Music and Contemporary Theatre

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Contents

Abstract

As an adjunct discipline, my work as a composer for theatre is contingent on, and preoccupied with, its relationships to other elements of a larger totality, including, for example, the institutional, acoustic and dramaturgical territories in which the work takes place, as well as the pragmatic demands of cross-disciplinary performance-making. Assuming that context is deterministic of both creative choice and audience reception, my project asks how an engagement with context allows for the active construction of the listening experience.

The portfolio consists of a musical, *A Pacifist's Guide to the War on Cancer* (2016); a dance and music collaboration, *Clubbing* (2015); a video installation, *Binary Code* (2017); and other supplementary pieces in which context is treated as compositional material. The generic dissimilarity of the pieces in the portfolio allows for a methodological approach that is narrow in focus yet not restricted to a particular compositional style, mediation or kind of audience engagement. With specific focus on its effects on the voice and on collaboration, what does this expanded conception of musical material offer the composer and what are its limits? How might this differ from other expanded musical practices that are addressing similar concerns?[1]

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[1] This commentary is accompanied by a composition portfolio and supplementary material on a USB drive named 'TP PhD' attached to the front page.

List of Illustrations

Introduction

In the last decade or so, there has been a surge of scholarly interest in how theatre sounds. Although it has not yet united around a dedicated journal or an annual conference, what had been a marginal concern (almost entirely dominated by discussions of Beckett, Artaud, and one wilfully abstruse stage direction in *The Cherry Orchard*) has gradually moved – through edited collections, special issues and a growing number of monographs[2] – towards a recognisable field of enquiry, with its own terminology, associated practices, dissents and its own margins. Although this has brought welcome fresh air to the thinking around sound practices in theatre, there are two curious, and potentially intertwined, features of this new scholarly landscape that bear discussion and that coalesce not-quite-comfortably in my own work and thinking around it. Firstly, there is not a great deal of attention to music in theatre-sound discourse; and, secondly, beyond the odd metaphor, there is next to no mention of theatre in the wider discussions around sound or listening that have undergone a parallel, more public, expansion in recent years – although there is much said, for instance, about film, art and a host of other satellite practices.

Perhaps the latter is an oversight based on the easy assumption that theatre is synonymous with artifice and the function of sound and music in theatre is purely to shore up the drama. But, even when that is the case, there are things particular to the ways that sound and music operate in that context that tease apart some of the edges that have built up around other sound discourses. Most importantly, I would argue that there are things available to music in theatre that are not available to music in other disciplinary contexts. I would like, therefore, to tentatively suggest that the relative absence of music from the discourse on theatre-sound, and the absence of

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[2] Ross Brown, *Sound: A Reader in Theatre Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); George Home-Cook, *Theatre and Aural Attention* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Lynne Kendrick, *Theatre and Aurality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Lynne Kendrick and David Roesner (eds), *Theatre Noise: The Sound of Performance* (Newcastle- upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011); and Petra Maria Meyer, *Acoustic Turn* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2008).

that discourse itself from sound-studies more generally, might be oversights that are fruitful to examine together.

It is never emphatically stated what it is or how it might be manifest, but much of the writing around theatre-sound presupposes that there may be unique characteristics to sound in theatre.[3] If we can propose that, at the very least, the way that sound works in theatre is not quite the same as the way sound works in other contexts then we could begin to imagine that those differences might be compositionally productive. At the risk of over-determination, I would like to propose that what theatre offers to the practitioner is the ability to *compose* how sound is encountered, what kinds of listening are invoked and the perceptual space that sound occupies. Of course, these possibilities exist in other musical situations but it is possible in theatre to activate them dynamically, as material. If music is a disciplinary adjunct, it has the freedom to slip in and out of the margins of attention, to become the performative object, to act conceptually or environmentally, to intervene noisily or to render itself mediatically silent. Music can 'act' or it can present itself post-dramatically, it can construct spatial, temporal and interpersonal relationships, and it can compose the bridge between the bodies of the audience and the performer. All these possibilities have aesthetic and political ramifications, some expected, others less so.

In short, theatre is compositionally interesting because it allows us to direct when (and what kind of) listening is important. I'm not sure that holds elsewhere. If, as a chorus of scholarly voices propose, listening is contextually contingent, is there a more amenable environment to compositionally exploit this than theatre? Lynne Kendrik perhaps comes closest to a definitive statement of this position, closing her argument that what is special to theatre is its ability to creatively delimit the oppositional

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[3] In "Aural Acts: Theatre and the Phenomenology of Listening," George Home-Cook argues that "listening-in-the-theatre is a specialist mode of attention." In Lynne Kendrick and David Roesner (eds), *Theatre Noise: The Sound of Performance* (Newcastle- upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011): 97

ontologies of sound and noise with the beguiling proposal that "nowhere is this more apparent than in theatre practice."[4]

The portfolio that accompanies this commentary presents a number of ways in which these compositional possibilities are approached. It is largely concerned with two theoretical territories – those of material and context – and, as such, is written after a number of strands of contemporary thought: new materialism, relational aesthetics, post-psychoanalytical and feminist conceptions of 'sonorous' subjectivity, phenomenology and attention, actor-network theory, film sound, auditory scene analysis and theatre-sound scholarship (which is inevitably multidisciplinary in itself). However, in the main, I will not be referring to these fields directly and I have stayed away from making theoretical claims and from the impulse to categorise or make theoretical oppositions between my own practice and that of others. I turn to theory in my own thinking around my work because I do not want to valorise my own intuition or rely purely on my own ideas around its impact. But my practice is not theoretical in and of itself so I am retaining the possibility of contradiction and productive incoherence.

Similarly, the scholarship that I cite is largely included as an aid to making work rather than for theoretical analysis. Brandon LaBelle's *Lexicon of the Mouth*, for example, does not feature here because I have not (yet) found it productive, but Mladen Dolar's *A Voice and Nothing More* and Adrianna Cavarerro's *For More than one Voice* have been widely influential across both music and theatre, and their thinking has become part of the terminological horizon of both practice and theory, including my own.[5] Similarly, although Seth Kim Cohen's thinking around conceptual practice bears some similarities with what I will be saying about context, his insistence that disciplinary contexts are (or should be) ultimately interchangeable – an argument that is squarely in line with Cage – renders it

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[4] Kendrick, *Theatre and Aurality*, p. 107.
[5] Brandon Labelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014); Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

relatively useless in terms of my practice.[6] To borrow the poet Sarah Vap's beautiful term, disciplines here are, at most, 'susceptible' to each other's discourses, formalisms and sensory modalities.[7]

In the same way that the composer and performer Laetitia Sonami uses *distance* to categorise sounds, for example, my co-opting of *context* is not intended to be theoretically watertight but rather is an aid to responding creatively to interdisciplinary, collaborative situations – a provisional, generative methodology rather than an analytical framework.[8] Similarly, the readings that I propose are concerned more with the making of the work rather than the reception – cause rather than effect. Although possible receptions are ultimately deterministic of my compositional decisions, the work comes to exist in complex relation to a multitude of other things that are at least as impactful as my own concerns and intentions. This is not entirely a Barthesian avoidance of authorial responsibility – as I argue in Chapter 3, the kind of interpersonal context that my work inhabits is particularly resistant to a linear conceptual consistency from idea to manifestation.

The practices that I enlist to frame discussion of my own work are largely from experimental music. This is because, firstly, some practitioners there appear to be addressing similar problems to those expressed in this commentary and, secondly, this is where the substance of my energy as an audience member and reader is focused. That said, only two talking points recur in every chapter: the voice-based work of the composer Peter Ablinger and the hip hop producer Noah Shebib's account of his technological processes. The ostensible disparity of these practices is emblematic of the seemingly impractical breadth of the material in the portfolio. The

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[6] Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009). He says on p. xxiii: 'Everything is a conversation.' For Cage, see for example: 'Segregation – and I believe this strongly– must eventually be eliminated.' Cited in Daniel Charles, *For the Birds: John Cage in Conversation with Daniel Charles* (London: Marion Boyars, 1981), p. 161.
[7] Sarah Vap interviewed by Rachel Zucker on *Commonplace* podcast: https://www.commonpodcast.com/home/2017/6/1/episode-30-sarah-vap [Accessed 6 September 2018].
[8] On Laetitia Sonami, see Jennie Gottschalk, *Experimental Music Since 1970* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 116.

commentary is not meant to be a definitive account but a proposal for how these kinds of disparities could begin to be thematically reconciled.

Although other works are cited, the main talking points are *A Pacifist's Guide to the War on Cancer* (a musical), *Clubbing* (a dance and music piece for six performers playing a mixture of conventional and home-made instruments, electronics, Morris dancing sticks and voices) and *Binary Code* (a video installation).[9] I start by discussing one kind of material – the voice – then move on to a broader discussion of how context might be employed as compositional material, before closing with a discussion of one kind of context – collaboration – and how that impacts upon the work. As such, the commentary pivots around the second chapter and the idea of context as compositional material. The chapters either side provide specific examples of this at work, the first concentrating on the materiality of the voice and the last on the contextual and authorial implications of collaboration. The commentary ends with notes on the play *See Me Now*, which further complicates the provisional conclusions of the research project.[10]

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[9] *A Pacifist's Guide to the War on Cancer* by Bryony Kimmings, Tom Parkinson and Brian Lobel premiered 14 October 2016, the Dorfmann Stage, National Theatre, London. See the video of the performance and scores in the portfolio (Portfolio/1 A Pacifist's Guide To The War On Cancer/ A Pacifist's Guide To The War On Cancer.mov). *Clubbing* by Keren Levi and Tom Parkinson premiered 5 March 2016, Frascati, Amsterdam. See the first part of the performance in the portfolio (Portfolio/2 Clubbing/ Clubbing Opening Extract.mp4). The whole performance is in Supplementary Material/2 Clubbing/Clubbing Whole.mp4. *Binary Code* by Tom Parkinson premiered 18 January 2017, Come Together Festival, Frascati, Amsterdam. See an extract of the video in the portfolio (Portfolio/3 Binary Code/Binary Code Extract.mov).

[10] *See Me Now* by Molly Taylor and the company, directed by Mimi Poskitt, premiered 11 February 2017, the Young Vic, London. Note that because of the reputational risks to the cast of potential digital dissemination, the performances were not documented.

Chapter 1: Making Space for the Voice

'Speech sounds are first and foremost entities which are
contrastive, relative and negative.'
– Ferdinand de Saussure[11]

Unsurprisingly, amongst the range of sonic elements addressed in the burgeoning theoretical field of theatre-sound studies, the voice is perhaps the most widely covered.[12] It is possible this has come about because it is the sounding component of theatre performance that sits in closest proximity to those elements that are more easily rendered in critical discourse. Yet the voice has a rich theoretical and philosophical history from the classical Greeks through to the post-structuralists, in part because of its resistance to understanding.[13] It is a nexus at which the performer and the performance text meet, but it is constituted neither by the body nor by language. How the voice is presented, whose voice is present and what the voice is doing are critical questions to ask of any oratorical situation and the answers betray much about, for instance, how interpersonal relationships are negotiated, how power is arranged or, as we will discuss, how the body that accompanies the voice is conceived. In the book *A Voice and Nothing More*, Mladen Dolar presents the voice firstly as the extra-linguistic residue of speech and secondly as the interface between language and the body:

> What language and the body have in common is the voice,
> but the voice is part neither of language nor the body. The
> voice stems from the body but it is not its part, and it

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[11] Ferdinand de Saussure, *A Course in General Linguistics* (New York: McGraw-Hill 1998), p. 117.

[12] In Lynne Kendrick and David Roesner, *Theatre Noise* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2011); Lynne Kendrick, *Theatre and Aurality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); and Ross Brown, *Sound: A Reader in Theatre Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), for example.

[13] Plato and Aristotle, for example, wrote extensively on the voice. See Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 133–8. Derrida argues that speech has been privileged over writing in philosophy since Plato. See Cavarero, *More Than One Voice*, p. 218.

upholds language without belonging to it, yet in this paradoxical topology, this is the only point they share.[14]

Vocal utterances can be analysed in terms of both semantic meaning and acoustic materiality. This chapter will discuss how those two properties are approached in combination in my work, particularly in *A Pacifist's Guide to the War on Cancer*, *Clubbing* and *Binary Code*. Whilst the three pieces employ the voice in ostensibly quite different ways, the foundational interdisciplinary combination of acoustics and linguistics remains constant. Given that so much is bound up in the voice, this chapter is devoted to the technical and compositional strategies that impact upon how the voice is manifested in my work.

Firstly, although the singer and composer Joan La Barbara was probably right to describe the voice as 'the original instrument',[15] my approach to it has only been made possible by contemporary digital technology, particularly advances in the ability to visually represent the location of the voice within the frequency spectrum and to isolate its individual frequencies. This technological advance has had profound implications for the study of both music and speech. Pianist Marilyn Nonken, a specialist in performing spectral composition, argues:

> The computer has changed how we listen to music... The
> technology of the computer has changed how we conceive
> of sound in an aesthetic sense almost as dramatically as it
> has altered what is known about human musical perception
> and performance.[16]

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[14] Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), p. 73.

[15] Joan La Barbara, 'Voice is the Original Instrument', *Contemporary Music Review* 21, 1 (2002): 35. This ubiquitous truism is actually contested. See Francesco D'Errico et al., 'Archaeological Evidence for the Emergence of Language, Symbolism, and Music – An Alternative Multidisciplinary Perspective', *Journal of World History* 17, 1 (March 2003): 1–70, and Jonathan de Souza, 'Voice and Instrument at the Origins of Music', *Current Musicology* 97 (2014): 21–36

[16] Marilyn Nonken, *The Spectral Piano: From Liszt, Scriabin, and Debussy to the Digital Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 13.

Similarly, the histories of the fields of speech perception and speech synthesis are commensurate with an increasing ability to visually represent sound.[17]

One of the main technical problems in musical theatre from the point of view of the sound is maintaining the balance between vocal clarity and volume. It was my aim that in approaching the sound-design, arrangements and orchestrations as contiguous elements in the compositional design of *A Pacifist's Guide*, it would be possible to be both louder than is normal in musical theatre and retain the clarity of the vocals. For understandable reasons, almost all theatrical sound-design privileges the audibility of the words over the volume of the music. This, however, often results in compromises to what could be termed the 'visceral materiality' of the music and the sensation of immersion in the sound-world, as well as what Barthes depicts as 'the body in the voice as it sings'.[18]

As I will go on to discuss, the privileging of the legibility of the text, within the tradition of musical theatre, over other aspects of the voice and the musical totality has technical implications that, it became clear, have aesthetic ramifications that are deterministic and, in some ways, characterise the genre. However, the privileging of textual legibility is problematic beyond technical or sensational questions and could be seen to characterise the attitude of musical theatre to the body. This became particularly problematic in a piece about cancer, the stated objective of which was to address conventional attitudes to the unwell and post-unwell body.

If the problem of lyrical legibility is addressed simply by a shift in the volume ratios of music and voice, however, the result is, paradoxically, a perceptual weakening of the voice and, as I argued in the essay 'Sonic

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[17] 'Spectrographs were a great advance on previous techniques, and it would be hard to underestimate their impact on speech science.' Stuart Rosen and Peter Howell, *Signals and Systems for Speech and Hearing* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 221. For a discussion of speech synthesis and music, see Mariama Young, *Singing the Body Electric: The Human Voice and Sound Technology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 75–104.

[18] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 179.

Departures: The Dramaturgy of Fade-Outs', a weakening of the performance space itself.[19] Maintaining the perceived power of the sound-world and yet allowing space for the voice to be audible is possible by, for example, removing the salient frequencies of the voice from the accompaniment. This is a technique that is being used with increasing sophistication in contemporary pop music as production techniques develop in tandem with a need for perceived loudness. The producer '40' (Noah Shebib) – who, in his work with the singer and rapper Drake, is recognised for expanding production techniques in this area[20] – explains: 'I was carving out an entire space in the frequencies so the artist occupies the top end completely, almost exclusively, and the music sits in the bottom end.'[21] As a crude example, in *Fake It 'Til You Make It* (2014), in which Bryony Kimmings and Tim Grayburn sing over a portion of a loud electro track, I used a low pass filter to temporarily remove all frequencies above 200 Hz.[22] Because the bass and the low-mid frequencies remain at the same volume, the effect is of a shift in environmental relationship to the sound rather than a reduction of power.[23]
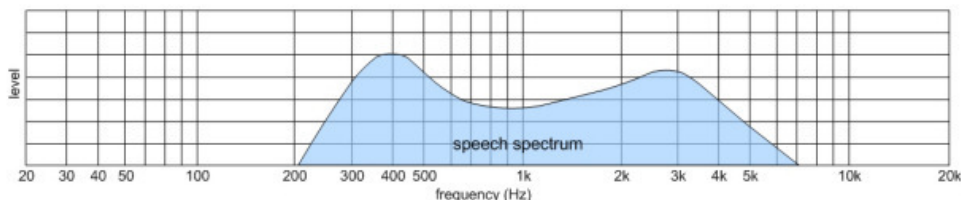
Visualisation of vocal range within the audible frequency spectrum

Although this is a fairly complicated operation, the design of which is dictated by the particularities of the voice, the music and the space, it is

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[19] Tom Parkinson, 'Sonic Departures: The Dramaturgy of Fade-Outs', *Theatre and Performance Design* 2, 3–4 (November 2016): 217–32.

[20] Paul Tingen, 'Noah "40" Shebib: Recording Drake's "Headlines"', *Sound on Sound* (March 2012): https://www.soundonsound.com/techniques/noah-40-shebib-recording-drakes-headlines [Accessed 5 June 2018].

[21] 'Drake Producer "40" Explains His "Underwater Sound"', *ADSR Sounds*, https://www.adsrsounds.com/news/drake-producer-40-explains-his-underwater-sound/ [Accessed 5 June 2018].

[22] *Fake It 'Til You Make It,* premiered 30 January 2016, Mandurah Arts Centre, Perth, Australia. This effect is most notable in my piece *Nothing Ever Said* (2011), which excludes the range of frequencies that the human voice is generally capable of producing.

[23] Kendrick, *Theatre and Aurality*, pp. 72–3.

relatively simple compared to the complexities of applying it to a situation with live instruments that can be heard acoustically as well as via amplification and with a large cast of vocalists. I will discuss two moments within *A Pacifist's Guide to the War on Cancer* where this approach was applied with differing levels of success.

Firstly, the first verse of 'Peace of Mind', a female solo ballad, comes out of a very loud section of electronic music.[24] From a collage of disparate material, there are three elements that remain: a fast loop of distorted synthesisers and electronic drums, a muffled vocal loop on the word 'more' that concluded the previous song and a distorted synthesiser drone. The protagonist, 'Shannon', walks slowly downstage centre towards the audience; she is repeating the words 'mine is' (the first words of the song) but this is impossible to hear over the noise: it is just one element in a collage of sounds. Slowly, through processes of filtering, pitch-shift and spatial location – but, crucially, not the lowering of volume – each of the musical elements are reduced in acoustic complexity within the frequency range of her voice, and in this way she is afforded a space of legibility within the sound-world.

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[24] From 45:15 in the video documentation of *A Pacifist's Guide* (Portfolio/1 A Pacifist's Guide To The War On Cancer/A Pacifist's Guide To The War On Cancer.mov).

The 'speech banana' representing where different speech sounds occur within the audible frequency spectrum

'Peace of Mind' begins with the words: 'Mine is such a complicated story/ it doesn't start at the start or end at the end'; as the song continues the character gains increasing clarity and resolve about her situation. This, in part, guided the choice of beginning the song in temporal and harmonic uncertainty, with dislocated elements of music still floating around in the space. Fittingly, it is initially unclear whether it is her song or one of the other musical elements that will succeed in taking prominence. If the voice is the interface between the body and language, it is through this reduction in acoustic complexity that 'Shannon' finds a place of respite from the predicaments that the song is working through. Although the operation of this process from electronic collage to song was technically and conceptually complex, it is dramaturgically clear and, as a result, successful.

Rose Shalloo singing 'Peace of Mind' and Amanda Hadingue (2016)

The second example of this approach was in the song 'Miracle'.[25] The protagonist of the song is a patient who is reluctant to accept that her cancer is inoperable but it is her doctor that sings the verses. Golda's character and her story are based on Lara Hazel, a real person who visited us several times during the process and died before we could stage it. She was emphatic about her love for disco music and it felt like a fitting tribute to her that we could combine a song in that genre with an element of her story that was essentially tragic. It was my intention that the choruses of this song would be the loudest and brashest moments in the show. I thought that if there were a couple of moments in the show where the music was loud enough, it would impregnate the space with the potential for loudness. In this way, volume would always be latent to the space and there would be a feeling of dynamism without always having to actually be loud.[26]

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[25] From 22:50 in the video documentation of *A Pacifist's Guide* (1 A Pacifist's Guide To The War On Cancer/ A Pacifist's Guide To The War On Cancer.mov).
[26] The impact of what comes to be sonically latent to theatrical environments and how that process might be perceptually organised is discussed by Lynne Kendrick in *Theatre and Aurality*, pp. 72–3, and George Home-Cook in *Theatre and Aural Attention*, pp. 143–51.

Amy Booth-Steel, Max Runham, Golda Rosheuvel (as 'Lara'), Lottie Valis, Francesca
Mills and Gareth Snook singing 'Miracle' (2016).
Image by Mark Douet

In addition to making vertical space within the frequency spectrum for the
voice to come through, the music was composed so that there would be
horizontal, temporal gaps for the words. Again, this was an attempt to give
the impression of maximum volume whilst leaving space for the words.
Although this could conceivably be composed from syllable to syllable, or
from semiquaver to semiquaver, in the verses I chose to leave the voice
supported by only guitar playing an octave riff, with the rest of the band
playing loud stabs on the first beat of every two bars. The drums and bass
would alternately fill in the gaps between the vocal lines. This suited the
tension in the lyrics as the doctor attempted to gently but firmly lead
Golda's character to realise that there is no miracle cure available.

The privileging of lyrical clarity, however, has, counter-intuitively, the
potential to limit the power of the voice itself. Mladen Dolar describes the
operation of the voice beyond a simple medium for language: 'The voice is
endowed with profundity: by not meaning anything, it appears to mean
more than mere words.'[27] It is ironic that within musical theatre – the art
form that should ostensibly have most affinity with the idea of the voice as a

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[27] Dolar, *A Voice*, p. 31.

compositional as much as a communicating agent – textual meaning is privileged over meanings that prefigure or exceed language.

We were commissioned to make a show about cancer and it was almost instantly that we decided that musical theatre would be the best format to work in ('the musical' as a productive institutional context will be discussed further in the next chapter). Remembering Dolar's words about the position of the voice in relation to both language and the body, however, I realised late in the process that by choosing the medium of musical theatre, we had accidentally positioned our subject matter – cancer – in a political and aesthetic context that was already working against our objectives of culturally repositioning the sick body. There is the danger that all but a certain kind of de-corporalised communication gets marginalised along with the body that was our ostensible object. As Helene Cixous argues: 'censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time'.[28] If an art form appears to be conservative, it is likely that its conservatism is engendered in its pragmatics as much as its practitioners and their themes. The privileging of text over the voice is only one of the ways in which musical theatre denies the body its materiality.[29]

Lynne Kendrik addresses alternative presentations of the voice in her book *Theatre and Aurality*:

> considering voice as a performance of sound *in theatre* allows us
> to consider what voice does when it is not in service to normative
> modes of meaning, by this I mean the authorial voice of the text
> in terms of 'script' or 'character'. In other words, what does the
> voice do in theatre when we are not working with 'realism'?
> How do we speak when the voice does not serve to cohere the
> speaking body?[30]

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[28] Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', *Signs* 1, 4 (Summer 1976): 875–93 (p. 880).
[29] George Rodosthenous. '*Billy Elliot the Musical*: Visual Representations of Working-class Masculinity and the All-singing, All-dancing Bo[d]y', *Studies in Musical Theatre* 1, 3 (January 2008): 275–92.
[30] Kendrick, *Theatre and Aurality*, p. 67.

By consciously attempting to unshackle the voice from language, the introduction to *Clubbing* uses the voice in a completely different way to *A Pacifist's Guide* (and conventional musical theatre). Within the discipline of phonetics, a language, dialect or accent is expressed as a finite set of distinct sounds.[31] Following that idea, I began to imagine ways of composing the journey from one phonetic territory to another. I was thinking of a time-based Venn-diagram beginning with sounds that are exclusive to one language, moving through sounds that are shared between that language and another before concluding with sounds that are exclusive to the second.[32]
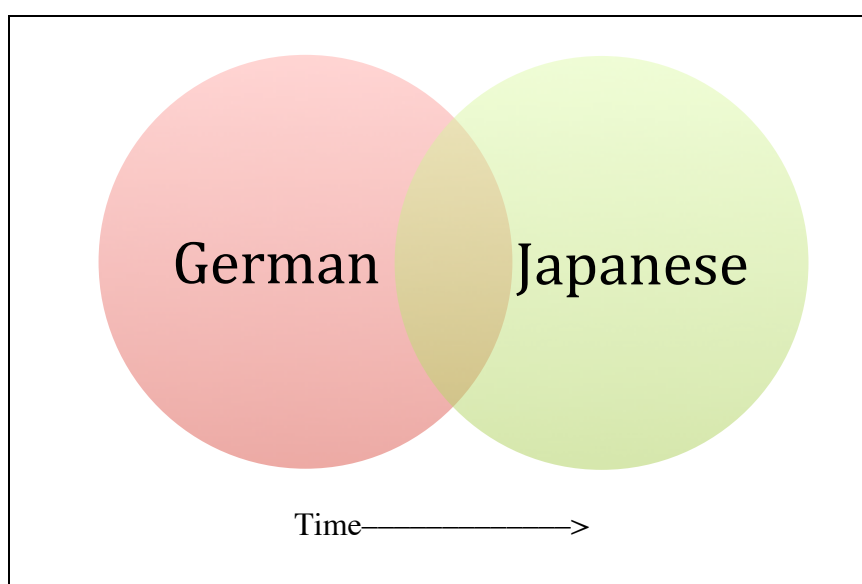
Venn diagram of the structure of the opening to *Clubbing* (2015)

In this piece, the performer was Yui Nakagami talking from German – with which she was previously unfamiliar – into Japanese – her native language.[33] The specificity of her linguistic capabilities was largely deterministic of both the compositional methodology and the resulting work. We tried several approaches before settling on a cyclical poetic text in

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[31] Phillip Carr, *English Phonetics and Phonology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. xiii.
[32] From 4:40 in the video documentation of *Clubbing* (Portfolio/2 Clubbing/Clubbing Opening Extract.mp4).
[33] German and Japanese have 32 consonant sounds between them, with 13 exclusive to German, 8 exclusive to Japanese and 11 shared. Of course, it is not possible to be this definitive. Spoken language is regionally, historically and individually contingent, and phonemic categorisation is subject to scholarly revision.

which individual German phonemes were progressively replaced by Japanese phonemes.[34] Initially, as Nakagami spoke, her voice was accompanied by crackles from a vinyl record and was illuminated by a flickering light. Together these referents gave a (imprecise) sense of archaic mediation.

Yui Nakagami in *Clubbing* (2015)

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[34] The poem is in the documentation (Supplementary Material/2 Clubbing/Clubbing Opening Score).

In the case of *Clubbing*, it made a kind of theoretical sense that a piece about codes of behaviour enacted by dancers playing music would start with the voice (neither music nor movement but containing the promise of both), progressively working loose from its grammatical and semantic moorings; that structural meaning would fall both into and away from the body, delivering a body simultaneously resistant to, and governed by, invisible codes of organisation. After all Nakagami's text had become Japanese, she was joined by solo cello, playing harmonics that were generated via frequency analysis of her speech.[35]
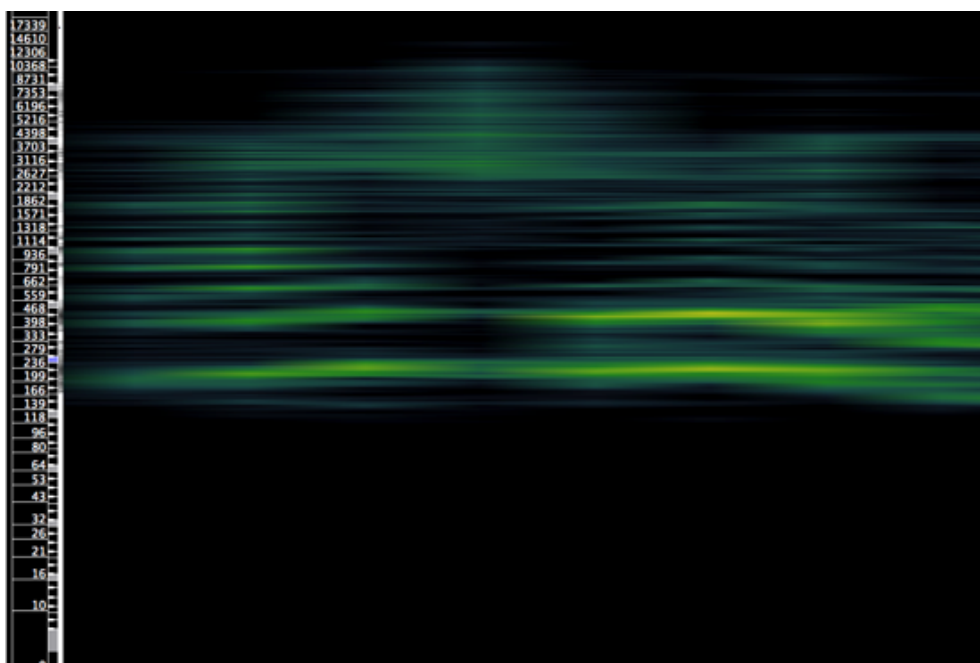
Spectrographic representation of Yui Nakagami saying 'entschuldigung'

For the closing part of this section, the cello and voice were accompanied by a typewriter on a marching snare drum harness. The typewriter progressed from an instrument of transcription[36] to playing in rhythmic unison with the

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[35] Here and in other elements of the compositional approaches discussed in this chapter, there is a relationship to the tradition of spectral composition (after Gérard Grisey). However, although there are some methodological meeting points between my work and that of the composers in that tradition, the co-opting of spectrographic data into my music is not really out of a concern with orchestrational timbre (which, for me, is more normally a result of conceptual or referential interests).

[36] This was inspired by a visit in the summer of 2014 to the US Senate, where everything that is said is transcribed in real-time by a mobile stenographer whose gaze is directed

voice and cello.[37] As Nakagami and the typewriter exit the stage, they leave the solo cello playing repeating double stops. The music contains the echoes of language and the rhythm of its transcription. The stage is set for all the ensuing sonic and corporeal material to be latent with a codified yet obscured grammar. The voice remains expressively present for the rest of the performance but the organisational influences governing the behaviour of the material have shifted from the textual to the algorithmic. By the end of this opening section of *Clubbing* we established the idea that there are a multitude of coexistent musics within speech and language, and a number of different ways that the inherent musicality of speech and language can be underscored using rhythmic, harmonic, melodic, dynamic and formal games.

Although the particular constellation of concerns that this section of *Clubbing* is addressing is difficult to map onto a specific field of music or performance, it is prefigured by a rich history of work from which it has taken guidance. Francisco Lopez's audio pieces in which he recreates imaginary rainforest environments where the sound of each 'creature' is afforded its own space in the frequency spectrum, for example, is a useful conceptual precursor to all the works under discussion here.

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exclusively at the mouth of the speaker. See image on page 18 and documentary images in (Supplementary material/2 Clubbing/Clubbing Senate Stenographer).

[37] See the score in the documentation (Supplementary material/2 Clubbing/Clubbing Opening Score).

Hillary Blake Firestone, Outi Markkula, Yui Nakagami and Alma Sua in *Clubbing* (2015).
Image by Anna van Kooi

The paradox discussed earlier, that of volume versus lyrical clarity, inherent
to musical theatre – as well as the ground covered in the text work of
Clubbing, of abstracting the voice from text – have, in part, however, led me
to a further compositional experiment. Following the work of Peter
Ablinger, particularly *Deus Cantando* (2009), it occurred to me that if you
map the partials of speech to their closest chromatic equivalent, it might be
possible to simulate speech using a midi-controlled player piano. In this
way, the frequencies of speech are not only obscured by music – as I was
trying, with mixed results, to avoid in *A Pacifist's Guide* – but entirely
replaced. The task was to attempt to find text material and methods of
presentation that can accommodate what is, relative to the voice, the sonic
imprecision of the piano and the chromatic scale, and yet have a sense of
legibility. Ablinger discusses this need in relation to his own work: 'with a
little help or practice or subtitling we can actually hear a human voice in a
piano sound'[38]. The 'help' to which Ablinger refers suggests that the
artwork needs to enlist and enhance the processes of language cognition,

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[38] 'Speaking Piano – Now with (somewhat decent) captions!',
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=muCPjK4nGY4 [Accessed 5 June 2018].

specifically, the role of visuality in speech perception in its operations. Yannis Kyriakides discusses this in his attempt to compose with the inner voice of the audience in his practice of 'music-text-film', exploiting our impulse to bridge disparate events to create meaning.[39]

Tom Parkinson and Jessica Latowicki in *Binary Code* (2017)

In addition to designing the software[40] to best render convincing speech via the chromatic scale, then, the work of the piece was to choose text and to frame the performance of that text in a way that would assist the viewer to 'hear' the words. In the case of *Binary Code*, I employed repetition, lip-reading and oppositional contrast as the cognitive 'help'. Adriana Cavarero argues that 'the act of speaking is relational: what it communicates first and foremost, beyond the specific content that words communicate, is the acoustic, empirical, material relationality of singular voices.'[41] Following Saussure's quote at the start of this chapter ('speech sounds are first and foremost entities which are contrastive, relative and negative'), and mindful that linguistics and computer code share a similar oppositional logic, it seems fitting, therefore, that the phrases most easily available to lip-reading are, for the purposes of this project, 'I love you' and 'fuck off'.

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[39] Yannis Kyriakides, 'Imagined Voices: A Poetics of Music-Text-Film', http://www.kyriakides.com/downloads/imagined-voices.pdf 239 [Accessed 5 June 2018].
[40] Software design by Elise Plans using Pure Data.
[41] Cavarero, *More Than One Voice*, p. 13.
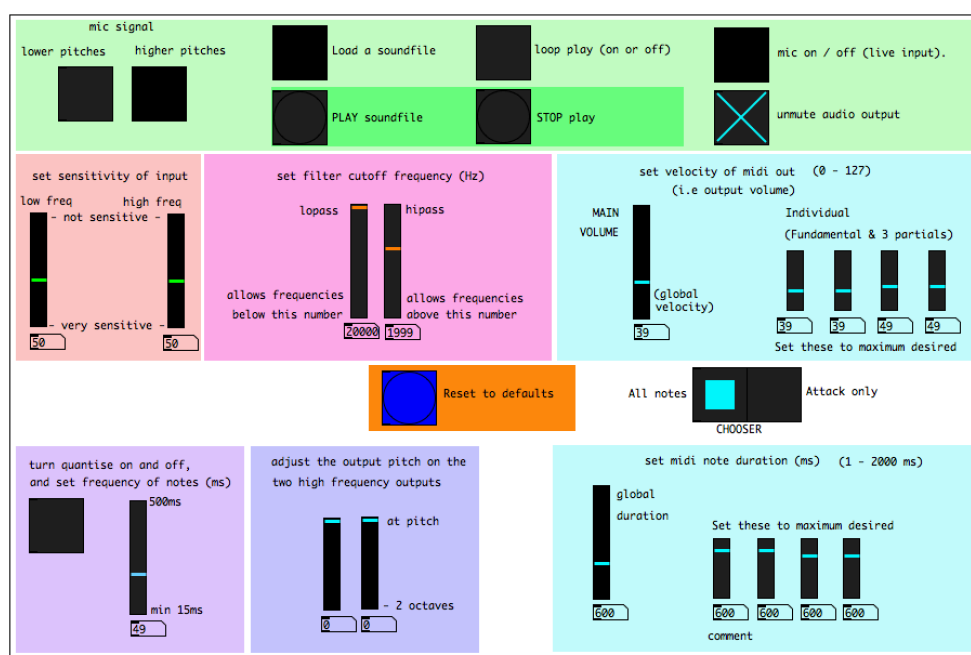
Pure Data software interface for *Binary Code* (2017) by Elise Plans

In terms of the digital encoding process, the main conceptual breakthrough was to treat the pitched sounds of vowels and the unpitched sounds of sibilance as categorically distinct in terms of how they are inputted in the software. In much the same way as the voice itself was isolated in the composition of *A Pacifist's Guide*, the vowel sounds and the sibilance have been processed so that they occupy distinct spaces within the frequency spectrum. Some early models of speech synthesis worked on the premise that, although vowel sounds can contain up to 20 harmonics, it is only necessary to synthesise the first three to achieve a legible speech sound.[42] Following this, we cut off the vowel input with a low pass filter at 600 Hz and treated sibilance as everything that happens above 3 kHz. This, of course, is another way in which the project invested in the placement of discrete units of speech into oppositional categories.

The score of *Binary Code* – that is, the order in which the actor Jessica Latowicki and I alternate saying 'I love you' and 'fuck off' – was generated by inputting 'I love you/fuck off' (Latowicki's score) and 'fuck off/I love

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[42] David B. Roe and Jay G. Wilpon, *Voice Communication Between Humans and Machines* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 1994), pp. 120–22.

you' (my score) into an online binary code generator, where 0 is 'I love you' and 1 is 'fuck off'.[43]
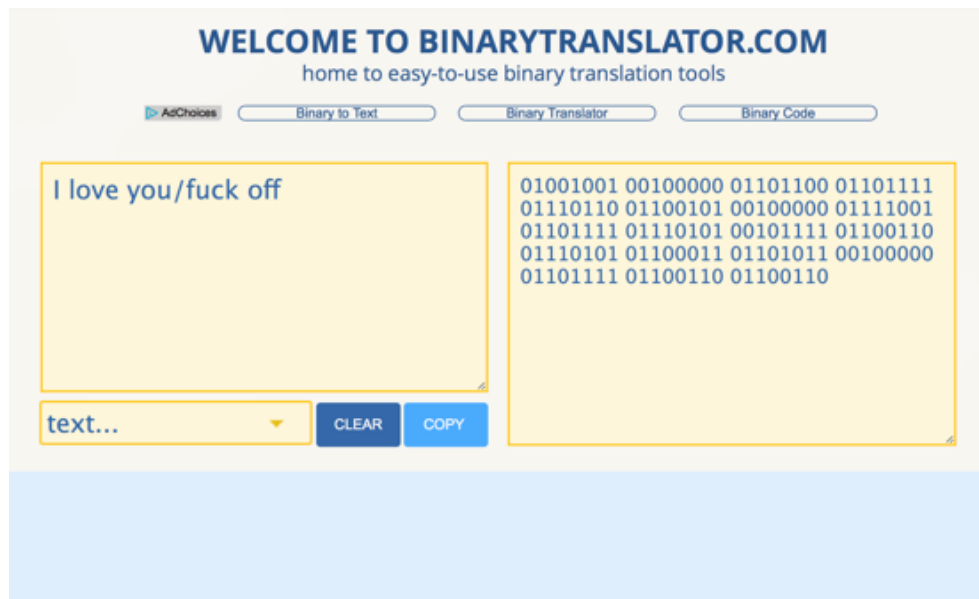
The score to *Binary Code* (2017), where 0 = 'I love you' and 1 = 'fuck off'

It is remarkable that through the notes of the piano, it is possible to hear that Latowicki is from the United States and that I was raised in Yorkshire. Despite the absence of the sound of our speech, much of what Dolar would characterise as 'the voice' remains. However, the body that is carried by the voice is problematic here. As Steven Connor argues, 'there is no disembodied voice – no voice that does not have somebody, something of somebody's body in it',[44] but it is unclear whether what is heard in *Binary Code* is a recording of speech or of music; in other words, whether it is Latowicki and I or the piano that is speaking. Mariama Young suggests of speech autonoma more widely: 'ultimately there is a question… of who indeed is mediating whom'.[45] As the curator and dramaturg Berno Polzer puts it of Ablinger's work: 'we hear sounds that aren't normal music, but

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[43] See the scores in the documentation (Supplementary Material/3 Binary Code/Fuck off Score *and* I love you Score).
[44] Steven Connor, *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, Stutters and other Vocalizations* (London: Reaktion, 2012), p. 17.
[45] Mariama Young, *Singing the Body Electric: The Human Voice and Sound Technology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), p. 78.

neither are they language, and one could say that a bridging happens.'[46] Despite its preoccupation with oppositional categorisation, *Binary Code* productively exploits this confusion (which is disciplinary as much as it is cognitive), a confusion that will be discussed further in the following chapters.

For a composer interested in the expressive possibilities of the voice, theatre offers a complicated platform. The voice is, ostensibly, the primary medium of theatre but it often threatens to be subsumed by language. In some contexts, the uneasy relationships between sound, voice, body and language can be compositionally and conceptually productive, particularly through the intervention of mediating technologies. But in musical theatre – which might be regarded as the theatrical genre where the voice finds its greatest expressive potential – there is, counter intuitively perhaps, an overarching emphasis on the clarity of the text. This is possibly less of a problem in musicals where the genres of music that are evoked come from within the tradition itself, but many other forms of music do not privilege lyrical clarity over vocal expression and, as such, when transplanted into that context and faced with those demands, sound unconvincing. There are ways of approaching writing musicals that could overcome this issue – and possibly exploit it creatively – but these would require interdepartmental consent at every stage of the creative process. As I shall go on to discuss, this is far from straightforward.

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[46] 'Speaking Piano – Now with (somewhat decent) captions!', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=muCPjK4nGY4 [Accessed 5 June 2018].

Chapter 2: Context as Compositional Material

> 'It is not just the work of art that is shortchanged when a
> description ends too soon but also everything that
> surrounds it.'
> – Rita Felski[47]

Surprisingly, the word 'context', in the sense used widely across the humanities, does not have a working definition in the *OED*. For the purposes of this commentary it is understood to mean the circumstances in which a musical performance is received, be they, for example, generic, disciplinary, institutional, cultural, scholarly, ideological, technological or acoustic. Rather than investigate how my music can interact with or influence the work with which it is presented, I would like to explore how the context in which my music is encountered can be folded back into my compositional practice. In other words, how the creation of the conditions for listening can be understood as an element of the compositional process.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter in relation to *A Pacifist's Guide*, we were commissioned to make a theatre show about cancer and almost instantly decided that it would be a musical. That choice was deterministic, not only of the kinds of music that would be presented but also of how the work would be received by an audience. We were also fortunate to have a choice in which producing venue it would run in London, and chose the National Theatre over the Young Vic and the Barbican – both of which could have been seen as more obvious institutional fits for the kind of work we had previously made. Again, that decision was not only to do with infrastructure and prestige but was also compositionally generative. 'A musical about cancer at the National Theatre' is a creatively productive phrase that engenders a kind of proto-compositional response in its audience. To bastardise Pauline Oliveros's description of her text pieces, the

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[47] Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 153.

'texts' around pieces can also function as 'attentional strategies' to invoke what Tim Rutherford-Johnson calls 'ways of listening and responding'[48]

Since Richard Thomas's and Stewart Lee's *Jerry Springer: The Opera* of 2003, there have been countless examples of shows that have used the subtitle 'The Musical' to self-consciously co-opt the cultural currency of musical theatre.[49] Without wanting to be prescriptive about what that cultural currency might bestow on a production, at the very least what it signifies is escapism and a self-reflexive renunciation of unnecessary gravitas. It also invokes generic tropes such as unison dancing, hummable melodies, harmonic consonance and dramatic levity. There is already a challenge to the audience in proposing that cancer is an appropriate subject to be dramatised: writing in 1979, Susan Sontag claimed that 'cancer is a rare and still scandalous subject for poetry; and it seems unimaginable to aestheticise the disease'.[50] Although much might have changed over the last 40 years with regards to what it is possible to render in the artistic imagination, it is still challenging in this kind of generic context. This is not, of course, to say that musicals are necessarily reductive or incapable of tackling complicated themes but that 'The Musical' (as a subtitle) is indicative of a certain approach to thematic concerns.

Without being explicit in the title, *The Book of Mormon,* by the makers of *South Park* and *Team America* is a more recent example of a musical that conceptually exploits the surface trappings of the generic context in order to articulate its themes. In that instance, the ostensibly comedic meeting point is that both Mormonism and musical theatre attempt to disavow their campness and assert a heteronormativity that (to the outsider) is clearly absent. Both *Mormon* and *Jerry Springer* are much more faithful to the

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[48] Jennie Gottschalk, *Experimental Music Since 1970* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 107. Tim Rutherford-Johnson, *Reflections on the Text Scores of Pauline Oliveros*: http://riotensemble.com/notes-on-the-text-scores-of-pauline-oliveros/ [Accessed 7 September 2018].

[49] It is worth acknowledging the historical quirk that the show that started the trend of subtitling works of musical theatre 'The Musical' was actually subtitled 'The Opera'. The juxtaposition of high and low culture was an act of comedic provocation.

[50] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 20.

generic norms of musical theatre than *A Pacifist's Guide*, each sung section has a 'lift off', for example, where a spoken scene transforms into a song.

There are a number of tropes that have remained remarkably consistent throughout the life of the musical.[51] Possibly because musicals are so complicated and expensive to stage, it would be very unusual to find a production that did not have a creative and technical team largely made up of people from that world and schooled in its procedures. Even film – a comparatively expensive artform – is more amenable to the pathbreaking auteur. For this reason, there are few, if any, deviations from established formal convention in the history of the musical: *Fiddler on the Roof, Sunday in the Park With George* and *Hamilton*, to choose some ostensibly dissimilar examples, all have the same features. To be clear, this is not an accident: musicals are almost exclusively written, produced and staffed by people who are studiously devoted to the form. To list the most basic attributes of a musical: they have a two-act structure; they begin with an 'I want' song (which lays out the problem that the protagonist is facing and lets the audience know what will happen in order solve it); the second act contains a 'dream ballet' and an 'eleven o' clock number'; songs are transformative (in contrast to pop songs that tend to be reiterative) and they begin with a 'lift off' from speech into singing. Although we did not stick faithfully to these, they became points of reference during our making process. Whilst musical theatre is not, in the main, an academically oriented discipline, it is critically reflexive and its practitioners are versed in analytical methods specific to the practice. Although the terms 'diagetic' and 'non-diagetic', for example, are borrowed from academic film studies (where they are relatively rarefied ideas) in the making of musicals they are everyday concepts.[52] Sarah Travis, the musical director of the 2005 revival

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[51] Commentators generally agree that the first modern ("integrated") musical was *Show Boat* (Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein) in 1927 and that *Oklahoma* (1943) by Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein laid down the structural template that exists to date. See, *The Complete Book of Light Opera* by Mark Lubbock (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962): pp. 753–56.

[52] See Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1990) pp. 73-89. In the practice of musical theatre, the terms refer simply to sounds a character is aware of and sounds a character is unaware of.

of Sondheim's Sweeny Todd, in which all the actors played musical instruments throughout, for example, insists that the music remained functionally non-diegetic.[53]

Despite being a hybrid and interdisciplinary art form, musical theatre, therefore, maintains a coherent (albeit contingent[54]) disciplinary and generic identity for both audience and practitioners. Although not a physical space, that identity – generative because of its limits – can be read as a 'site' and enters the same theoretical and creative territory as 'site specific' or 'site-responsive' performance. Borrowing a characterisation from English studies: 'we can think of genres as… operational sites… Genres are rhetorical maps that chart familiar or frequently travelled communicative paths.'[55] Both 'the musical' (a genre) and 'the National Theatre' (an institution as well as a physical place) are 'sites' that the work inhabits, but they are also sites that, for creatively generative reasons, we chose. Those decisions already begin to operate on the relationship of the work to the theme and, as this chapter proposes, begin to both frame and produce the music.

Of course, "The National Theatre" is less amenable to creative intervention than most of the other contexts under discussion here, but it is nevertheless enveloped into the work. To enlist Georgina Born's description of what is at play: the National Theatre is an institutional site whose social relations "afford or condition certain kinds of musical [as well as theatrical and interdisciplinary] practice… these relations and institutions also enter into the nature of musical experience, permeating music's immediate socialities and imagined communities."[56] Again without wanting to be overly

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[53] In conversation.
[54] Bruno Latour takes issue with the idea of context as 'a distinctive, bounded totality governed by a predetermined set of structures and functions'. See Rita Felski, 'Context Stinks!', *New Literary History* 42, 4 (Autumn 2011): 573–91 (p. 578).
[55] Amy J. Devitt, Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff, 'Materiality and Genre in the Study of Discourse Communities', *College English* 65, 5 (May 2003): 541–58 (pp. 552–3).
[56] Georgina Born "After Relational Aesthetics: Improvised Music, the Social and (Re)Theorising the Aesthetic" in eds. Georgina Born, Eric Lewis, and Will Straw *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics* (Duke University Press, London, 2017) p. 43.

prescriptive, there is a potentially quasi-legal authority to the National Theatre institution and its output: it has a relationship to other aspects of the state and a corresponding public accountability that is not present to the same degree in other publicly funded institutions and certainly not in commercial theatres. In a sense, every production is a 'state of the nation' play, its 'immediate socialities' struggle to be contained. As Mark Fisher writes in the Guardian:

> a national theatre isn't just an organisation that puts on plays. It is also a symbol. Put the word "national" in your name and you become a receptacle for a country's values. In what you do, the nation will seek to see the very definition of itself; a definition perhaps vaguely articulated, but intensely felt. Change your priorities, by being too regal or not regal enough, and you upset the nation's sense of its own identity.[57]

Since 1988, its official title has been the "Royal National Theatre"; the fact that the word "Royal" was quietly retired from its public literature soon after its initiation suggests an acknowledgement of the power latent to a name. In this light, what 'The National Theatre' offers is in inherent contradiction to what I have suggested is latent to 'the musical' and it is in the relationship between the two and the theme of the show that the work starts to be produced.

The impulse towards contextually responsive work is, in part, a rejection of the idea of monolithic, historically transcendent and hermetic art, and runs in tandem with the scholarly move in recent decades towards studying culture in a specific context.[58] This may also be true of 'works in progress', where the work is presented as indivisible from the context of its

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Interestingly, Born does also write about past examples of musicians creatively constructing "the institutional forms supporting the artistic work" (p. 52).

[57] Mark Fisher 'Stage of the nation: what does it mean to be a national theatre?' in *The Guardian* https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/jan/15/national-theatre-england-scotland-wales-ireland [retrieved 15 January 2019]

[58] Felski, 'Context Stinks': 575: 'history itself is revealed as a buzzing multiplicity of texts – explorers' diaries, court records, child-rearing manuals, government documents, newspaper editorials – whose circulation underwrites the transmission of social energies.'

production. Although 'work in progress' as a term has fallen out of favour with practitioners, performance as an exposition of the making process is characteristic of a certain mode of contemporary performance practice of which *A Pacifist's Guide* – and Kimmings's work in general – is emblematic. In a sense, this impulse characterises my own work in that I attempt to approach each project on its own terms and in response to the stated objectives of my collaborators rather than through a consistent approach to genre or methodology. Although Stephen Sondheim, for a converse example, insists that "content dictates form,"[59] his formal choices are limited to those offered by musical theatre and maintains a coherent compositional 'voice' - rather than, say, switching from string quartet to immersive installation.
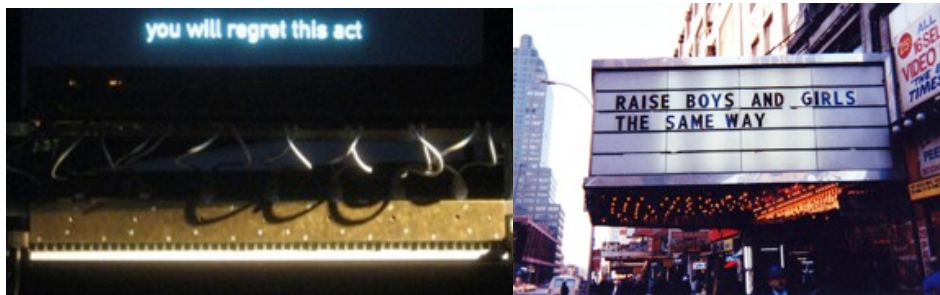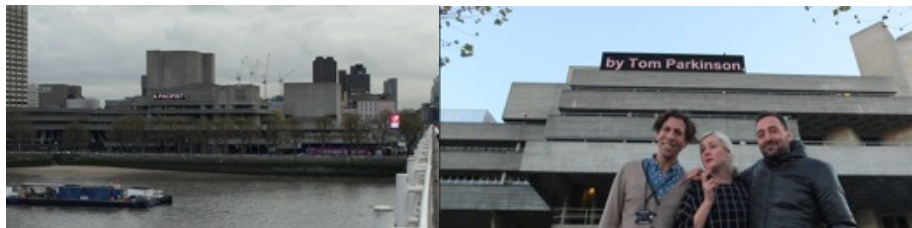
Clockwise from top left: *Deus Cantando* by Peter Ablinger, *Raise Boys and Girls the Same Way* by Jenny Holzer, *Native* by Pauline Oliveros, *A Pacifist's Guide to the War on Cancer* at the National Theatre by Bryony Kimmings, Brian Lobel and Tom Parkinson

There is a sense here of what Peter Ablinger was referring to in the quote cited in the previous chapter. In employing projected surtitles, he is looking

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[59] Stephen Sondheim, *Look I Made A Hat* (London: Random House, 2011): xv

for 'help' in assisting the audience to 'hear' the originating text. The 'help' offered by contextual cues such as 'the musical' or a 'string quartet' offers a frame by which to culturally, as well as formally, situate the work. Crucially, however, as with the case of Ablinger's 'help', what is being constructed is a mode of listening and, as such, it inevitably becomes part of the musical composition. In this way, all the elements of a work can be seen as modular blocks of contextualisation, from the physical space in which the performance takes place to the pitched material, technological processes and critical receptions. Each element of the composition is only meaningful in terms of its relationships, its contexts.

Binary Code (18 January 2017) in Frascati, Amsterdam, as part of the Come Together festival

Of course, context is contingent, unstable and available to varying degrees of intervention. But if the stability of what might traditionally be regarded as musical material – the score – has been subject to half a century or more of critical suspicion, might that, conversely, allow for other agents to be

incorporated into the composition?[60] As the literary critic Rita Felski puts it of texts: 'new actors jostle alongside those with thousand-year histories; inventions and innovations exist alongside the very traditions they excoriate' Following Bruno Latour, however, Felski proposes to revise the role of context in conditioning the work of art, that the impulse to historicise has led not to an expansion of the potential of the work but a reduction of its meanings to those bestowed by its temporal period. She argues that the binary of context/material is limiting: '[w]e sorely need alternatives to seeing [works of art] as transcendentally timeless on the one hand, and imprisoned in their moment of origin on the other.'[61] In addition to the softening of critique, it is possible that this growing suspicion of the monolithic potential of context has also been responsible for a general shift in descriptions of performance works from 'site specific' to 'immersive', a fuzzier term that is oriented more towards experience rather than concept.[62] It is also possible, however, that if context and material are approached, compositionally, as interrelated or even synonymous, this binary is not as stark. What creative circumstances might be amenable to this? Very tentatively, we could begin to ask the question of whether this potential reconciliation is particularly available to music, and even more so for music in an interdisciplinary setting.

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[60] Salome Voegelin describes the score as "the language of music's disciplinary erudition." *Political Possibility,* p. 166

[61] Felski, 'Context Stinks': 575.

[62] This is clearly a contentious and generalising claim, and may apply differently depending on the discipline, but in theatre the term was adopted relatively quickly by commercial and mainstream performance companies, as well as being co-opted by advertising and branding agencies. As a result, although works that could reasonably be described as immersive are increasingly popular, the term itself is falling out of favour in experimental practice, with no term, as yet, having superseded it. Adam Alston, for example has written extensively on the links between immersion and 'neoliberalism': 'immersive theatre often seeks to cut itself off from the world beyond immersive boundaries'. Adam Alston, *Beyond Immersive Theatre* (London: Palgrave, 2017), p. 17. For a similarly critical view of trends within contemporary music, see Tim Rutherford-Johnson, *Music After the Fall: Modern Culture and Composition Since 1989* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), p. 166; Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2003): 'Immersion… is characterized by diminishing critical distance to what is shown and increasing emotional involvement in what is happening' (13); and, for a more sympathetic reading from fine art, Katja Kwastek, 'Immersed in Reflection? The Aesthetic Experience of Interactive Media Art', in *Immersion in the Visual Arts and Media*, eds Fabienne Liptay and Burcu Dogramaci (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 67–85.

The specific contexts could become, therefore, both the parameters in which the composition takes place and the composition itself. In theory, this allows for the musical content to be generated from the demands made by the context whether, for example, that is by engendering a certain kind of expectation in the audience or by paying creative attention to the local power relations. Ablinger argues that even if his work takes place 'outside the confines' of the concert hall, what it articulates is the concert hall itself: 'the conditions of making music, the conditions of hearing that are to be negotiated'.[63]

In *A Pacifist's Guide* there is a radical shift in the role of sound from Act One to Act Two: the listening context – which has itself been silent – starts to make its presence felt. After a relatively straightforward opening act in terms of music and narrative, the audience returned from the interval to a bare stage with 'Emma', the nominal protagonist of the show, seated and tightly spotlit. There follows several minutes of brutal noise from a 38-channel surround sound system, enveloping the audience in the sounds of an MRI machine. This is followed by a period of complete silence;[64] a Foley scene in which the sounds of walking, talking and thinking are re-created live by two members of the cast behind a table of noise-making objects; a scene in which 'Emma' crawls across the stage on her hands and knees screaming; a semi-structured discordant self-harm drone ritual; and a scene in which the cast lip-sync to recordings of interviews with the people on which their characters are based.

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[63] Peter Ablinger, 'Keine Überschreitung' ['No Transgression'] (2009): https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/9555738.pdf [Accessed 5 June 2018] '[D]ie Bedingungen des Musikmachens, die Bedingungen des Hörens, die hier verhandelt werden' (my translation). For further discussion, see G. Douglas Barrett: 'what presents itself in his work is not "beyond the confines" of the concert hall, but the very confines themselves.' 'Window Piece: Seeing and Hearing the Music of Peter Ablinger' [n.d.]: ablinger.mur.at/docs/barrett_window_piece.doc [Accessed 5 June 2018], p. 2.

[64] Of course, actual silence is not available in theatre. See my essay 'Sonic Departures': 222–3 for a comparative discussion of disciplinary silences: 'Rather than the absence of space, a mediated construction of space or the cessation of performance, what we are talking about when we say "silence" in the theatre is the absence of design.'

Amanda Hadingue (centre) in 'The Ritual' with Hal Fowler, Jenny Fitzpatrick, Naana Agyei-Ampadu and Gareth Snook

These kinds of sonic experimentation – outside the generic norms of musical theatre – have a particular currency because of the context. And 'Silly Girl', the song that follows it (a solo ballad by Golda Rosheuvel in answer to her disco song in the first act), owes at least part of its impact to what has happened in the interim. Listening to a character sing has become a different kind of musical encounter to that experienced in the first act. To this point, all the scenes in the second act are characterised by shifting relationships to sound. Sound has materialised itself; what was an ostensibly benign (silent[65]) agent of mediation has become an actor in the drama as the role of sound in the experience of illness is exposed. The song is the death of 'Lara Hazel' as she looks back at the mistakes she has made in her life but also the final death of the security offered by musicalised drama. After this, Rosheuvel takes off her costume – including the hidden artifice of her fat-suit – and exits the stage to take a seat in the audience. In theory, this process exposes not only Rosheuvel's corporality, as distinct from that of her character, but listening itself as an embodied act.

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[65] Mary Ann Doane, writing about film sound, has argued that 'the invisibility of the work on sound is a measure of the strength of the sound track' and that the function of sound is as a 'silent' support to the image. 'Ideology and the Practice of Sound Editing and Mixing', in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, eds Teresa de Lauretis and Steve Neale (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1980), pp. 47–60 (54).
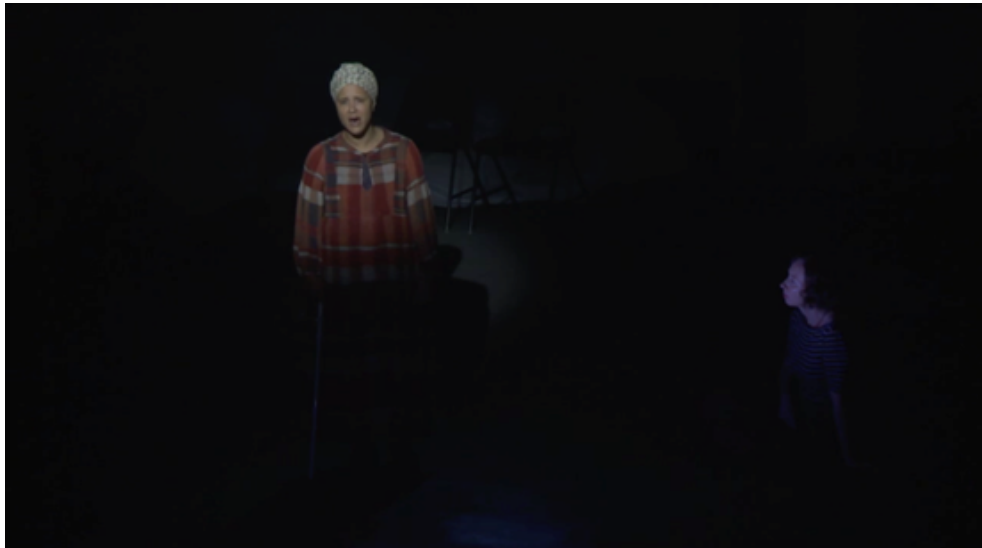
Golda Rosheuvel singing 'Silly Girl' and Amanda Hadingue

In this way, Rosheuvel takes sound into the institutional context of the work; she crosses over from musicalised drama and enters the world. This process incorporates not only her character but Rosheuvel herself and the audience, who then become part of the sounding action. The two territories have become infused with the potential of each other – the stage is open to the real and, conversely, the auditorium is open to music. In plotting the dramaturgical arc of the show, we knew that there would be a moment of no return where the passive distancing of theatrical and musical artifice would be removed. As I will discuss in the following chapter, the intention from here on was that all the music would be acoustic, without amplification. It was my intention that, as the sonic dramaturgy of the piece developed, there would be a shift in the modular relationships of the contexts; that the voice, for example, would expand its relationship to the body of the singer, or the physicality of a musician would take on a significance in relationship to the narrative of the show. This moment that prefigures the end of the performance, for example, primes the space for the audience to be heard and they are subsequently invited to recite the names of loved ones. Finally, a member of the audience – someone from the local community who has or has had cancer – comes onto the stage and talk through their experiences

before reprising the chorus of the opening ensemble song, 'Fingers Crossed'.[66]

Audience member Henriettta 'Hydrox' Holroyd (standing, centre) singing a reprise of 'Fingers Crossed' to close the show

Although this argument bears some similarities to Matthew Shlomowitz's call for composers to 'think beyond the sonic', to include concerns with 'subjectivity, signification and cultural engagement', the practice I am describing here is possibly more limited and musically solipsistic.[67] Elements that might not be traditionally regarded as musical material become musical material through constructing a mode of listening rather than as disciplinary expansions. Shlomowitz portrays an 'expanded sonic practice' as distinct from that strand of contemporary music concerned with the materiality of sound, but what are the extra-musical effects for other than to condition the listening experience? As Johan Fornäs writes in general terms: '[a]nything that is vocally uttered may, in principle, enter the realm of verbality and become at least potential words, just as everything that is socially coded as a musical performance may be heard as music'.[68] Or, as the Wandelweiser composer Antoine Beuger says of his own process:

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[66] This reprise version of 'Fingers Crossed' was arranged by Marc Tritschler, the musical director, as was the opening overture.
[67] Matthew Shlomowitz, 'Mapping Contemporary Music: Four Positions' [n.d.]: https://www.dissonance.ch/upload/pdf/140_04_hb_shl_mapping.pdf.
[68] Johan Fornäs, 'The Words of Music', *Popular Music and Society* 26, 1 (2003): 37–51.

in thinking about the piece, you are really thinking about what the experience is going to be like. And the piece is not just the score or the notes or the sounds, it is the whole context of its performance.[69]

In other words, if our experience of music is predicated on the context in which that music is encountered, then the context is itself part of the substance of the music. In the case of *Clubbing*, and certainly with *A Pacifist's Guide* (where disciplinary roles are delineated), as well as in *Binary Code* (where the visual is primarily in service of the sonic), my relationship with 'extra-musical' elements is, therefore, focused on how they impact upon – and create modes of – listening.

With notable exceptions – such as Verity Standen's *Hug* (2015), Tao G. Vrhovec Sambolec's *Outline* (2010–), Neele Hülcker's and Stellan Veloce's *Ear Action* or, tentatively, some of the interpersonal strategies that the Wandelweiser collective invoke – the kind of expanded musical practices that Shlomowitz is advocating have been resistant to the relational turn that has come to characterise a large proportion of current experimental performance.[70] Relational aesthetics – a term coined by the French art critic Nicholas Bourriaud – describes a type of art practice in which human relationships are paramount. Situating the practice in opposition to a hermetic, individualised notion of artistic production, Bourriaud describes 'an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space'.[71] In the world that my own practice inhabits, that of contemporary theatre and performance, this work is characterised by a (often loosely) delimited interaction between performer and audience,

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[69] James Saunders, 'Antoine Beuger', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Experimental Music*, ed. James Saunders (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 231–41 (241).

[70] Harry Lehman's concept of relational music, expanded by Matthew Shlomowitz in 'Real World Sound in Relational Music': http://www.shlom.com/?p=relational [Accessed 5 June 2018] is slightly different in that the relationships in question are not primarily interpersonal but of media and discipline.

[71] Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses Du Réel, 2002), p. 14.

often on a one-to-one basis, or between the audience members themselves. Possibly because human interaction threatens the kind of transportive effects that we still look for in musical performance, relational ideas of this kind have not yet taken hold in creative musical practice to the same extent as in other performance disciplines.[72]

Duet for Four Chambers (2014) by Tom Parkinson.
First performance: Cruising for Art, Vogue Fabrics, London, 15 February 2014

Lookout (2016), directed by Andy Field, involves two kinds of relational effect. In each city it visits, the piece is made anew in collaboration with ten-year-old children who then go on to perform the work in a one-to-one performative conversation with an adult at the top of a very tall building looking out over a city. The adult holds a small Bluetooth speaker in their hand, which plays music and a recording of the child speaking about their

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[72] More commonly, however, relational ideas are incorporated into scholarly discussions of, for example, collective improvisation and other musical settings that require an account of the interaction between musicians. At the forefront of this approach, Nicholas Cook, for example, claims that even in fully scored contexts, 'we are listening to the real-time negotiation of human relationships'. Nicholas Cook, 'Musical Encounters: Studies in Relational Musicology by Professor Nicholas Cook':
https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLvl0hDPLGolNciIyCvtKPUFfSC8lhsPQR&v=eSl VF58_Bt0 [Accessed 5 June 2018].

present and imagined future relationships to the city. *Lookout* contains three pieces of music that are accompanied by pre-recorded text.[73]

Bluetooth speaker in *Lookout* (2016). This performance was in London in the summer of 2017, on top of an office block in the financial district

In order to give a greater sense of authorship to the children, for each track I made around 40 separate pieces of music that would work alone or in any vertical combination, which equates to an effectively unlimited number of unique pieces of music.[74] The child performers chose which combination of tracks they wanted to accompany their voice. I originally experimented with making a modular, generative system with a simple user interface but it proved more straightforward and rewarding to make a collection of stems that would remain harmonically and metrically coherent in any combination. Although there was a final performance for adults, the children were as much the audience for the work as they were the participants so the music had two distinct functions at different stages of the

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[73] See two examples in the documentation (Supplementary Material/4 Lookout/ Lookout Brighton Pt1 Matthew.mp3 *and* Lookout Brighton Pt2 Molly.mp3).
[74] A binominal coefficient of 1,099,511,627,775 - this, of course, wouldn't equate to that many recognisably distinct pieces of music but enough to make it effectively unlimited.

process. And there are a multitude of contextual relationships at play: from the modular building blocks of the stems, which at every stage had to maintain the narrative function of the music in relationship to the text (of which Field had referential requirements such as 'wide-screen', 'hopeful', 'playfully dark', etc.), to the site-specificity of the frequency response of small speakers, the differently embodied experiences of listening to the child's voice pre-recorded and live, the ambient noise of the elevated surroundings, and the cultural currency of fictional portrayals of dystopic urban futures.
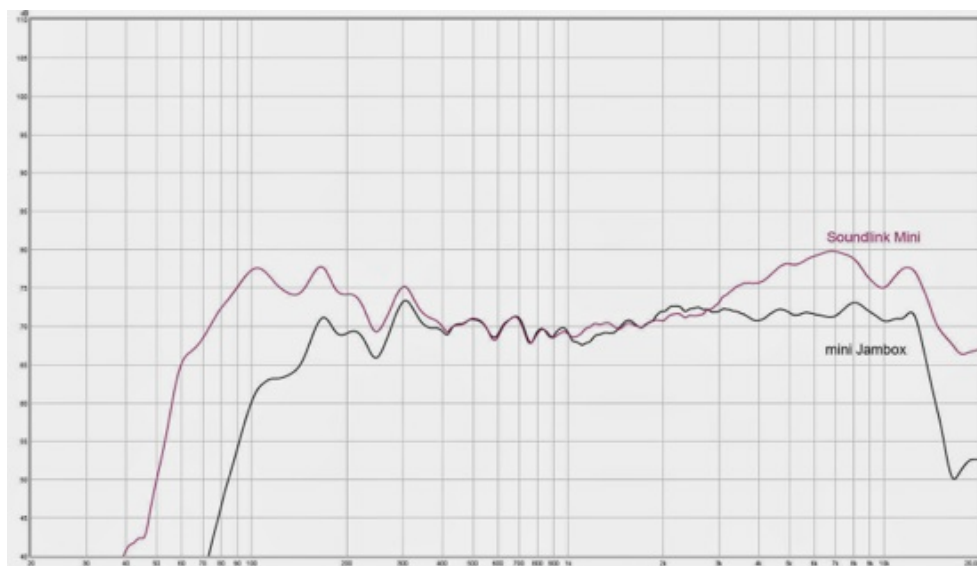
Frequency response of portable Bluetooth speakers

Additionally, the relational context allows for an alternative kind of listening experience, in which the adult audience member is effectively alone – or at least out of earshot of another adult – with a youngish child. The performance demands the kind of relationality that Michael Pisaro describes of his own practice and that of his Wandelweiser colleagues:

> what writing music comes down to, in the end, is care. We create
> situations. We care about them and take care of them. And we
> care for the people involved.[75]

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[75] Michael Pisaro, 'Writing, Music', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Experimental Music*, ed. James Saunders (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 27–76 (76).

The responsibility that the adult feels towards the wellbeing of the child, who is nervous and disarmed by default, extends towards the entire experience that the child is facilitating, including the music.

Lookout (2016) by Andy Field

Ostensibly, however, in spite of the experimental impulses of *Lookout*, the music still functions as a narrative support for the pre-recorded text in much the same way that Mary Anne Doane describes the ideological work of sound in cinema.[76] However, the singularity of the performance, the fact that the non-diegetic narratorial voice is of the same ten-year-old child that is stood next to the audience member holding the speaker and playing the music that she has herself authored, makes the elements of the performance impossible to reconcile in those terms. The audience member is denied the experiential syncretism that would be required to homogenise the

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[76] 'Because sound and image are used as guarantors of two radically different modes of knowing (emotion and intellection), their combination entails the possibility of exposing an ideological fissure – a fissure which points to the irreconcilability of two truths of bourgeois ideology. Practices of sound editing and mixing are designed to mask this contradiction through the specification of allowable relationships between sound and image.' Doane, 'Ideology', p. 54.

performance. Part of the work involves a stylised conversation with the child – passing questions and answers back and forth – and the genuine agency that the performer has over the piece as they attempt, in real time, to engage the audience member in helping them to investigate the city that lies in front of them, nullifies the cinematic functioning of the music.

Lookout (2016) by Andy Field. The Bluetooth speaker is in the hand of the child

Both relational aesthetics and the developmentally distinct but thematically congruent field of relational musicology have provided new ways to analyse both new and traditional musical situations in terms of interpersonal and interdisciplinary exchange. In a sense, the guiding impulse of relational musicology, certainly as described by Georgina Born, is similar to that of Felski's attempt to reconcile the (study of the) specificity of the artwork and (the study of) its earth-bound politics:

> we also know perfectly well that artworks are not heaven sent, that they do not glide like angels over earthly terrain, that they cannot help getting their shoes wet and their hands dirty. How can we do justice to both their singularity and their worldliness?[77]

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[77] Felski, 'Context Stinks': 576.

In other words, how can we accommodate, as Born puts it more succinctly: 'the opposition "text" and "context"'[78]? Any experience of sound is multiple and irreducibly complicated. If the listening contexts presented here offer meaningfully different ways to experience sound, perhaps it is legitimate not only for a compositional practice to respond to its context but to productively engage with the conditions for listening – to treat the listening context as musical material that can itself be composed. To the extent that a composer can have agency over them, the expanded conceptions of the musical object offered by popular music studies and ethnomusicology, for example – what Born calls 'the bodies, discourses and socialities mediating musical experience'[79] – as well as the indeterminacies of post-Cagean practice and the material parameters – are folded back into the compositional process.

In carving out distinct ranges of the frequency spectrum in his productions, for example, Noah Shebib is placing the voice and the music in materially different spaces, both in perceptual terms and in terms of its narrative impact. Crucially, however, Shebib is responding to an absolute volume threshold of 0dB in digital music. The ability to independently compress and limit distinct ranges of the frequency spectrum has made this kind of approach an inevitability – although it has found markedly different manifestations in different kinds of music.[80] Here, the effectiveness of this approach relies on a sophisticated appreciation of its generic context on behalf of the listener in order for the missing frequencies to be re-created in the imagination, exploiting (and creating) what Ola Stockfelt terms '*genre-normative modes of listening*'.[81] Shebib's singular aesthetic vision is a product of its technical and generic context, and of what Peter Szendy

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[78] Georgina Born, 'For a Relational Musicology: Music and Interdisciplinarity, Beyond the Practice Turn', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 135, 2 (November 2010): 205–43 (p. 220).
[79] Born, 'Relational Musicology,' p. 219.
[80] See for example spectrographic representations of 'Wake Me Up' by Avicii in the documentation (Supplementary Material/5 Spectrograms/Wake Me Up). In contemporary dance music, instead of remaining in distinct ranges, instrumental parts shift progressively in and out of the frequency space of the voice.
[81] Ola Stockfelt, 'Adequate Modes of Listening' in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, eds Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 88–93 (91) (emphasis in original).

describes as 'the era when listeners become authors'[82] – where new kinds of relationship to music are evoked by digitisation.

The opening of *Clubbing*, discussed in the previous chapter, works to frame what comes after it, to construct a mode of audience relationship that is specific to the performance. In particular, it establishes that the sonic material shifts between three different registers: concrete, referential and abstract. However, it is only able to do this because of its disciplinary context. In beginning a dance and music piece with a spoken monologue, we wanted to establish the choreographic and musical aspects of the voice, the voice's relationship to the body, the corporeality of language and an embodied relationship between the codification and abstraction of sound. That is, we wanted to situate the threshold between language and music, or speech and dance, in the performing body. This would not have been available to us in the same ways in a work that, for example, was self-consciously dramatic, or that called itself a play. There would be other relational forces at play, other 'actors' inserting themselves into the field of reception. Thus, whilst the performed material in the opening section attempts to contextualise the rest of the performance, to construct modes of reception specific to this piece, we co-opted the extant disciplinary contexts in order for it to do so. This is a necessarily unstable and contingent situation – musical *materials* when reinvented as *contexts* are temporary, dynamic and subject to persistent relational pressures.

In *A Pacifist's Guide* we begin with a stable and coherent presentation of music and progressively reorganised its contextual foundations so that the 'music' of 'musical theatre' itself becomes an 'actor' in the performance. In *Clubbing* the entrance of what is recognisably music is delayed to the point that it stops short of being music because it is contextualised by all that has come before: a single note becomes a collage of movement, breath, gesture, language, acoustics and sound. Whilst maintaining their distinct disciplinary trajectories, sound is latent choreography and movement threatens to

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[82] Peter Szendy, *Listen: A History of our Ears* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 136.

become music. And in *Binary Code*, the centrality of the piano – the quintessential tool of the composer – allows for a further troubling of the ontological boundaries of music. I will go on to discuss the implications of a contextually responsive, collaborative, interdisciplinary practice for a stable ontology of music in the next chapter, but here I mean that even in a purely disciplinary sense the work tilts towards, for example, drama, experimentalism, speech science and – because of the remit of the festival in which it was presented – dance.

In the terms that I am describing here, context is more than a synonym for 'referent', the circumstances in which the music takes place or the pressures that impact on the process of making music. Contexts are differently available to compositional intervention and differently impactful on the sounding result but they all combine, systematically, to *make* music. As George Home-Cook writes of the relationship of sound to scenography, for instance, 'what we *see* plays a vital role in shaping our perception of what we hear'.[83] In Kyriakides's 'music-text-films', it is possible that, in conceiving of the (inner) voice as a mechanism for 'determining the way our attention shifts between media', the voice itself becomes a context that acts on the other musical and visual materials, including the projected text from which it is derived.[84] For a specific example from my own practice: although it would be possible to create a much more faithful rendering of the original speech sounds of *Binary Code* using sine waves, for example, it would be an entirely different proposition as a piece of music. Whilst this particular instance could appear to be primarily a question of materiality, it is more to do with contextually contingent meaning. The *work* (and this is becoming an increasingly untenable descriptor) is composed out of a multiplicity of contextual relationships. Contexts act on other contexts to produce musical meaning as well as to produce compositional processes, ostensibly in the same way that notes combine to make chords that, in turn,

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[83] George Home-Cook, *Theatre and Aural Attention* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 83.
[84] Kyriakides, *Imagined Voices*, p. 230.

have contextual relationships to other chords.[85] What, however, are the implications for the work of the composer if composition becomes a process of managing or curating contexts?

Binary Code (2017) extract, as rendered by Sibelius software

If the idea of context as compositional material stops at informing compositional choices or remaining cognizant of potential receptions, it remains peripheral to the actual work of music-making. Borrowing Born's description of a subordinate musicology, it would be 'as though bits of social analysis can be drafted in to serve musicology's needs for a better account of context or performance, while everything else remains the same'.[86] Or, in compositional terms, paying lip-service to contextual concerns whilst maintaining the centrality of traditional conceptions of the musical object and traditional conceptions of authorship. But if I am proposing that an expanded conception of what music *is* means that composers can work with those elements *as music*, there is an inevitable

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[85] The ability to computationally model how music is perceived is predicated on defining 'context' both in general terms and in the terms specific to the music in question. I.e., harmony and melody, for instance, can only be understood through contextual relationships. See Geraint A. Wiggins, Marcus T. Pearce and Daniel Müllensiefen, 'Computational Modelling of Music Cognition and Musical Creativity', in *The Oxford Handbook of Computer Music*, ed. Roger Dean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 392–94.

[86] Born, 'Relational Musicology': 231.

destabilisation of the ontologies of both music and composition. As I will discuss in the following chapter, this is problematic, not least in terms of a unified and coherent composition portfolio.

Chapter 3: Authorship and Collaboration

'Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of
the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to
use the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least
for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.'
– Susan Sontag

With *Clubbing*, Levi and I were concerned to maintain a sense of
experiential heterogeneity. We have worked together for a number of years
but this is the first time we attempted to make a truly interdisciplinary work.
Crucially, however, we have often taken parallel conceptual approaches to
the work so that there are other disciplinary meeting points than emotional
or narrative affect or cross-modal metaphor. Despite the fact that in places it
is impossible to meaningfully differentiate between choreography and
music, our interest there was not in creating a hybrid discipline or making
an ethical statement about the hierarchical ordering of the senses,[87] but in
making abstract compositional choices that were generative of both sound
and movement.

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[87] Although *Clubbing* bears resemblance to the (largely German) tradition of 'composed theatre', and is to some extent prefigured by the work of Heine Goebels, Ruedi Häusermann and Mauricio Kagel, for example, there is no attempt to approach the other elements of theatre as (quasi) musical material – which according to Matthias Rebstock and David Roesner in *Composed Theatre: Aesthetics, Practices, Processes* (Bristol: Intellect, 2011) is a qualifying attribute of the genre (pp. 326–7).

Poster designed by Will Brady

When we began to work on the piece, we originally had in mind that half the performers would be percussionists and half dancers. However, after an initial workshop in Essen in Germany, we realised that work presented in this way would inevitably become about comparative disciplinary

physiology. This is of interest,[88] but not for the work we wanted to make.[89] And there is something productive about making music with dancers. It is not to fetishise musical amateurism but dancers have a certain kind of disciplined corporeal precision that has more to do with space than timing.[90] There are ways of making music with dancers – using the skills that are unique to dancers – that are not readily available to musicians.[91]

Additionally, it may be that in working with performers whose collective primary skill is not playing musical instruments, the kinds of relationality discussed in Chapter Two are more clearly at play. If, as Catherine Laws puts it, the idea that 'the instrumentalist's body is a *vehicle* for the realisation of cognitised musical intentions', is destabilised, what is then at stake?[92] If, in other words, a traditional conception of instrumental precision is not the primary objective of the bodies on stage, what is? Perhaps Nicholas Cook's depiction of music as 'the sound of social interaction' becomes newly salient in this kind of context.[93] In my piece *Accident* (2005) and in another collaboration with Keren Levi, *Envelopes* (2010), the converse process was in operation: my identical twin brother and I playing (drum kit and a table of objects respectively) in absolute unison. Where movement becomes music in *Clubbing*, music became choreography. In

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[88] See, for example, the hugely influential *Both Sitting Duet* (2002) by composer Matteo Fargion and choreographer Jonathan Burrows.

[89] And we avoid a version of what Shlomowitz calls 'the Kagel problem', invoked when musicians are required to act. Matthew Shlomowitz, 'Mapping Contemporary Music: Four Positions' [n.d.]: https://www.dissonance.ch/upload/pdf/140_04_hb_shl_mapping.pdf.

[90] 'Amateurs "of no great skill" can, while trying to play "as well" as possible, produce so-called "new techniques" (such as multiphonics) and complexities of rhythm and intonation that would take years of work for the professional musician.' Virginia Anderson, 'Historical Assumptions of the Avant-Garde and Experimental Movements: The Participants and Their Historians': http://www.experimentalmusic.co.uk/emc/Jems_files/HistoricalAssumptions.pdf [Accessed 5 June. 2018]; see also Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage And Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), on Cornelius Cardew's Scratch Orchestra, pp. 131–9.

[91] See, for example, Phillipa Cullen's extensive work from the 1970s on the interaction between dancers and music technology. A catalogue of her documentation has been compiled by Stephen Jones as: *Dancing the Music: Philippa Cullen* at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249563725_Philippa_Cullen_Dancing_the_Music [Accessed 5 June 2018].

[92] William Brooks, Damien Harron and Catherine Laws, 'Sounded Gestures and Enacted Sounds': http://www.cmpcp.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/psn2011_Laws.pdf [Accessed 5 June 2018].

[93] Cook, 'Musical Encounters'.

both situations, it is relationality that allows for the disciplinary uncoupling to take effect.

Outi Markkula and Mari Matre Larssen in *Clubbing* (2015)

The sonic and choreographic material in *Clubbing* is made from a very limited collection of generative assignments and generative mathematical

patterns. The effect is of a multiplicity of tasks that have a perceptually obscure yet singular cultural code – a folk village of sound-producing activities. In shifting and unstable constellations, the sounds themselves oscillate between concrete, mimetic and abstract registers. Taking a transdisciplinary journey, a typewriter arrives to transcribe speech, later returning to articulate an otherwise silent walk across the stage, and later still is reconfigured as a percussion instrument…

> # With one hand holding a beater, strike a sounding surface repeatedly at a speed that is slightly slower than your maximum. Stop just before consistency becomes impossible to maintain.

One of the recurring scores from *Clubbing*

Much of the material in *Clubbing* is organised in time (and space) by repeating patterns of 42. There are six performers and we took the first six prime numbers, 2, 3, 5, 7, 11 and 13, the sum of which is 42. Each 42-beat cycle is split into smaller rhythmic cells of these primes. There was no numerological (or other) significance to that choice. We were interested in making forms that were perceptually unpredictable and asymmetrical – prime numbers are used in computing and have evolved in the natural world as a way to generate non-coincidental cycles.

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A   7 1 2 5 1 11 2 3 2 3 2 3
B   2 3 2 5 2 3 2 13 3 2 5
C  13 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 7 2
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Examples of cycles of primary numbers that add up to 42 that we used to organise the material in *Clubbing*

These phrases recur in various ways: through patterns in space, rhythmical composition and, primarily, in partnered stick dancing (which employs both). These different presentations of what we call 'the code' are superimposed on each other in varying speeds and levels of abstraction. The effect is of a world both chaotic and ordered. The organisational principles (because a cycle of 42, particularly when split into cells of prime numbers, is outside of what psychologists call the 'phonological loop' of memory) are clearly present but resistant to familiarisation or easy understanding.[94]

Hillary Blake Firestone and Outi Markkula in *Clubbing* (2015)

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[94] Francisco Aboitiz, S. Aboitiz and Ricardo R García, 'The phonological loop: a key innovation in human evolution', *Current Anthropology* 51 (January 2010): 55–65.

Once we had gathered the kinds of material we wanted to work with, 'the code' allowed me and Levi to set compositional processes in motion and to witness the results. For parts of the process, our roles were dramaturgical and curatorial rather than authorial. There was a moment where we could have allowed the material to be reordered and reprocessed anew with each performance but this would have necessitated a loss of precision and deliberateness, and, especially given that we were asking dancers to work outside their medium of expertise, a loss of a sense of familiarity.[95] It was important to us that the performers were embedded within a system rather than discovering through free choices in the moment, and that there was a restricted set of sounds and activities – that what mathematicians would describe as the 'state space' of the piece would be relatively small. This is to concede that there is a complicated process of authorship at play. Levi and I ceded a creative register to 'the code' but not to the performers.

Hillary Blake Firestone, Alma Sua, Rita Vilhena, Yui Nakagami, Outi Markkula and Mari Matre Larsen in *Clubbing* (2016)

What I have attempted to articulate in the previous chapters is that my work is generated out of the demands of its context, both in specific terms – in this case, through the haecceities of the voice – and more broadly; and, to the extent that this is a decision, out of a considered evasion of creative authority on my part. Whilst this is a recognised position in post-Cagean

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[95] This decision was guided by Alvin Lucier's account of discussing a performance of *Poem for Chairs, Tables, Benches, Etc.* (1960) with La Monte Young, in which Young insists that the performers are not seen to be 'learning on the job'. Alvin Lucier, *Music 109: Notes on Experimental Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012), pp. 126–7.

experimental music and artistic practice more widely, my work does not exclusively take place in a context in which this is meaningful in itself. It is possible that working collaboratively – often as an adjunct to the main event – affords the composer the ability to further elude creative authority. Unlike in concert situations: in making work as part of someone else's work, the procedures and postures required to displace compositional authorship are minimal to non-existent. Kyriakides proposes that 'one could say that in composed music there is a level of authorial narration',[96] that the composer's 'voice' is present. The qualifier 'composed' implies there might be musical situations in which this does not hold or holds to a lesser degree. It is possible that in (interdisciplinary) collaborative work, the authorial voice can be dispersed or displaced to the extent that its presence is negligible.

Expanding the quote from producer Noah Shebib from Chapter One slightly, he prefaces his discussion of the location of the voice in the audible frequency spectrum with a short but telling statement about his motivations: '*Instead of focusing on my music*, I was carving out an entire space in the frequencies.'[97] Shebib's signature sound is both a consequence of digital acoustics – the meeting point of an absolute volume threshold of 0dB and the audible frequency spectrum – and a disavowal of his own authorial position. Interestingly and perhaps not coincidentally, Shebib's interest in sound technology came out of a rejection of his childhood as an actor. At the time he started working with Drake (also a child actor), he had given up making music and was concentrating exclusively on engineering (materialism) rather than composing (authorship).

Paradoxically, it is further possible that the kinds of compositional methodologies on offer to the ideologically motivated non-author are (necessarily) wider and include tropes such as emotive harmony, narrative affect or semantic reference that would otherwise be the hallmarks of wilful authority. In other words, if – rather than as the fruits of authorial

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[96] Kyriakides, *Imagined Voices*, p. 58.
[97] Noah Shebib, 'Underwater Sounds' (my emphasis).

expression – the music emerges from the work and the work emerges from the context, the conflict between, for example, procedure and choice or materiality and drama is not as stark. In particular, what is on offer is the potential for alternative and experimental types of practice within and through ostensibly conventional contexts. Shebib's music, for example, does not happen in a context where authorship is conventionally underplayed and what it leaves space for is extremes of proprietorialism on behalf of the vocalists. Similarly, the function of much of my work – with Kimmings and others – is to assist in the construction of a coherent authorial and narrational voice. Incidentally, because experimental (technological) practices occur through utility rather than ontological confrontation, theatre-makers (and theatre audiences) have been historically more willing to accept new ways of presenting sound in performance than has art music.[98]

In a very real sense, it is context that dictates the ontological borders of sound, what might be perceived, for example, as pleasant or unpleasant.[99] To expand the quote used in the Introduction, theatre-sound scholar Lynne Kendrick identifies that 'the means by which we engage in sound production precisely impacts on noise'. That is, the arena in which sound is presented impacts on where we perceive its limits to be. 'We are the arbiters of noise, of what this means and what it can do, and what a definition might be. And nowhere is this more apparent than in theatre practice.'[100] In order to remain properly responsive to the demands of the dramaturgical situation,

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[98] The first use of pre-recorded sound onstage in theatre (a baby crying), for example, comes 34 years before Ottorino Respighi's orchestral piece *Pines of Rome* (1924) (which incorporated a phonograph recording of a nightingale). See John Levack Drever, 'John Levack Drever on Sound Effect – Object – Event', in *Sound: A Reader in Theatre Practice*, ed. Ross Brown (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 188–205 (192–3). However, Jean-Marc Larrue argues that a certain form of 'mediatic resistance', due to the privileged status of 'presence' has characterised the development of sound in theatre. 'Sound Reproduction Techniques in Theatre: A Case of Mediatic Resistance', in eds Lynne Kendrik and David Roesner, *Theatre Noise*, pp. 18–20.
[99] See Frances Crow's discussion of the 2002 European Union Directive 'relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise', for example: 'it is not the sounds themselves that are noisy or unpleasant but the context in which these sounds are heard that makes them unwanted.' 'Noise Mapping: Tracing Sound', *Earshot* 5 (August 2007): 6–11 (p. 7).
[100] Kendrick, *Theatre and Aurality*, p. 72.

it is necessary for music (and designed sound and its others) to remain ontologically flexible. Of course, to varying degrees, the dramaturgical situations in the portfolio are themselves available to my own creative influence.[101] My use of the idea of modular contextualisation, as described in the previous chapter, is, in part due to its resistance to modelisation, but also because it accommodates different levels of authorial sovereignty. For Lydia Goehr, a theory (of music) 'explains what sort of thing a work is in terms compatible with the description of how the concept of a work functions in practice.'[102] Although I have relied on theory in order to articulate it, I have refrained from attempting to ascribe either a model for practice or a framework for analysis to how I have described my own working relationship to context. Instead, it presents ways to reconcile the disparate elements of my work and allow it to begin.

If we ascribe value, for instance, to aesthetic, generic or scholarly coherence, the ideas around context allow me to accommodate the greatest threat to that in my work (at least in the terms laid out by Goehr): other people. This final chapter addresses the related concerns of interdisciplinarity, collaboration and authorship, and it was tempting to approach it as a series of caveats and excuses for the quality of the portfolio, which is ridden with the appalling consequences of having had to allow other people into its processes. (The drummer who yelled 'I'm not playing this fucking bullshit' at me in rehearsal; the producer who attempted to claim that a crisis meeting called by the musicians was because I had not scored things out properly rather than because of their pay; the atmosphere created by having to remain mindful of the huge financial and reputational pressures at stake in making theatre on an international stage…). Instead, I am attempting to write an account of how a practice that accommodates an expanded conception of context might also have to account for the impact of

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[101] Whilst writing this portfolio, I have also worked on performances in which the function of music was exclusively down to its dramatic utility. Whilst there are grounds for including that music in this discussion, I wanted to keep the material in the portfolio confined to that in which authorship and intention are more problematic to account for.
[102] Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 20.

interpersonal collaboration on the coherence of the work and, by implication, the coherence of the author.

If the problematisation of authorial agency is an idea that unites some composers working in both of Shlomowitz's contemporary music-making camps – materialism and expanded sonic practice – almost by definition, the strategy that is most visible is that which deals with authorship most explicitly through interdisciplinary practice. Writing about Jennifer Walshe's influential description of 'The New Discipline', Sanne Krogh Groth writes about how Goehr's 'work-concept' is fed back into itself in the work of three Danish composers who, through their own presence in the work, self-consciously use their position as authors (mindful of the cultural currency of that position) to destabilise its coherence:

> the teleological narrative, as found in the modernistic understanding of new music, is to various extents also enacted through the performativity of the composers and the embedded institutional conventions. *The whole point of the performance would not be possible if this context did not exist*, a context in which we find autonomous artworks, teleological narratives, and last, but not least, authors.[103]

In a sense, in Krogh Groth's characterisation, in Walshe's New Discipline, authorship is destabilised through excess. Walshe herself problematises her position through an unremitting overload of media, genre and cultural reference, including both the narcissistic impulses of social media and an archival collection of invented historical alter egos. Walshe herself, in delimiting the New Discipline, says that few of its proponents are working *in* theatre to *do* music: 'I'm not aware of many composers who work in this way who submit their works for performance art calls or seek to have their

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[103] Sanne Krogh Groth, 'Composers on Stage: Ambiguous Authorship in Contemporary Music Performance', *Contemporary Music Review* 35, 6 (2016): 686–705 (p. 703) (my emphasis).

work presented at theatre festivals.'[104] That is bound to be true almost by definition inasmuch as musical practices presented as theatre are necessarily distinct from theatrical practices presented as music – with different discursive, aesthetic and even sensorial ontologies that expanded practices must negotiate. As Krogh Groth argues, 'the whole point of the performance' is contingent on extant disciplinary contexts.

Although it is a relatively conventional context with ostensibly stable authors, musical theatre is the most provisional of art forms. That may at first seem like an absurd statement, but its processes are relatively unique in the performing arts. There are huge numbers of people involved – on the first day of rehearsals for *A Pacifist's Guide*, there were over 80 people in the room (none of these were the musicians) – and more people than in any other kind of production that I have witnessed claiming a stake in its creative content; there is also a longer and more collectively responsive development period. New opera, for example, potentially the closest form to the musical, does not conventionally have previews, whereas a new musical may preview for over a year before its official opening, during which time it may have changed unrecognisably and have a different creative team.[105] Of course, the history of music is replete with long gestation periods for works, but these are more typically the result of a developing vision of a single individual.[106] In musical theatre, it is not even a given that the composer will remain in post.

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[104] Jennifer Walshe, 'The New Discipline: A Compositional Manifesto': http://musiktexte.de/WebRoot/Store22/Shops/dc91cfee-4fdc-41fe-82da-0c2b88528c1e/MediaGallery/The_New_Discipline.pdf [accessed 5 June 2018].

[105] *A Pacifist's Guide* had sixteen public performances across three venues before it officially opened. Prior to that, it had innumerable sharings during the previous two years.

[106] The compositional idea of working with distinct sets of phonemes as musical material in *Clubbing* took fifteen years from conception to eventual performance in the opening, and even then it was in an inchoate form.

Rehearsals of *A Pacifist's Guide*, from left: Nina Steiger (dramaturg), Debbie Hannan (assistant director) Marc Tritschler (musical director), Kirsty Housley (dramaturg), Malcolm Forbes-Peckham (rehearsal pianist), Bryony Kimmings (writer/director), Lizzie Gee (choreographer), Jon Gingell (guitarist/copyist), Lewis Gibson (sound designer), Tom Parkinson

The implications of this are significant in terms of the possibility of a coherent authorial voice. Two contradictory forces are at play: firstly, because of the speed at which the work is done and the number of people involved in rendering the production, the score has more authority than the composer. This was unique in my own compositional history. I tend not to work with scores in a traditional sense and would rather develop ideas in dialogue with musicians and singers than hand over a finished document. I have always wanted to avoid a relationship that Louis Andriessen described as 'you want a Bb? Here's your fucking Bb.'[107] Secondly, the extent to which ideas are carried through from conception to the stage are dependent on the composer's relative charisma in the rehearsal/development room. In a situation where almost everyone had more experience than me, working in an unfamiliar genre in an unfamiliar institution, this latter condition was particularly problematic.

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[107] Andriessen in a talk at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, 10 February, 2016.

Alice Morgan (piano), with whom I have had a creative musical relationship for over ten years and who was ultimately deemed by the producers not to have the correct experience for the post of musical director, and Ruby Colley in the first workshop for *A Pacifist's Guide* (September 2014)

In a further paradox, my own insecure position had implications for how creative the cast and band could be. If I had had more confidence in my position, I could have been bolder in my propositions and potentially made some experiments that may have resulted in more original material, and I could have been more open to seeing where offers from the musicians would lead. In terms of the orchestration, for example, I wanted to be able to cover all potential bases. We had written the songs to be generically dissimilar so it made sense to have a degree of flexibility within the band. Having a doubling of electric and double bass as well as acoustic and electric guitar, for example, would allow me to have a quasi-classical trio of guitar, double bass and violin as well as a traditional rock band. In reality, I think this choice, which was born of timidity more than anything, represented a general lack of clarity.

The only element of the singing that was not in the score, which emerged from a cast member out of the process of rehearsal, was the guttural 'oh' that Jenny Fitzpatrick, playing a doctor persuading Golda Rosheuvel (playing Lara Hazel) to accept the inevitability of her death, placed before the second stanza in each of her verses in 'Miracle' – the 'disco' song discussed in Chapter One. I cannot remember anyone ever discussing it with

her, saying 'yes, we like that, keep going', so perhaps it took some of its power through its insecurity, but it was a synecdoche, for me, of the latent potential in the cast that we were unable to uncover; a momentary crack in the score that allowed the body to reveal itself.[108]

In arranging 'Miracle', I imagined the voice of the doctor to be soft and airy, vulnerable despite its authority, and for the patient's performance to be confident and stylised. In dramatic terms, the earthly knowledge of the doctor (in John Berger's famous characterisation 'the familiar of death'[109]) would be in contrast to the denial of the patient, and we could co-opt different dramaturgical tropes in order to achieve that – with the patient entering a loud and brash, stylised world of performed artifice. In the event, this was achieved to great effect by switches in lighting states but there were a number of obstacles to rendering it musically. Firstly, my desire for Rosheuvel to sing through a hand-held microphone was quashed by the choreographer, who, because of having considerably more experience of musical theatre than anyone else in the process, came to have more agency over many of these kind of musical decisions than I did, secondly, Jenny had the loudest voice of any singer I have ever worked with, and, thirdly, the drummer refused to stop playing through the sections that were intended to be only guitar and voice.

Jenny Fitzpatrick (left) in 'Miracle'

[108] Dominic Symonds examines the potential of this kind of effect in musical theatre in 'The Story of Oh: the aesthetics and rhetoric of a common vowel sound', *Studies in Musical Theatre* 2, 3 (December 2008): 245–60.

[109] John Berger, *A Fortunate Man* (London: Penguin, 1967), p. 62.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the final section of the show, from when Golda sings 'Silly Girl', was intended to be effectively acoustic. Since seeing the singer-songwriter Josh Ritter perform his encore in a massive concert hall entirely without amplification in 2004, I have used this compositional device in many pieces. It forces attention onto the body of the performer(s). In *To Band* (2013) by Keren Levi and Tom Parkinson, for example, this process took place in two stages: I removed the reverb from the output of the sound system before removing the amplification of the musicians entirely. In *We Are In Trouble* (2018), a dance piece choreographed by Ivgi&Greben, a piece of music loud enough to mask all the acoustic sounds of dancing disappears to leave a collage of unamplified breath and running feet. The physicality of the dancers is presented in a new way and a new kind of relationality is invoked. These moments do not have to entirely remove technology but (appear) to nullify its distancing effects. In *Ugly Chief* (2017), after a series of brash and loose songs I arranged the Solomon Burke song 'Cry to Me' for unamplified electric guitar and voice through a small portable megaphone. Although it is partly artificial and self-consciously designed, what is invoked is an absence of mediation and technological artifice – in crude dramaturgical terms, it suggests a non-fictional shift into an exposed and vulnerable honesty (a proposition that, of course, is itself productively open to critical and dramaturgical scrutiny).

In changing the modality of sound, we were attempting to invoke what Catherine Laws describes as 'the performativity of listening', a situation that would allow the audience 'to concentrate on what it is to listen, rather than on the subject that speaks or the object that produces sound'.[110] Whilst this may suggest a move away from the body and towards intellection, the displacement of an exterior subject and object allows for a situation in which, as George Home-Cook argues, 'the lived body itself is foregrounded as attentionally thematic', and that would necessarily include both the

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[110] Catherine Laws, 'On Listening', *Performance Research* 15, 3 (2010): 1–3 (p. 1).

bodies onstage and the body of the listener.[111] It is not only in overt measures that these kind of effects can be employed: there are ways of using sound at the edge of attention, for example, that compose the salience of a moment. Home-Cook contrasts 'dramaturgically organised noise' with 'theatrically organised hearing', where, for instance, the removal of a false sound bed assumed to be part of the ambience of the room could heighten the tension at a judicious point in the show.[112] These moments can 'direct the ear to listen with more care', as Mark Lamos describes it, without the audience necessarily having to be cognisant of what is happening.[113] In *A Pacifist's Guide*, this shift – replete with silences – would be crucial in establishing a definitive end to a fictionalised portrayal of the sick body and, in broad dramatic terms, the point at which the space became too ill to continue.

The plan was for the musicians to be forced off their bandstand, away from their technology, by a metastasising stage and to join the cast. I arranged 'Silly Girl' for a telecaster guitar through a tiny battery powered amplifier worn on the hip, large goat-skin bass drum, metal chain, viola, double bass, Indian harmonium and unamplified voice. We tried it during the first previews at Home in Manchester, but in the event the auditorium was so loud that the potential of this moment was lost. The stage was full of very large inflatable 'blobs' and many of the lights were fan cooled. Despite concerted attempts to minimise the effect by building long exit tubes for the fans etc., there was a constant and unpredictably discordant drone throughout the show that built in volume towards the end. Many of the modes of 'theatrically organised hearing' and ways of guiding attention that are specific to theatre were unavailable to us. As a result, abstracted from the content of the song, 'Silly Girl' – ultimately arranged for amplified instruments – acted partly as a functional reprise of the first half of the show rather than a significant milestone in the journey of the audience. If any

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[111] Home-Cook, *Theatre*, p. 47.
[112] Home-Cook, *Theatre*, p. 76.
[113] Mark Lamos cited in Home-Cook, *Theatre*, p. 77.

semblance of the passage from amplified artifice to acoustic post-drama remained, it was as metaphor rather than as liberation.[114]

Extract from 'Silly Girl'

Much of the work that could be characterised as collaborative took place outside of the rehearsal room: in phone calls, conversations in the pub, Whatsapp group chats, over lunch; problems were addressed and strategies were negotiated. Uniquely in my experience, in this production there were no meetings in which departmental heads – music (both me and Marc Tritschler, the musical director), sound, set, choreography, costume and direction – would get together and talk through the creative process. Everything was ad hoc and on the fly. As such, it is very difficult to write about coherently, especially what happened towards the end of the process when we were rushing to finish. The next three paragraphs briefly outline some aspects of my working relationships with Bryony Kimmings, Brian Lobel and Lewis Gibson.

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[114] See Sontag, *Illness*, p. 3.

Kimmings and I wrote the songs in productive bursts, largely face to face but sometimes she sent lyrics or a voice recording from her phone and sometimes I sent her demos of musical ideas. Perhaps because they are incomplete outside their dramaturgical context, none of our methods are easily assimilated into models of collaborative songwriting;[115] we would get together and churn out the bones of half a dozen songs in an afternoon that would start out on the piano, guitar or a laptop or without instruments altogether. Songwriting with her is the most uncomplicated and instantly rewarding artistic relationship that I have ever experienced. It feels fragile and temporary, as if whatever makes it work could easily disappear, but it has remained the same since we started writing together seven years ago. Although the process of making theatre together can be savage, neither of us have ever criticised each other's proposals.

On the first day working on *A Pacifist's Guide*, we met in a studio in Hackney Empire and talked over the kinds of things the show would address, together with Brian Lobel, our co-writer on the musical, who has made a number of performances of his own around cancer, sickness and representation. One of the things that Brian, as someone who has had cancer, regularly speaks to gatherings of healthcare professionals and advocates for patients, was keen to critique was the idea that cancer 'survivors' are somehow saints. He describes his own work as 'at odds with the conventional cancer narratives… which rely on the binary of tragic death/inspirational survival'.[116] In response to the pressure to 'fight' the 'battle' with dignity and the language around awareness-raising, we wrote 'Even Cunts Get Cancer'. The song remained the centrepiece of the show throughout the process until a point in the previews it became clear that it had lost its function, as the script crystallised into the emotional journey of the protagonist. Most of the songs for the musical followed this kind of trajectory: we would talk through a particular issue and how that might be dramaturgically rendered. This would often involve conversations with

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[115] For example, Joe Bennett, 'Collaborative Songwriting: The Ontology of Negotiated Creativity in Popular Music Studio Practice', *Journal of the Art of Record Production* 8 (2013): 1–9.

[116] Brian Lobel, *Theatre and Cancer* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, forthcoming).

Lobel and potentially with one of the cancer patients whose story we were attempting to evoke at that point.

The sound designer Lewis Gibson and I have a longstanding creative relationship that has incorporated both experimental music and work for theatre. As well as working on *A Pacifist's Guide*, he came to Amsterdam for a couple of days to work on *Clubbing* with me as an outside ear. There is often a continuity between our roles and there is no one whose work is closer to mine. We talk through each other's projects even if we are not directly involved and function as sounding boards for each other's ideas and objectives. The process of *A Pacifist's Guide* would have been considerably different had he not been involved, primarily perhaps because he is as comfortable with me intervening in what is ostensibly the remit of sound design as I am with him making compositional interventions – which he did. In the majority of my work in theatre and dance, I am both sound designer and composer and – as the depiction of my relationships to sound and music have hopefully rendered unsurprising – regard the roles as largely synonymous. As such, it was vital here that the sound designer and I would not be proprietorial about our roles. For me, when music starts, where it comes from, how loud it is and how it ends are often just as interesting questions as what the music is.

From left: repairs engineer at University College Hospital, Joyce Forbes, holding part of a drip machine for Lewis Gibson and me to record; Gibson recording a chemotherapy device

The extent to which the scholarship around music and collaboration focuses almost entirely on the relationship between composers and performing musicians, however, makes me doubt that the term is even accurate to describe many of the processes that went into producing this portfolio.[117] Indeed, a number of scholars agree on a definition of collaboration that would exclude elements of my work. Writing in the *Contemporary Music Review*, Alan Taylor suggests that 'the term collaboration should be limited to cases where the imaginative tasks are shared rather than divided between participants'. In most cases, scholars follow Sam Hayden and Luke Windsor in assuming that if there is a creative hierarchy, the composer would be found at the top.[118]

However, it is possible that an expanded conception of how context can function compositionally makes a narrow definition redundant because the degree of compositional agency in any musical situation is already under question – or is at least contingent and temporary.

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[117] See the recent edition of *Contemporary Music Review* dedicated to 'Collaboration in Contemporary Music' edited by Alan Taylor, 35, 6 (2016); also Sam Hayden and Luke Windsor, 'Collaboration and the Composer: Case Studies from the End of the 20th Century', *Tempo* 61, 240 (April 2007): 28–39.
[118] Hayden and Windsor, 'Collaboration': 32–3.

G. Douglass Barrett suggests that the rage at loss of authority that Arnold Schoenberg expresses in his letter to his publisher, and that Peter Ablinger extends by forcing the composer to 'speak' through the player piano in his piece *Letter from Schoenberg*, evokes a further kind of ontological challenge to music: 'This loss of autonomy, the questioning/destruction of authorship, the non-present (death of the) subject maybe considered another of music's others.'[119] Perhaps it is no accident that the kinds of musical practices and compositional relationships that I have written about here and are presented in the portfolio do not find an easy home in the *Contemporary Music Review* – because authorship is the signal to contextual noise. In Barrett's characterisation, 'music' and authorial voice are synonymous.

It is hard to overstate how under-studied collaboration is when it comes to music if one is not discussing the relationship between composers and musicians or situations where the composer is the boss. John Cage, for example, is possibly the most theorised and influential composer of the twentieth century and for most of his life he was in a romantic and artistic partnership with the choreographer Merce Cunningham. As such, one could be forgiven for assuming that there would be a wealth of material both by Cage and others about their collaborative relationship. However, this is not the case. When asked about collaboration, Cage cannot hide his irritation. Beyond the fact that they worked independently on their own aspects of the work they made, Cage says next to nothing other than to reject the idea of collaboration. "We don't collaborate… we work quite separately… I refuse collaboration." Cage is not alone amongst composers in this regard, take Aaron Copeland, for example, who insisted that programme notes for the ballet *Appalachian Spring* explained that the title has nothing to do with his music and was the sole responsibility of his collaborative partner Martha Graham. In fact, the most interesting thing about the scholarship on music and *interdisciplinary* collaboration is that it barely exists: it appears to be

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[119] Barrett, *Music and Its Others*, p. 12.

uninteresting to composers and to musicologists.[120] It is beyond the scope of this commentary to reflect on why this might be but perhaps it is because collaboration presents an existential threat to the coherence of the musical work, given how bound up it continues to be in authorship. Elsewhere, it has been suggested that there is something inherently antisocial about the musical personality.[121] Cage himself makes a distinction between the art that he makes and the work that he was forced to do because he needed the money. Once he could afford not to work in dialogue with others, he didn't, and the reasons why a composer would take that attitude are assumed, by Cage, to be self-evident.

All of this hasn't stopped Cage – primarily through his relationship with Cunningham – assuming the role of the go-to example of a collaborative artist in both scholarship and the popular imagination.[122] And, of course, it could be possible to read their interdisciplinary compositional methodology as a form of collaboration. However, (at least in Cage's telling, which, of course, might be incomplete[123]) their way of working has very little to do with my own or any of the collaborative situations that I find myself in.

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[120] To reiterate, I'm only talking about interdisciplinary collaboration, there is a wealth of material on collaboration between musicians and between musicians and composers.
[121] See, for example, Anthony E Kemp *The Musical Temperament: Psychology and Personality of Musicians* (New York: Oxford University Press 1996) and; Ulla Pohjannoro 'Inspiration and decision-making: A case study of a composer's intuitive and reflective thought' *Musicae Scientiae,* 18, 2, (2014): 166-188.
[122] See Stephen Raskauskas, 'How composer John Cage and choreographer Merce Cunningham changed the art of collaboration.' (2017) https://www.wfmt.com/2017/02/24/composer-john-cage-choreographer-merce-cunningham-changed-art-collaboration/ [accessed 19 January 2019]. Referencing Cage's practice, John Bischoff, Rich Gold, and Jim Horton, cite "…an important form of collaborative music, that is of the simultaneous playing of compositions." 'Music for an Interactive Net-
work of Microcomputers.' *Computer Music Journal* 2, 3 (1978) 28.
[123] As others have noted, it would be disingenuous to mention Cage's reluctance to speak publicly about the details of his relationship with Cunningham without acknowledging the professional, economic, legal and physical dangers of being openly homosexual throughout the time in which they were together. See Andy Weaver, 'Writing through Merce: John Cage's Silence, Differends, and Avant-Garde Idioms' *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 45, 2 (2012), pp. 19-37; and Jonathan D. Katz, 'John Cage's Queer Silence; Or, How to Avoid Making Matters Worse' *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 5, 2 (1999), for example. Others, however, have begun to argue recently that the position of sexuality in his work betray the limits of (anti-corporeal) Cagean experimentalism and it is possible that his stance on collaboration could also be addressed as part of this revisionist shift in the scholarship around his work (see Ryan Dahomey, 'John Cage, Julius Eastman,

Similarly, in an article titled "the Magic of Collaboration", Robert Ashley describes how he worked on the film opera *Perfect Lives:* "I regard PERFECT LIVES as a masterpiece of collaboration."[124] However, the situation that Ashley is describing is one in which all the disciplinary elements are ultimately derived from what he calls the "template": a musical structure composed by Ashley alone. "In this technique, the geometry of the television screens, the camera movement, the singers' gestures, the colour of the scene and the colours of the costumes are predetermined… The template governs everything."[125]

What might be useful for an understanding of the kinds of relationships that condition my own work, however, is to look at what, for example, Ashley's interdisciplinary collaborators on *PERFECT LIVES* had to say about the process and how they worked with his template. John Sanborn, who became the director, began working with Ashley after writing him a letter explaining why the approach to video that he appeared to be taking was uninteresting and what might be a more engaging alternative. From contemporary interviews with Sanborn, Ashley's template appears to have been flexible enough to allow him to make affective decisions about the video content and to be led, in part, by processes that are specific to video-making. According to Sanborn, the shape of the collaboration was determined largely by the media context, "I think *PERFECT LIVES* is a great break in the tradition of how images and sound go together in a dramatic form, most importantly because it was composed for television." He describes his own breakthroughs as coming up with what he calls "re-metaphors" for "certain musical ideas that I know exist and that have been worked out by Bob [Ashley] and Peter [Gordon, music producer] and Blue [Gene Tyranny, pianist]," that allow him to tell the story of the opera whilst remaining

and the Homosexual Ego' in ed. Benjamin Piekut, *Tomorrow is the Question* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2014) pp. 39-62).
[124] Robert Ashley "The Magic of Collaboration" in ed. Ralf Dietrich *Outside of Time: Ideas About Music* (Köln: Musiktexte, 2009) p. 250
[125] Ashley "Magic of Collaboration" p. 268

faithful to the dictates of Ashley's template *and* the demands of the medium.[126]

There is certainly a broad analogy here with the ways in which Levi and I worked together and the ways in which I worked with Kimmings during the rehearsal process. Perhaps (outside of interpersonal considerations) the inevitable contradictions between discipline or medium specificity and interdisciplinary desires are what characterises the work of collaboration more than anything else. Often the material starts to insist on its own, intradisciplinary, path and this might follow a different direction to the cross-disciplinary strategy agreed in advance. Ideally, as appears to be the case in *PERFECT LIVES*, the procedural structures that have been agreed upon would be flexible enough to accommodate this without threatening the coherence of the work.

Ashley encourages the reader to pick collaborators wisely: "If, as a composer, you intend to make a large, collaborative composition, your motto and guideline should be: work only with people of genius."[127] In this he is similar to the choreographer Jonathan Burrows who has a longstanding collaborative relationship with the composer Matteo Fargion, saying "find the right person to work with you and then trust them completely."[128] (Beyond that insight, however, Burrows appears not to have shared anything publicly about the details of their collaborative processes.) Vera John-Steiner writes about how trust is essential in inventive collaborative situations because it allows artists to overcome the kinds of doubts that inhibit creativity: "Trust between collaborators often contributes to the heightened self confidence needed to overcome the weight of artistic traditions."[129] In this, however, we return to the main reason that collaboration is difficult to address: it is rooted in the swamp of human

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[126] Peter Greenaway–Four American Composers (1983)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XS-5lQtAuVM [Accessed 19 January 2019]
[127] Ashley "Magic of Collaboration" p. 254
[128] Jonathan Burrows, *A Choreographer's Handbook* (Ablingdon: Routledge, 2010) p.
[129] Vera John-Steiner, *Creative Collaboration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 79

interaction. In approaching the complexity of this topic, John-Steiner notes "the challenge of effectively integrating intellectual, aesthetic and emotional aspects of creativity." She observes that "the literature on collaboration focuses primarily on the cognitive aspects of mutuality… But students of collaboration have not yet provided a theoretical framework to account for the significance of emotion in partnership."[130]

In any case, collaboration appears to be difficult to pin down.[131] Across all fields – politics, economics, business, literature, film studies, education, psychology, self-help, the arts – apart from Cage, it is very difficult to find instances of collaboration cited as anything other than an assumed good.[132] As Karen Savage and Dominic Symonds argue, it is necessary to keep definitions open.[133] And attempting to contain the word to a particular relational geometry, as Taylor does in the new music review, quickly descends into value-laden semantics. On the other hand, Salome Vogelin's claim, for instance, that speaking is "a collaboration between mouth and ear,"[134] is typical of cases where the deployment of the word is poetically provocative yet broad enough to escape meaningful definition. In fact, the study of collaboration suffers from a tension between three competing problems: it is a buzzword deployed uncritically as a synonym for any kind

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[130] John-Steiner *Collaboration* pp. 75-76
[131] For a discussion on the difficulty of agreeing a definition of collaboration amongst scholars, see Pierre Dillenbourg, Michael Baker, Agnès Blaye and Claire O'Malley, 'The evolution of research on collaborative learning' eds. Pieter Reiman and Hans Spada *Learning in humans and machine: Towards an interdisciplinary learning science* (Oxford: Elsevier, 1996) p. 190
[132] Emily R. Lai discusses this problem in regards to the literature on collaboration in an educational setting arguing that in the main, studies simply assume benefits in teaching collaborative skills to children, even though "there is scant empirical evidence," to account for how and why it might be effective. "Collaboration: A Literature Review" (Pearson, 2011) http://images.pearsonassessments.com/images/tmrs/collaboration-review.pdf p. 2 [accessed 19 January 2019]. Indeed, it is only interdisciplinary collaboration that Cage appears to have been resistant to, he was happy to describe his musical relationships as productively collaborative, often crediting the pianist and composer David Tudor in those terms. Because of Tudor's involvement in the composition of *Williams Mix,* for example, in a 1952 letter to Boulez, he cites it as "not 'my' work." In Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1993) p. 132.
[133] "In short, we (Savage and Symonds) have what might be interpreted as a "broad church" perspective on collaboration, which critics might view as blurred, but which we see as receptive to different variations of mutually beneficial activity." Karen Savage and Dominic Symonds, *Economies of Collaboration in Performance: More than the Sum of the Parts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) p.112
[134] p196

of positive relationship between things; art criticism is overwhelmingly oriented towards individual lead artists; it threatens authorial branding.[135]

Looking beyond the specific conditions of the interpersonal collaborative relationships at play in the portfolio, there are novel ways in which collaboration and authorship collide in musical theatre. Early in the process of making *Jerry Springer*, before Stewart Lee became involved as a co-author, Richard Thomas did a series of scratch performances at Battersea Arts Centre, promising audience members a pint of beer if they contributed an idea that made it into the show. Ordinarily, the process of working with Kimmings is also unusually open to feedback and she has developed ways (using bespoke feedback forms rather than discussion) of synthesising audience opinion as the work is made in order to feed it back into the performance. With *A Pacifist's Guide,* however, this way of working was abandoned, possibly because there was already an unmanageable amount of voices in the rehearsal room. From today's perspective, the collaborative relationship that was probably most meaningful in the life of *Jerry Springer* is between the production houses, Avalon, Alan McKeown and the National Theatre. Indeed, Avalon, The National Theatre and Complicite were all involved in the process of making *A Pacifist's Guide* and it is true that the frictions of that particular constellation were partly deterministic of the trajectory of the show. In a fascinating 2016 article, Ashley M. Pribyl makes a compelling case to include the lawyers for June Havoc (the real life protagonist Gypsy Rose Lee's sister) as collaborators in the musical *Gypsy* (for many practitioners, the pinnacle of the musical artform) given how impactful their contributions were to the shape of the narrative. Interestingly, when the American composer Missy Mazzoli bought the exclusive rights to stage an opera of Lars Von Trier's film *Breaking the Waves*, the rights to stage a play or a musical remained available.[136] In

[135] Ashley Lee Wong writes compellingly about this latter problem and the threat that collaboration poses to the "reputation economy" amongst artists. 'Work In The Creative Economy: Living Contradictions Between the Market and Creative Collaboration' eds. James Graham and Alessandro Gandini, *Collaborative Production in the Creative Industries,* (London: University of Westminster Press, 2017) pp. 197-215

[136] Missy Mazzoli in conversation, 2014

theory, this implies that the ontological limits of musical theatre, opera and drama already reside in legal documents, ready to be contested in court as well as onstage.

Ordinarily, when thinking about my own work, 'collaboration' is purely a description of the interpersonal contexts that impact on its formation. My primary concern is how I can collaborate with others and my interest in the theories and models of collaboration (to the extent that they exist) is in better facilitating that. However, following others in opening up the scope of collaboration to include (for example) institutional, legal and audience relationships, suggests that there is a potential for 'collaboration' to start acting like a synonym for 'context' itself. One approach to revising the work of this commentary, therefore, would be to regard my practice as: *collaborating with the conditions within which the work is composed*. There are further implications here for authorship if collaboration implies a weakening of authorial sovereignty and collaborative partners can expand to include non-human agents.[137]

Making music in collaborative contexts requires effort that is not traditionally associated with the role of the composer – towards other people and, potentially, towards other, less responsive bodies. If the material of composition is expanded to include everything that impacts upon listening, the authority of the composer is already less coherent. Musical theatre presents a further challenge to this kind of thinking because there are extant and delimited modes of collaboration and these prescribe an authorial coherence to the composer. In experimental and interdisciplinary contexts, this lack of coherence has the potential to be creatively productive, but, as we have seen, there is reluctance within the discipline of music to disavow ultimate authorial stability. This disavowal suggests something about the

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[137] This is where the discourse on composer/musician collaborations meets this discussion – the demands of the particular instrument has to be taken into account. In a discussion of collaborations involving the virtuosic oboeist Christopher Redgate, Michael Hooper argues: "the oboe, as much as the composer and performer, plays a part in shaping musical outcomes." https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/tempo/article/start-of-performance-or-does-collaboration-matter/091DD929DC4B9F2E7107A1B055BA0842

obdurate cultural position of the composer but also, and much more interestingly, suggests something particular to the ontology of music. If, as I have suggested, music – and particularly music in an interdisciplinary context – is uniquely amenable to the idea of context as compositional material, theatre offers a platform to play with and intervene in the material of composition away from the deafening noise of the concert hall.

Conclusion: *See Me Now*

'If I was ever on my own in the bathroom or whatever I'd do a few scales to see, or to test it. I always knew it was still there but I didn't actually sing out. I never wanted to… I never wanted to put the two together, the singing and the crack cocaine; I never wanted them to come together. I thought it would make it unclean if they came together.'

– 'Dee' in *See Me Now*[138]

'Lily,' 'Peter' and 'Flynt' in *See Me Now* (2017)

At the start of 2017 I made the music for *See Me Now* at the Young Vic, a verbatim play performed by a cast of current and former sex workers. In many regards, it is the most problematic production I have ever worked on, and I would like to conclude with a discussion of this piece because the issues it raised further complicate the propositions of this commentary.

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[138] *See Me Now*, by Molly Taylor and the company, directed by Mimi Poskitt premiered 11 February 2017, The Young Vic, London.

Essentially, the show was a series of monologues with some stylised moments of group choreography. Because the performers were telling frank and often brutal stories from their lived experiences, it felt instinctively wrong to aestheticise them. In the event, however, there was a significant amount of music in the show, for two reasons. Firstly, without it, the show ran the danger of being dominated by formless silences between monologues. The tension in these gaps was heightened because the performers were nervous and largely unused to public performance. Music's first function was to not be silence: to give the breaks a sense of design,[139] and to reassure both cast and audience that the show was proceeding as intended. Secondly, once it became clear that support was available, members of the cast asked that their words be accompanied by music – for the emotional content of their stories to be underscored.

The challenge presented by the former was considerable. The music had to bridge, for example, a monologue by a visibly traumatised young woman about growing up in a children's home on Jersey and another by a 66-year-old man about his fitness regime. What does that sound like? How do you avoid betraying the lived reality of one or the other? How should a composer approach that task? The artistic fidelity here is clearly to the performers and their stories, but must also remain mindful of the responsibility to the audience, both in terms of structural coherence and taking care of potential responses to the narrative content. The latter function of music was no less challenging. The cast were significantly more forthright in their feedback than is normal: 'this music is terrible,' 'it's giving me flashbacks, turn it off' and (after the director asked me to alter one of the tracks to make it 'less camp') 'my soul was in that music and now you cunts have ruined it'.

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[139] In 'Sonic Departures' I argue that 'what we are talking about when we say "silence" in the theatre is the absence of design' (222).

Despite its visually oriented title, the show was focused more on allowing the performers to be heard. Given that the remit of the production was to give a voice to those who are rarely granted a public hearing, my own 'authorial voice' as a composer had no place in it. The more the performance showcased my own creativity – and that of the rest of the creative team – the less successful we would be in fulfilling the work of the work. In other words, the contextual demands of this piece required – in order to foreground a particular aspect of 'voice' – a renunciation of compositional authorship. What is complicated about this is that the renunciation of authorial voice on behalf of the composer is an instrumental strategy that, in one move, both disavows *and* confirms the context of the performance.

In *See Me Now* authorial displacement is required for narrative coherence and, as such, any claim to a conceptual or discursive role for that authorial displacement is also renounced. The show is decidedly post-dramatic in its refusal to concede to artifice, but what function would post-dramatic sonic strategies (which have evolved to productively undermine the coherence of the performance text) have here? Both in terms of utility and politics, self-reflexive sonic experimentalism would be misplaced. In order to instrumentalise the listening contexts, to foreground the voices, bodies and experiences of the cast, music had to silence its own materiality *and* discursivity. In some ways, this is music acting most like music, at least as described by Jean-Luc Nancy: 'one can say of music that it silences sound'.[140] Perhaps more than anything, it is this kind of contradiction that is most attractive about making music in a theatrical context. There is a restless instability that is beyond systemisation.

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[140] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 32.

'Elizabeth,' 'Dee' and 'Pan' in *See Me Now*

Despite its relatively unassuming role in *See Me Now*, towards the end of the show, as the narrative thread of one of the stories began to materialise around a cast member's past as a singer, music reclaimed centre stage to remind us of its other potentialities. The day her contract with Sony Records was terminated, 'Dee' started a fourteen-year addiction to crack-cocaine. The account of her eventual recovery was delivered through a heart-breaking ballad that she had written herself, accompanied by 'Flynt', who revealed himself to be a superb pianist. The bodies that emerged from the song, through the audible resilience of her vocal folds and the unlikely dexterity of his fingers, reanimated the central remit of the play: that we were in the company of people whose marginalisation is unfairly reductive. It barely registers that the narrative of redemption-through-song is less than novel because we are witnessing it take place in real time through an extraordinary voice. Is it accurate to describe the modes of listening that are present during the song – institutional, narrative, disciplinary – as having been composed or theatrically organised? 'Dee's' authorial voice appears to belie all of that: it seems more solid, factual and permanent than the voices that surround it, more authentic a witness to her history than authorial language could hope to be. That apparent coherence has been composed, at

least partially, by the contexts of the performance and – according to the argument of this commentary – these include the voice itself, as well as the voices of the rest of the cast, the notes of the song and a host of other forces impacting on each other. But it is possible that the idea of context as compositional material has found its productive limits; perhaps to insist on integration here is uselessly reductive, not to say impolite. If I have sketched out a method of approaching composition in a theatrical context, there will be moments, like this, when that approach must hear its own noise.

In this commentary, I have attempted to write about my work through the seemingly unrelated concerns of voice, context and authorship. In doing so, I have attempted to reconcile the technical, theoretical and interpersonal aspects of my practice as well as the particular demands of the works in question. At the close of this research process, as a set of videos, notebooks and memories, it still refuses to circumscribe its heterogeneity – no less so than it felt at the time. However, I hope to have sketched out an approach to making music in an interdisciplinary, interpersonal, performative context that gives that heterogeneity a productive legitimacy. Central to this is the idea of context as compositional material: an expansion of the substance of music to include all aspects of its production and reception that impact upon how it is encountered. By definition, this remains unbounded, incomplete and incoherent.

Thinking of elements of music as modular blocks of contextualisation allows for an approach to composition that is reductive – in the sense that it makes an expanded practice practically manageable – and yet does not prescribe a set of material or methodological relationships. By foregrounding the voice in the first chapter, I wanted to narrow down on one type of compositional material and the way it is manifest across my work. In focussing on collaboration and its authorial implications in the final chapter, I was able to concentrate on one particular kind of context. Through relating these elements in this way, via the central chapter, the voice started to act like an agent of contextualisation and collaboration becomes a kind of

material. In reconciling the strategic, accidental and immutable aspects of my work, this kind of reciprocal interchange is immensely helpful to my practice as a composer.

Theatre is the best *place* to *do* music: what theatre offers is the added potential, through folding the context of the work back into the work itself, to compose the ways in which music is encountered; to stage its own listening. But, for a composer, the implications of accepting that premise require a renunciation of much of what has come to characterise music. The closer music gets to becoming a coherent and recognisable object, with a coherent and recognisable author, the more it sheds this ability and enters a different – more recognisable but less creatively contingent – mode of existence. This paradox is compounded by a theatrical reliance on extant modes of performance and musical practice.

Despite its hubristic breadth, this study remains limited in its ambitions; I have been concerned only with the process of music-making from the point of view of the composer rather than an audience and with interdisciplinary performance-making from the point of view of music rather than a theatrically integrated totality. In practice, my work is dramaturgical as much as it is compositional and is, of course, oriented towards its audience, but these seem to be much more straightforward kinds of relationships than those under discussion in this commentary. In any case, neither of those positions is tenable: the work is only complete when it meets an audience and is indivisible from its interdisciplinary presentations. However, in focusing a discussion of my practice on music whilst incorporating the disciplinary, contextual and material forces that accompany it in that discussion, I hope to have provided an account of how composition as an adjunct practice can operate without being overwhelmed by, or disowning, its surroundings.

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Appendix

Portfolio and Supplementary Material

This commentary is accompanied by a composition portfolio and supplementary material on a USB drive named 'TP PhD'.

The drive is organised into subfolders:

Commentary
  Music and Contemporary Theatre.pdf

Portfolio
  1 A Pacifist's Guide to the War on Cancer
    A Pacifist's Guide to the War on Cancer.mov
  2 Clubbing
    Clubbing Opening Extract.mp4
  3 Binary Code
    Binary Code Extract.mov

Supplementary Material
  1 A Pacifist's Guide to the War on Cancer
    Pacifist Scores
      [twenty-four scores from the musical]
  2 Clubbing
    Clubbing Opening Score
    Clubbing Senate Stenographer 1.jpg
    Clubbing Senate Stenographer 2.jpg
    Clubbing Whole.mp4
  3 Binary Code
    Fuck off Score
    I love you Score
  4 Lookout
    Lookout Brighton Pt1 Matthew.mp3
    Lookout Brighton Pt2 Molly.mp3
  5 Spectrograms
    Wake Me Up Spectrogram With Text.png
    Wake Me Up Vocal Spectrogram With Text.png