

The Fantastic, the Real and the Hybrid: Towards a practice of material ontology in my recent creative work.

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Map: Introduction

If the title reads like something of a fairy story, then the purpose of this text has already been at least half understood. This is indeed the telling of a story. Like many archetypal plots, this story outlines the details of a journey. This particular journey exposits the emergence of new attitudes and understandings in my recent creative practice regarding the identity of musical materials. However, this journey does not follow the archetype of a quest. Regarding the issues explored, the text is not a philosophical pronouncement upon the conceptual fabrics from which musics are formed in any general sense - no particular proverb or ethical 'call to arms' lies at its end. Moreover, this text serves as something of a travelogue from a curious *flâneur*, offering this composer's account as to 'how I came to be here,' although as yet there is no indication that I will stay 'here' indefinitely.

My present 'here' is a place occupied by a compositional approach to ideas of material identity that I have come to refer to colloquially in my work as *hybrid speciation*, although, as shall later be elaborated, these two words are ultimately unsatisfactory. In such work, any emergent identity of the heard surface of a given musical passage is encouraged via the collisional entwining of multiple holistic/textural behaviours in compositional space (i.e. on the composer's desk, outside of experienced musical time). Such a preoccupation is not concerned with the creation of some kind of composite musical organism - as the word hybrid, through its imperfection, will suggest. Instead, such efforts can be better understood as a means of reimagining the compositional act as a *conduit*, where, appropriating terminologies from Karen Barad, *intra-actions* of musical agencies are permitted to diffract (Barad 2007). Such operations can be further conceptualised as an opening-out of the ends of my compositional makings, directing authorial intension into a space unpremeditated by any constituent input criterion or author, into 'a zone of indiscernibility that is common to several forms, irreducible to any of them' (Deleuze 2003 p.42).

Yet my arrival at the above occurs later. As previously stated, the purpose of this text is not simply to explicate this destination but more to describe the conceptual spaces traversed in order to reach it. It is not claimed that the route taken is in any sense efficient or necessary (in the philosophical sense) but it is hoped that, in documenting its various meanders, a contextually

clearer perspective upon my current practice(s) will be permitted. As such, this story now requires a beginning – such a beginning is, somewhat ironically, initiated by an ending.

Departure: The Fantastic

Prior to embarking upon the journey here described, the preoccupations of my compositional work focused upon what I came to call *activated notions of disruption*, a grammar in which transformative musical processes were re-considered in terms of destructive force. Here, materials changed through damage; musical ideas were eroded or encrusted in compositional space. Such ideas formed the basis of my doctoral thesis (Sergeant 2013), from which this chapter heavily draws. In exploring such ideas, an ongoing search for new planes of operation appeared, seeking new conceptual spaces into which such strategies could be transposed. Initially, such planes were parametrically defined – notions of timbral damage, for example, were explored – but increasingly what occurred was a gradual transference into a more notional space; a conceptual ‘zooming out’ in an attempt to widen this emerging vocabulary and the different classes of force it may contain.

It was from within this context that I came to the work of Tzvetan Todorov, more specifically his notion of the *fantastic* (Todorov 1975). It is here that this story begins. For Todorov, the fantastic materializes as a literary genre, a realm in which we (as readers) are presented with ‘a world which is indeed our world, the world we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, [and in this world] there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world’ (ibid. p.25). In Todorov’s vocabulary, such an event invokes

a hesitation common to reader and character, who must decide whether or not what they perceive derives from “reality” as it exists in the common opinion. [...] If he [or she] decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny. If, on the contrary, he decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvellous. (ibid. p.41)

By way of elaboration we may consider the following thought experiment. A story tells of a number of people who bore witness to the sudden appearance of a unicorn wandering the streets of Brixton, South London. Later that evening, the national news runs one of two possible stories covering the event. In the first, the event is revealed to be the work of an elaborate hoax: there was no unicorn, it was merely an illusion brought about via pranksters and prosthetics. However in the second version, experts are brought to the scene, capture the animal and verify its status as an entirely new species.

Should the first account be broadcast, my story moves into the realm of the *uncanny* – its spectacular events are accounted for within the normative precepts of reality. Should the second version of events be aired, the nature of my story veers into the *marvellous* – a new reality has been created in which unicorns both exist and are native to various areas of South London. But now consider a third scenario, where *no* story is broadcast. The unicorn disappears without trace and is never seen again. For my readers, its nature remains unknown; they remain encapsulated in *hesitation* – the threshold between the territories of the uncanny and the marvellous. It is via the invocation and sustainment of this threshold that Todorov's notion of the fantastic can be located.

The operations enclosed by this Todorovian model have not gone without transposition into a musical domain. Marianna Ritchey, for example, explores Tzvetan's conceptual framework in relation to Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* (1830). Ritchey's work draws particular attention to the fantastical hesitation invoked from the collision of normative structural axioms expounded by the prevailing (Beethovenian) symphonic model of the time and their distorted counterparts as manifest in the *Épisode de la vie d'un Artiste* (Ritchey 2010 p.183). In such an example, the conceptual space in which Todorovian forces are activated is located within the interface between audience and musical work. As Ritchey identifies, the *cinq parties* exhibits sufficient characteristics for a socio-culturally contemporaneous audience (at least) to locate it within a certain set of normative expectations. Once framed in this way, Berlioz can instigate events within this infrastructure that have the potential to create hesitation in the mind of the audience through a departure from – or friction with – such precepts.

But perhaps my most impactful interaction with the Todorovian model lay in considering its potential expansion into another dimension. The audience is not the only hesitating agent within this space, as Todorov explains in relation to the character of Alfonso from Potocki's *Saragossa Manuscript*.

Who hesitates in this story? As we see at once, it is Alfonso – in other words, the hero, the central character. It is Alfonso who, throughout the plot, must choose between two interpretations. [...] The fantastic therefore implies an integration of the reader into the world of the characters; that world defined by the reader's own ambiguous perception of the event narrated. (Todorov 1975 p.31)

I began to wonder, to what extent could internal (perhaps even 'diagetic' is a useful term here) musical material generate a hesitation between itself and its surrounding musical context, its musical 'reality'?

A particular musical moment immediately sprang to my mind – the musical ending which, as mentioned earlier, prompted this beginning. Consider the ending moments of Richard Barrett's

Vanity (1990-94), for large orchestra. For nearly twenty-five minutes, an abrasively dissonant and texturally ornate behavioral environment is occupied by the work. But the last bar offers me something rather extraordinary within this context: emerging from dense chromatically saturated orchestral textures, a quotation, comprising a single bar from Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* quartet (No. 14 in D minor, D810, II - Andante con moto) emerges, played by a solo string quartet. Barrett's composition then ends.

For me at least, this particular musical moment has always emitted an intuitive sense of 'what on earth was that?!' The event - the sudden and brief appearance of Schubert's music - seems so at odds with the environment from which it has materialized that I seem to be forced into an unclaimed perspectival space: not enough music follows for me to conceptually accommodate this gesture within the behavioral precedents of the preceding music (the uncanny), nor is there enough preceding from the event for my ears to reformulate my notions of the 'virtual world' within which I might have previously thought myself located (the marvellous). The quotation could serve as a conceptual violence - a hesitation - pushing me into the realms of the fantastic.

And so the story could end. Using the lexicon here outlined, I could have been led to develop my own musical work where different classes of musical event(s) could have been used to spark hesitation-forces operating along multifarious lines - some resolving into the uncanny, others into the marvellous. Instead what occurred was something of a reversal, or at least a kind of introspection within these terms, a reversal that led me not to a preoccupation with some kind of composed musical fantasy, but with a complete reconsideration of my compositional formulation of a 'musical reality' itself.

Transport: The Real

Introducing Todorov's ideas into my musical thinking began to allow me to see a new operational space. The Todorovian model is absolutely meshed with ideas of the real. Within this, there are notions of internality, exteriority and boundary here which, when interweaving them with *musical* identities, become increasingly uncomfortable. The spatialisation of these terms is deliberate. Todorov's accepted reality is encapsulated by a boundary, enclosing an inside. Fantastical events placed within this inside instigate discourse with an outside. Events resolving into the marvellous manipulate the limits of the boundary, whereas events resolving into the uncanny serve to coronate it.

As might be materialising from the discourse of the preceding section, I find the idea of considering a piece of music as an environmental space enormously beguiling (as will become increasingly important later). I find it useful to consider a piece of my own music-in-formulation as a metaphorical habitat for various musical organisms (the material) to occupy and interact with and within. I suppose the initial appeal of Todorov's ideas could be reconsidered within this

context as a potential way of introducing some kind of 'foreign' species into these habitats in an attempt to somehow destabilize it, like the well-documented introduction of cane toads into Australia. Yet the introduction of cane toads into the Australian ecosystem, however disastrous for the normative equilibrium of the presiding ecology, does not, of course, constitute an affront to the reality of an Australian ecosystem itself. For better or worse, the ecosystem transforms around the introduction of the foreign species.

What such allegory permits me to see and now introduce is the problematical relationship with an idea of innate boundary, especially when re-considering such ideas with regard to a musical composition as an environment. Even remaining within the ecological analogy for a moment, how does one ultimately define a single environmental habitat? Does appreciating the habitat of a fish end at the shore of its lake? Should it also accommodate the river systems that feed it? Or the geology that created those rivers? Or the movement of plate tectonics that created that geology? Or perhaps even the laws of physics that govern those geologies? And if we expand the boundary this far - and even beyond - what meaningful purpose does it hold?

This position can be grounded more concretely back into a musical domain by a simple thought experiment concerning binary form. Here, a musical material, A, is juxtaposed alongside/against a contrasting musical material, B, the resulting musical structure being succinctly described as AB. But it is the collisional aspect of this form that most interests me here. When A meets B, a rift of difference is necessarily formed between the two musical identities; they have to be marked apart in order for their structure to exist. Yet somehow it seems problematical to describe this meeting as an invocation of the fantastic. Again, ideas of internality/exteriority are useful here. Simply by being entwined in the same musical work, the two ideas remain interior to one another. Upon hearing B, any presupposed environmental 'boundary' (although the arbitrary nature of this term is becoming apparent) set up by 'A' may have to be readjusted, but the space, the habitat, the work, remains intact.

In light of such thinking, my original consideration of Barrett's *Vanity* seems at least premature. How is this different from that explicated above? The introduction of the Schubert quotation instigates a delineation of material but it seems increasingly melodramatic to claim that it constitutes a challenge to the reality-space occupied by the work as a whole. It (the quotation) becomes a part of the whole - it is interior-ised within the work's ontology. Indeed, as I listen to the piece more, what increasingly strikes me is how, when this particular moment arrives, the preceding context for the quotation makes me hear Schubert's music somehow differently. The context changes how the quoted material tropes seem to *be*.

Such thoughts are beginning to lead me to wonder whether, in a Todorovian realm at least, musical environments - pieces as I think of them - are somehow trapped in the *perpetually* marvellous. A musical event always becomes part of its wider formal context.

Rather than a musical identity (a material, a section, an idea) being something containable within some fixed, almost Platonic, a-temporal enclosure of some kind, the emergence of musical identity seems far more anchored to a process of perpetual becoming. Musical ideas – and any identity they carry – seem to me locked into a process of perpetual experiential emergence, becoming itself endlessly as it does so. This is not, by the way, to make some kind of neo-Modernist claim about self-referentiality. Through its becoming, musical identity is removed from the abstract rationalism of the dictums of the score object and repositioned through and of the experience of the listener subject, as Nietzsche eloquently summarises below.

I set apart with high reverence the name of *Heraclitus*. When the rest of the philosopher crowd rejected the evidence of the senses because these showed plurality and change, he rejected their evidence because they showed us things as if they possessed duration and unity. Heraclitus too was unjust to the senses, which lie neither in the way the Eleatics believe nor as he believed – they do not lie at all. It is what we make of their evidence that first introduces a lie into it, for example, the lie of unity, the lie of materiality, of substance, of duration... ‘Reason’ is the cause of our falsification of the evidence of the senses. In so far as the senses show becoming, passing away, change, they do not lie... But Heraclitus will always be right in this, that being is an empty fiction. (Nietzsche 1990 p.46)

Such classes of thoughts and realisations transported my own creative attitude towards material ontology – my starting point from where I might consider what music material ‘is’ – to a new conceptual domain. For too long have I perhaps referred to the constituent musical personalities in my compositions as idea-X and/or/against idea-Y, tracking their recurrence and development across a score with complete disregard for the inevitable mono-directional flow of musical time. Musical identity – indeed, musical identities – do not drop out of the musical experience in discrete self-encapsulated ‘packets,’ they necessarily unfurl through a temporal experience. As such, interrelating such ideas across time as being of the same permanent and somehow a-temporal essence seems misleading, or at least preventative for wider thought. As Deleuze says, ‘Repetition is not generality’ (Deleuze 2004 p.1). To return to a something within a piece is to let it be infected with memory, innately bifurcating it from the original through an experience of difference. To draw boundaries around delineable musical ideas within a work, to other them from one another, seems as abstract and artificial as to claim that the world ceases to exist outside of the shores of the pond (to refer back to the analogy above). What became fascinating to me was the prospect of moving away from notions of material-as-object, with all the enclosure such ideas can now be read to entail, to a more holistic position of material-as-behaviour.

It is in relation to such behavioural states that perhaps my direct interaction with identity as a matter of perpetual becoming can begin to be more concretely articulated with regard to my compositional practice. I have made analytical dissections of my work of this nature elsewhere (e.g. Sergeant 2013) and for reasons of space these shall not be repeated here. As a summary, such behavioural states are defined by a set of executed statistical likelihoods applied to parametric values. These likelihoods are used to create patterns of kinetic textural behaviour; the material is no longer defined by individual parametric input classes (pitches, intervals, durational ratios, etc.) but by the generalised mannerisms they enact as they unfurl together through time.

Of course, such an approach to material definition is not in itself new. Composers such as Elliott Carter, Tom Johnson and Brian Ferneyhough, for example, have explored such holistic notions of musical material in multifaceted ways. Whilst it is not possible to document all of such methodologies at this juncture, one could mention that Carter's employment of 'character-patterns' forms a potential approach of material-as-behaviour, where '*intervals, metronomic speeds, polyrhythms and rhythmic characters* [are] used to dramatize the musical personalities of textures' (Schiff 1998 p.36 emphasis retained). Notions of behaviourally defined materials could also be even attributed to certain of the didactic processes of Tom Johnson. His *tiling* of materials, for example, appears to produce an identity far more defined by the (highly deterministic) process journeyed by his materials than by parametric data 'inputted' into these processes (Johnson 2008). Similar ideas are found in the work of Ferneyhough, particularly explicated in his exploration of the nature of musical figures in relation to *lines of force*.

Lines of force arise in the space between objects – not space as temporal lacuna, atopia, but at that moment of conceptual differentiation in which identity is born – and take as their vehicular object the connective impetus established in the act of moving from one discrete musical event to another. (Ferneyhough 1995 p.35)

What is illuminated to me here is that these notions of material identity that are not, indeed *cannot*, be enclosed within any given single musical moment. Instead, the identity that appears to be arising presents more as a continuum, perpetually becoming itself as its multifarious figures traverse through time, as Ferneyhough further expands

The figure develops momentary perceptual frames – stage sets – capable of projecting particular hypothetical evaluational categories into the still-to-be perceived future of the discourse. To some extent, we recognize and locate the nature of such a frame whilst still physically living-through the decay and dissipation of one or more anterior frames, whereby the partial superincumbence or 'cross fading' of an indeterminate

series of prior states comes to provide a significant, albeit necessarily fluid and evolutionary perspectival orientation. (Ferneyhough 1995 p.37)

To return to my own statistically defined approach and to develop further, if we were to artificially reintroduce a concept of encapsulated *object* into my scenario – an enclosed definition of a material being – such an object could only take the form of the sets of probabilities and statistical relations from which the instance of my material was originally seeded. My material as heard in the score is ultimately a single example from an infinity of possible instances of a particular behavioural class. In being defined by a set of statistical likelihoods and not inevitabilities, in essence, all possible outcomes of a particular behavioural trope are permitted the possibility to exist.

By way of elaboration, consider another thought experiment. A behavioural model is derived such that each of the twelve composite pitches of a one-octave chromatic scale are probabilistically weighted according to a distribution. Within this scenario, the pitch of A4 receives the lowest chance of being selected: the chances of its selection are set at 0.00001 (i.e. extremely unlikely). The selection is made according to this distribution and, surprisingly, the result yields a sequence of one hundred iterations of A4. Such a scenario should not be misread as a failure; it is entirely possible for this behavioural model to output this instance, it is just highly unlikely.

This experiment illustrates the innate bifurcation induced here between the *instance* of such statistical processes and any statistical *object* from which such instances are ultimately derived. It is not possible to wholly and absolutely resurrect the framework from the instance (reading the one hundred iterations of A4 in this way would suppose a framework whereby $P(A4)=1$). Thus, in a sense, the absolute identity of the material – as symbolised by its statistical framework – is positioned at a point of innate non-enclosure. To invert the sentiment and put it another way: to achieve concrete knowledge of my behavioural material is to achieve a holistic and simultaneous awareness of *all* possible outcomes of the particular statistical field. This is ultimately a knowledge of an infinity and, as such, is beyond the scope of human experience: one can get the ‘gist’ of a behavioural identity but cannot absolutely grasp it. The identity of my behavioural materials, then, is in a sense more innately unenclosed.

And so again the story could end. Yet it struck me that there was still a conceptual reconciliation that I needed to allow to take place. Returning to the analogy which opened this section, such conceptions of material substance have aided my redefinition at the level of the musical organism, without using that which was gleaned as part of this thought process to re-inform the level of the habitat. As it stands, the questions arising from the *gedanken* experiment concerning binary form have not yet been overcome. What of the conceptual infrastructure I have developed, for example, addresses issues arising from simply juxtaposing materials-as-behaviours? Without reconsidering

the nature of the habitat in which my musical behaviours are to survive, the risk of re-enclosure is strong. Hybridising these two conceptual levels has become the focus of my most recent creative enquiries.

Arrival: The Hybrid

The first move came as a process of reflection of the two ontological scales – treating the formal elements of a composition in the same behaviourally defined manner that I had previously derived in my local-level materials. Such manoeuvres took the form of open-ended, modular compositions, such as *bet denagel* (2013, for solo Baroque violin). A miniature image of the score can be seen below in figure 1.

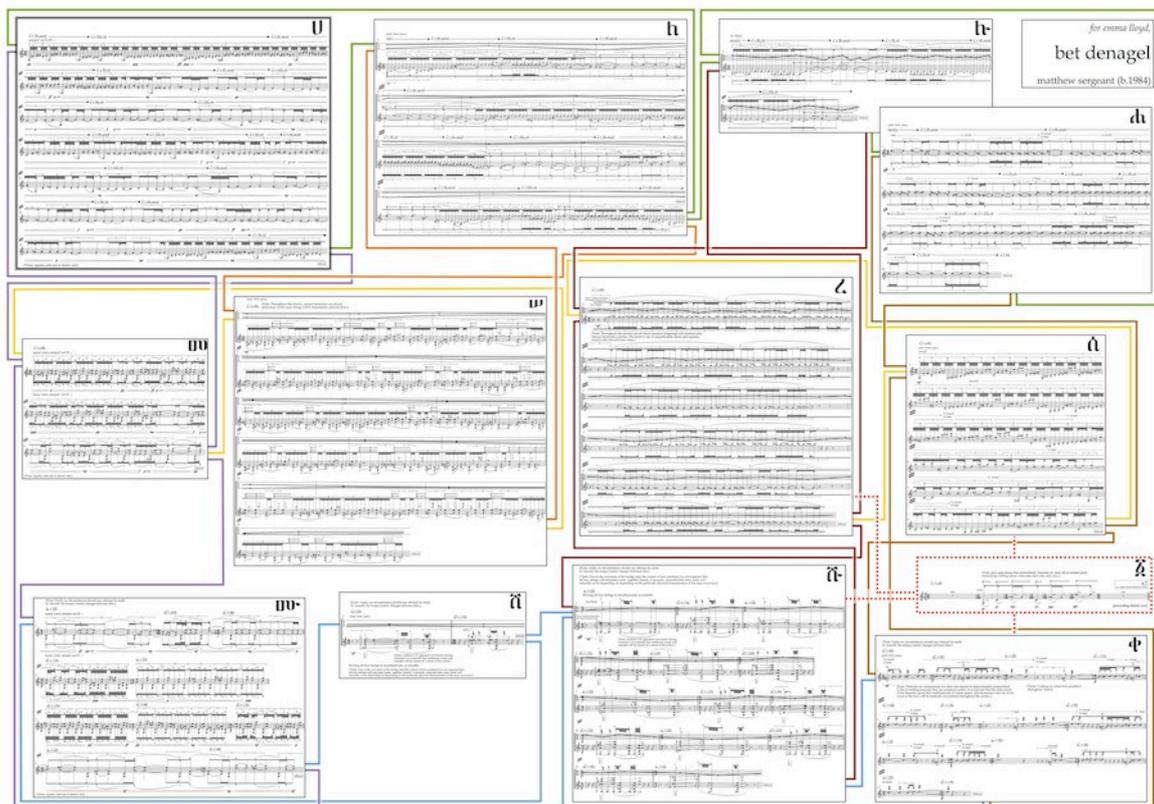


Figure 1: Matthew Sergeant: *bet denagel* (2013, for solo Baroque violin): miniature score.

The performance version of this material is printed on a single sheet of large (A0) paper, allowing the violinist to view the entire layout of the composition at one time. The score presents a series of (boxed) modules, labelled as *districts* in my sketches, connected with coloured lines, referred to as *paths*. A performance may ‘move’ from district-to-district at the will of the violinist, providing the two districts are connected by a path. The performer may return to certain districts in the same performance or omit districts entirely but must start and end a given performance at the same district. A caveat is also provided, that the district enclosed with *dotted* lines (towards the bottom-

right of figure 1), referred to as the *landmark* in my sketches, *must* be played in any given performance and only performed *once*. *bet denagel* makes use of behaviourally defined local-scale materials within (and even across in certain circumstances) each district.

bet denagel was the first of my compositions to begin to explore more open-ended formal properties. Yet, rather than acting as a casual foray into interdeterminism, the attempt can be better understood in terms of a reflection of the principals that had previously governed my more local-scale processes. Whilst every iteration of the piece will be substantially different (performances to date have ranged from eight to forty minutes, for example), there are general patternistic behavioural properties to the form of the piece that, although open-ended to an infinity of possibilities, serve to inevitably unfurl as the piece progresses. Certain districts will always occur in the same temporal vicinity as others, for example (due to the network of paths). The landmark will only occur ever once, although it could take any position within the larger temporal frame. Thus, to follow terminologies from pervious, although larger-scale characteristics consistently present through and across iterations, these are locked more into a perpetual state of becoming. The ultimate formal identity of the work is not closed or encapsulated in any particular 'place' but amorphously appears through and of each iteration of the work in performance.

Yet a tension emerged when I considered the work retrospectively in terms of space. At its core, the behaviourally defined larger-scale identity of *bet denagel* is spatial. It is the spatial layout of the material on the page that ultimately derives its temporal characteristics. In a sense, the contents of the space (and its various district-subspaces) are arbitrary; the perpetual becoming of the piece's larger scale will emerge regardless of material substance or conception is placed in each district. A conceptual bifurcation seemed to have unwittingly taken place between the two ontological levels; the habitat is not entwined with the musical organisms that have come to call it home.

My arrival at reconciliation of these levels came from reconsidering ideas of formal identity within approaches to the organisation of space itself. Consider Bernard Tschumi's ideas concerning his project for the *Parc de la Villette* (Paris, 1988-92), for example.

One of the goals at La Villette was to pursue this investigation of the concept of structure, as expressed in the respective forms of the point grid, the coordinate axes [...] and the "random curve" [...]. Superimposing these autonomous and completely logical structures meant questioning their conceptual status as ordering machines: the superimposition of three coherent structures can never result in a supercoherent megastructure, but in something undecidable, something that is the opposite of a totality. (Tschumi 1996 p.199)

What struck me about such practice was the inter-relational discourse between the larger and smaller architectural scales. The larger-scale identity of the project, if such an encapsulated terminology is appropriate here, is not imposed as an enclosed quality, it is encouraged to emerge – to become – through the conflict and collision of its interior elements. The form is now the *output* of its contents, not the contents the articulation of the form. It is with such notions that my most recent work has come to engage. It is from within this resultant space that my first hybrids began to emerge.

Hybrid speciation is a term I appropriated from evolutionary biology that describes the phenomenon of two interbreeding species producing a third independent species. In my compositional practice, I have used the term to describe a more collisional approach to material becomings. Here, rather than using behavioural mannerisms as the formulating principles of, say, a given musical line, that line is now deconstructed into several parallel planes of operation, each with an independently conceived behavioural characteristic.

My recent short composition *shell* (2014, for solo voice) is particularly indicative of the process. An excerpt of the score can be seen below in figure 2.

Figure 2: Matthew Sergeant: *shell* (2014, for solo voice): bars 1-3

The voice is here disassembled into several parallel-operating material ‘agents.’ The behaviour of consonants is, for example, rhythmically decoupled from the kinetic behaviour of vowels. Taking inspiration from the recent vocal music of Aaron Cassidy, for example, vocal aspects not normally compositionally controlled, such as glottis position, are also activated into such territories (Cassidy 2013).

Each strata is assigned a separate statistically controlled behavioural palette, itself an extension of the static patterns employed in my earlier music (c.f. *bet merkorios*, 2012, for solo cello). Each stratum is now assigned up to six statistical mannerisms, each containing a different degree of textural kineticism. Transitions between such mannerisms are also statistically controlled so as to weight transition between certain states and not others. The process is composed algorithmically as software patches in IRCAM’s OpenMusic environment, an iteration of which ultimately

generates the final score. An example of a screenshot of this compositional space can be seen in figure 3 (here being used in the composition of my piece *lichen*, for electric lap-steel guitar, currently in progress at the time of writing).

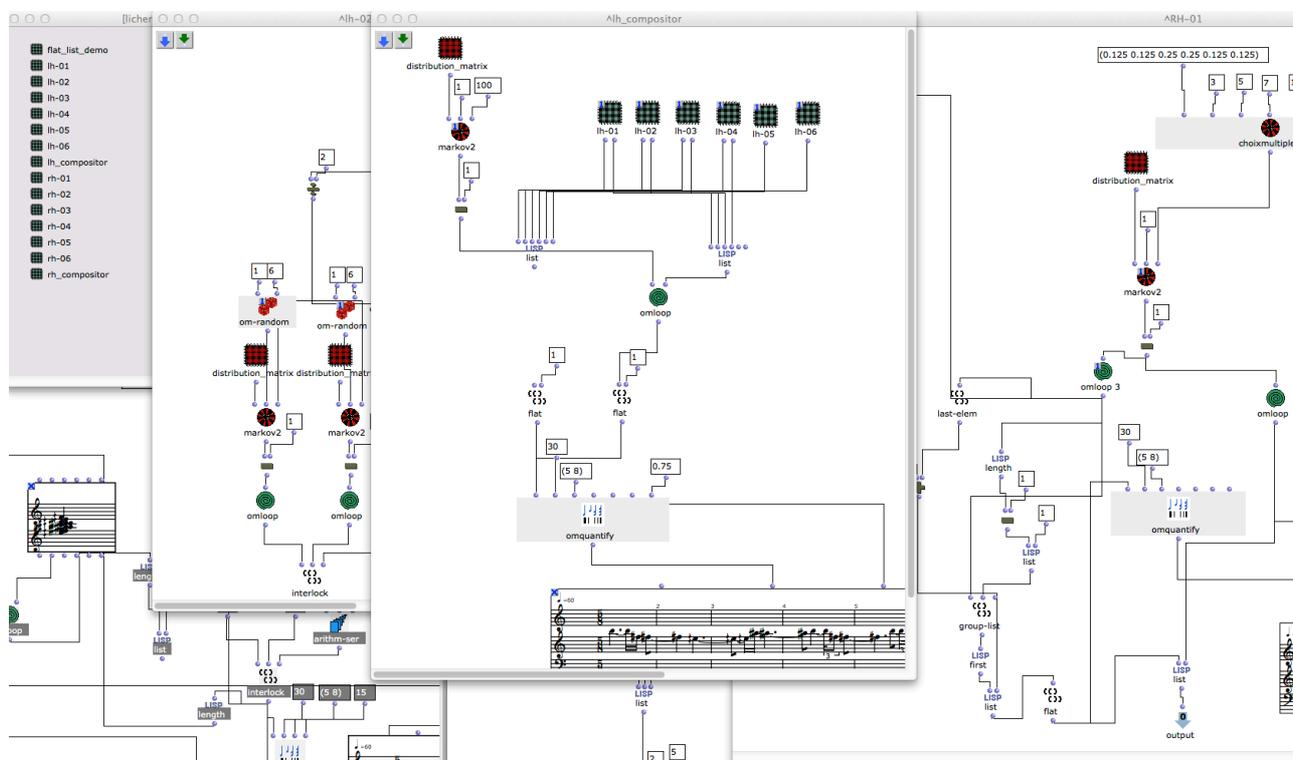


Figure 3: Screenshot of OpenMusic environment as used in the composition of *lichen* (in progress, for solo electric lap-steel guitar)

In performance, the various material becomings are recombined, fusing and colliding the strata into what I came to initially understand as sonic hybrid. Central to such a conception is an idea of erasure and conflict between the material layers. Especially exemplified within the physical context of the voice, there is necessary mutual effect on the layers as they are performed with simultaneity. The movements of the tongue necessitated to execute certain consonant sounds conflict with the parallel demands of the consonants, forcing into sonic existence musical moments that are not merely the compositing of the original inputs – in their combination new gestural ‘species’ emerge. In my thinking at least, this bifurcates my notion of hybrid from, say, Messiaen’s *Mode de valeurs et d’intensités* (1944), where the *co-existence* of the various parametric series at any given moment seems more prioritised.

It will be noted that such discussion, however brief, has said nothing about the structural identity of such musical worlds. What has moved to excite me about these entwined working contexts is the manner in which a formal identity for each piece emerges as a product of the collision of the subsurface material becomings (behaviours as material). The nature of the motions

within and frictions between material layers produce larger-scale phenomena. Kinetic or static mannerisms sometimes align between strata, creating larger scale zones as structural landmarks. In a sense, the larger scale identity of the work is an emergence of their mutual collision.

And yet, as previously stated, the originally appropriated terminologies of hybrid speciation no longer seem to adequately describe the space I am coming now to see.

Here

The idea of hybrid is of something concrete and the biological process of hybrid speciation produces something concrete. Indeed, the idea of speciation itself is a process of encapsulation, of 'locating a being something' somewhere. As I have come to witness the development of my work along this path, such terms seem increasingly at odds with the space I have come to see. My interaction with material ontology has consistently resisted the urge to enclose, to build becomings, not beings. I find processes of becoming increasingly evident in the compositional process itself. Rarely now do I have any idea what the final destination/sonic-identity of my compositions will be. I seem now to be creating contexts more than anything else, letting the material become as it collides and entangles with itself in performance and on the page.

In seeking an alternative descriptive mechanism for the ontological space I have come to occupy, I am drawn to the so-called onto-epistemological 'agential realism' of Karen Barad (Barad 2007). Whilst the intricacy of her ideas will prevent full explication here, to attempt introduction to them is to begin with the physical phenomena of diffraction. 'Simply stated, diffraction has to do with the way waves combine when they overlap and the apparent bending and spreading of waves that occurs when they encounter an obstruction.' (ibid. p.74) What is introduced here is a notion of becoming that exists through and of a kind of collision. The phenomenon of diffraction does not exist in the wave, nor in any obstructing *apparatus* (a term Barad herself substantially develops) but in the mutual coalescence of both – an idea that Barad defines as *intra-action*.

The notion of intra-action is a key element of my agential realist framework. The neologism "intra-action" signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual "interaction," which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. (ibid. p.33 emphasis retained)

I find much comfort here. It is not that my material strata have any prior reality outside of the heard experience of my compositions, nor do they manifest through the hybrids they become. Instead they seem to resemble agencies entangled in *intra-action*. Paradoxically, through their mutual coalescence in experienced musical time, they are bifurcated into themselves through witness of their entanglement. In entwining they become real.

Within this emergent space there is much to explore. An idea of musical material as a Baradian agency, for example, is a conceptual technology that I am only just beginning to understand. To dwell, for Barad, 'agency is a *matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not a something that someone or something has*. It cannot be designated as an attribute of subjects or objects (as they do not preexist as such. It is not an attribute whatsoever. *Agency is "doing" or "being" in its intra-activity. It is the enactment of iterative changes to particular practices – iterative reconfigurations of topological manifolds of spacetime-matter relations – through the dynamics of intra-activity. Agency is about changing possibilities of change [...].'* (ibid. p.178 emphasis retained) How long I say 'here' is thus almost an irrelevant question. My continuing journey will inevitably progress beyond the space in which it has here arrived. Where this will take my music is matter of conjecture at this moment. But that will be another story.

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