation with my Younger Self’

Buzacott, Martin (1999) [Tough or Tender?](#) (in *24 Hours*), ABC

Buzacott, Martin (1999) [Wearing Maturity Well](#) in ‘24 Hours’, ABC

Carter, Elliott (1998) [Elliott Carter: Collected Essays and Lectures, 1937-1995](#), University of Rochester Press

Carter and Hopkins, Link (ed.) (2002) [Elliott Carter: Harmony Book](#), Carl Fischer

Chang Wen, Venerable (2014) [Music from the Chan/Zen Mind](#) in ‘Chan Magazine, Summer 2014’: <http://chancenter.org/cmc/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/BookSummer2014web.pdf>

Ford, Andrew (1993) [Composer to Composer](#), Hale and Iremonger

Gill, Bradley (2005) [Compositional Technique and the Exploration of Spirituality in the Music of Brad Gill](#), unpublished PhD, Sydney Conservatorium, University of Sydney

Gill, Bradley (1998) BMus Honours thesis analysing Toru Takemitsu’s ‘Rain Spell’, unpublished, Sydney Conservatorium, University of Sydney

Gill, Bradley (2005) [Approaching Towards a Zen Music: a Creative Response](#): <http://www.sideband.com.au/zen-music-gill.html>

Goehr, Alexander (1998) [Finding the Key: Selected Writings of Alexander Goehr](#), London: Faber and Faber

Grout, Donald J. (1980) [A History of Western Music](#) (2nd Edition), Hardcover Publishers

Hayes, Stephen (1986) [Ninja realms of Power: Spiritual Roots and Traditions of the Shadow Warrior](#), Contemporary Books

Hindson, Matthew (1999) [A Golden Age?](#) *Sounds Australian*, Australian Music Centre

Ho, E. 1997, ‘Aesthetic Considerations in understanding Chinese literati musical behaviour’, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 6, pp. 35-49.

[Type text]

Huyssen, Andreas (date unknown) Mapping Out the Postmodern (currently unable to locate original source)

Kos, Bozidar (date unknown) In Search of Perceptible Harmonic Organisation (unpublished paper)

Kos, Bozidar (1999) PhD (Unpublished, University of Sydney)

Kramer, David (1978) Moment form in twentieth Century Music, in 'Music Quarterly', April, LXVI:2, 181

Lumsdaine, David (1983) Towards a Zen Music, (unpublished) excerpt from a paper presented at Kings College, London

Lumsdaine, David (1996) Chaotic Harmony, (unpublished)

McLeod, Jenny (1994) Tone clock theory expanded: chromatic maps I and II, (unpublished)

Palisca, C. V. (Ed.) (1988, 1980) Norton Anthology of Western Music, Volume 1: Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, 2nd Edition, Norton

Reynolds, Roger (2001) Form and Method: Composing Music – the Rothschild Essays, Routledge Press

Rosen, Charles (1997) The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven (second edition), Faber and Faber

Skowron, Zbigniew (2007) Lutoslawski on Music, Scarecrow Press Inc

Toop, Richard (1999) The Heart's Ear – review (from *Sounds Australian*) ABC

Uchiyama, Kosho (2004) Opening the Hand of Thought: Foundations of Zen Buddhist Practice, Wisdom, Boston

Williams, Alastair (1997) New Music and the Claims of Modernity, Ashgate Publishing