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Citation

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Four Facets of 'The New Complexity'

*To those depicted herein
and, especially, to Kate*

The following pages imply a view of priorities in new British music which is not, on the whole, shared by the British musical establishment, though it has adherents enough elsewhere. Of the four composers considered here – in order of age, Michael Finnissy, James Dillon, Chris Dench and Richard Barrett – none was included in Paul Griffiths' *New Sounds, New Personalities collection*,[1] which can be taken as a fair indicator of current establishment tastes. Yet they possess sufficient force to have become, along with Brian Ferneyhough, the corporate subjects (or victims) of a new catch-phrase: 'The New Complexity'.

'To define a thing', writes Nietzsche, 'is to begin to lie about it'. Leaving aside the appropriateness of the 'New Complexity' label, it has the effect of lumping together composers who, from many points of view, might prefer to remain separate. But just as there is no smoke without fire, so there are few pigeon-holes without a grain of truth inside them. Clearly there *are* points of contact between these four composers, just as there are differences which in the last two or three years have become so pronounced as to make this, perhaps, almost a last chance to regard them as a (disparate) unity. My desire to look at them this way springs from a conviction, already expressed else-where,[2] that alongside Birtwistle and Ferneyhough, they represent the few possible sources of light within a scene otherwise dominated by (to coin another catch-phrase) 'The New Capitulationism'.

The strategy of what follows is, in essence, threefold: a taking-apart, a view of each composer *sui generis*, and a tentative reconstruction. That is, I shall first try to establish some of the vital technical and aesthetic links and distinctions between the four composers, using basic categories such as notions of complexity, style and tradition to articulate them. Secondly, I shall deal with each composer in relative isolation. This central component of the essay is its main substance, and for each composer the approach is again threefold: a general introduction, an interview (all the interviews date from November 1986) and an informal analytical examination of, what are for the most part, recent works. Finally, and rather briefly, I shall seek to relocate the composers within a broader context which may, despite everything else I have written, show how much they have in common.

The analytical sections, perhaps, require comment in advance, in terms of scope, aims and approach. The relative brevity with which each selected work is treated should make it clear that in no case have I attempted a 'comprehensive' analysis, or anything close to one. The very notion of a comprehensive analysis inevitably invokes, for me, Borges' parable of the idealist cartographers whose map of a country is the same size as the country itself (and even that image is, where new music is concerned, often unduly

optimistic: from my own recent work I could cite, among others, an analysis of Ferneyhough's *Superscriptio* which, though entirely cursory, occupies more pages than the score itself).

So the analyses are partial and, indeed, in a double sense. Whereas much recently-published analytical work is intended not only as an exegesis of individual pieces but as a contribution to a more or less specific theoretical genre, I should make it clear that mine, both here and elsewhere, does not share the latter aspiration. I am, of course, seeking to give a provisional account of the compositions I discuss; beyond that, however, my main aim is to give some indication of each composer's creative process, of *composition* as a 'putting together' of *personal* preoccupations, both aesthetic and technical.

Given this aim, the ideal situation requires access to the composer's sketches or equivalent materials. Chris Dench and Michael Finnissy kindly supplied me with a wealth of sketch-pages, and Richard Barrett gave some very helpful analytical comments. James Dillon was most generous in supplying scores and record-ings, but preferred not to release his sketches for study; my comments on his work, therefore, are necessarily more speculative and more prone to substantial error – they can only offer a view of how the works *might* have been created.

Concerning the analytic portions, Richard Barrett wrote:[3]

I'm still slightly cagey about exposing the 'anatomy' of the pieces to closer scrutiny at this stage. Maybe this is because the music *qua* music is insufficiently well known for a verbal exegesis not to run the risk of being offputting

The point is well made, and has been at the back of my mind every time I have formulated or reproduced any kind of 'abstract' chart. However, rather than retreat from analysis, I have proceeded with the optimistic conviction that the pieces will soon reach the broader audience they deserve, and that those readers with an aversion to technical analyses will find sufficient matter in the interviews to arouse their interest.

Complexity

The term is, of course, so loaded as virtually to pre-clude rational debate and particularly so in a country like Great Britain where 19th-century traditions of amateur music-making and all-purpose anti-intellect-ualism are still very much embedded in the collective psyche of the musical establishment. A word which, on the face of it, should refer simply to relative difficulty of technical execution or density of musical substance becomes, in critical hands, a somewhat drab polemical weapon, dependent on residual prejudices rather than a considered aesthetic position (all in all, it is surprising that terms like 'formalism' and 'cultural Bolshevism' have not staged a comeback . . .). So it is

not surprising that the composers involved are less than enthusiastic about the 'New Complexity' label:

MICHAEL FINNISSY: It horrifies me that people say the music is complex. It isn't, except in a very superficial detailed kind of way. It's complex if you accept that human beings are complex, and that all art is complex. But to say that it's complex with the implication that somehow it's not 'refined' enough, or that somehow it should conform to the ideals of an 18th-century French garden – you know, geometric precision, economy of pitch-statement *à la* Webern: that's completely ridiculous. Hardly any music is like that, and critics who think that contemporary music *ought* to be, have got their heads stuffed up their arses.

CHRIS DENCH: Funnily enough, the notion of complexity came about through much older pieces, which were very much more skin-deep – pieces that had the flashy surface and nothing underneath. And people would look at the 11:15s I had rather arbitrarily thrown in, and say: 'Oh, this is terribly exciting'. And to some extent even *Topologies* (1979) is a bit like that . . . [Nowadays] I am against that kind of melodramatic surface. Again, I think that 'complexity', as most people understand it, is a kind of hyper-intellectual teasing-out of the skin of the music. O.K., that's great, except that you're not really offering complex music, you're just offering a complex process of generating it.

As one grows up and matures one wants to express more rich and plural things; one's experience richens, and yes, I think that results in more complicated pieces. Inevitably that's the case: even a composer like Hans Abrahamsen, who decided at first that he was completely going to avoid any kind of complication, has gone more and more *into* complication.

It would be disingenuous, I suppose, to deny that, compared to the vast majority of works emanating from the British Isles, these four composers' works have their complex aspects. At a technical level, certainly, they are mostly aimed at performers with virtuoso techniques (including, of course, Finnissy himself) and, as with Ferneyhough, the mere appearance of the notation is often fairly daunting. Yet I would doubt whether any of their works places the same kind of consistent technical and, above all, psychic strain on the individual player as Ferneyhough's recent music. Even so, the difficulties *are* sufficient to confront each composer with the prospect of inaccurate performance as the rule, rather than the exception. The foundation of the Exposé group in 1984 was one response to this dilemma; but one can't really devote the rest of one's life to writing for a handful of players so provisional stoicism tends to be the order of the day:

RICHARD BARRETT: A hypothetical perfect performance would encapsulate a lot more music than a *pro tempore* one does, but I'm fairly confident, with the experiences I've had so far, that these things eventually become far more second nature than some people would have us believe. But the crux of it is that, for the moment at least, I would rather set down the musical ideas as they are, and accept a certain amount of indeterminacy from the players, than say 'I can't do this', and then not do it and thus produce a work which, to an even greater extent, is a betrayal of the musicality behind it.

It is a mixture of Luther's 'Here I stand' and Beethoven's 'What do I care for your wretched fiddle', and it is the attitude towards instruments *per se* that partly conditions the level of performance difficulty: whether one regards the instrument in the Bach/ Xenakis tradition as a sort of organ stop, to be switched on or off at will, or as part of an organism whose other part is the body of the player. In the first version, the only point at issue is whether or not something is physically possible. (Whether or not the physical

movements necessary to produce the notes are physically 'idiomatic' is not, within this view, the composer's problem.) It seems to me that much of the writing in Dench's later pieces falls into this former category (although much of *Tilt* (1985), though very difficult, is also very 'pianistic') and some of Finnissy's does too (though once again, not the keyboard writing). Dench sees it this way:

I'm *not* interested in writing music that can't be played – that's stupid. If there is no mechanism by which something can be done, it simply gives the performer a hard time. You can only 'stretch' the player if you do something that is feasible but hard.

On the other hand, it seems to me that a piece like Dillon's *Sgothan* (1984) – or the beginning of the Barrett's *Coïgitum* (1985) – involves difficulties which are extrapolated more or less idiomatically from the physical nature of the instrument itself.

The one incontestable point of similarity between the four composers lies in the surface appearance of their notation, which is a) complex, and b) very meticulously written. It is probably Finnissy, with his financially enforced experience as a copyist, who provides the model here, rather than the calligraphically more mannerist Ferneyhough. In music which often involves a complex overlay of irrational values, precision and legibility are clearly essential, and although the calligraphy of each composer has its own distinctive features, in no case is it an aesthetic component of the musical idea (as might be asserted by Ferneyhough, or even Bussotti) as opposed to being merely a vehicle for it.

For Dillon, what is now regarded as standard 'maximalist' notation arose from a crisis with an early (withdrawn) choral work entitled *Babble*:

I had a terrible problem when I was writing *Babble*, in which I used a combination of traditional notation and space-time notation. The use of traditional mensural notation heightened that for me, because there were certain things I knew how to do quite comfortably and others where I simply had no idea. I remember first seeing the space-time notation used by Stockhausen in *Momente* (1962-72) – it was in Karkoschka's book on notation[4] – and I had got to the stage where I was so desperate to continue working on the thing that I just lifted this solution. But I was uncomfortable from the moment I lifted it; I was really unhappy about it, because there always seemed to be a gap between the results of space-time notation and what was on paper. There's a kind of ideology working there, and after a while it begins to generate its own kind of predictable results. That was the first time I began to see that there was a problem inherent in notation itself; before that, I had been using it rather mechanically – I hadn't thought too much about it. At the time I was doing a linguistics course, so I was beginning to be very analytical about things like the relation between the notation and whatever it was a symbol for. The next piece I wrote was *Dillug-Kefitsah*, (1976) where I used complex irrational rhythms, and I thought I was probably on the right track: it actually won a prize in '78 at the Huddersfield Festival, and then, in '78 or '79, (Ferneyhough's) *Transit* was done . . .[5]

In Ferneyhough's work, though, the irrational values are generally a means of redefining the overall rhythmic flow from one bar (or beat) to the next and merely provide the framework for complexly sculpted internal rhythms. With the younger composers (and most drastically, perhaps, with Chris Dench) a more obvious model is Xenakis, and the aim is usually, as with Xenakis, to create different simultaneous pulses which are usually periodic and, far from seeking to redefine motion *at* the barlines, these periodic groups habitually go *across* them.

Microtones

Another 'complicating factor' in the work of all four composers is their frequent use of microtones (usually quarter-tones). Not that microtones are *per se* harder to produce on wind and string instruments than semitones – but the fingerings are less familiar to wind players, while for string players there is, inevitably, the sensation of straying onto all the parts of the fingerboard one had been taught to 'miss out'. From an acoustic point of view also, at least in polyphonic music, the harmony is likely to become a great deal more opaque.

Two immediate questions arise: where does the desire to use microtones come from, and what purpose do they serve? On the first point, only Chris Dench cites a 'concert-hall' source – not by Ferneyhough (who first used them in *Epicycle* in 1968) nor even Xenakis, but Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Photoptosis* (1968). Dillon and Finnissy evoke more 'ethnic' origins; for the former, 'having been exposed to the bagpipes at a very early age, I've always found microtones very comfortable', while Finnissy refers to an experience at the age of sixteen:

Busoni talks somewhere in one of the essays about melody being an endless curve which you fix the points on. I suppose if you imagine a Hokusai-type curve, instead of the more regular geometrical type, one would need quarter-tones in order to fill in more interesting kinds of shape.

Yet when Finnissy composes with microtones, the expressive element is always very much to the fore, with the 'lament' styles of much Eastern European folk-music, as in *Catana* (1984), the String Quartet (1984) and the String Trio (1986), of which more below. For Dench, who once referred to Xenakis's *Shaar* (1983) as a 'work of singular sadness, which had a sobbing quality unlike anything I know', the emotive aspect of microtonal writing is clearly important, and its sheer unfamiliarity can be a part of its effect – hence he says of the final section of *Enoncé*, 'I used third-tones to give a very odd effect of strangeness, to be really unearthly . . .'. Yet here, at least in part, the emotional effect on the listener is the result of being confronted by a seemingly impassive harmonic system. Of the quarter-tones in the string quartet *Strangeness* (1985), Dench says:

I had deliberately tried to make the harmony as anonymous as possible. Because the piece is about despair and grief, and I didn't want a harmonic language with too much character, because it would have contradicted the generally solemn nature of the piece.

In principle, one might expect the same attitude from Barrett who is inclined to describe his microtonal procedures in relatively cold-blooded terms:

If you go back as far as *Essay in Radiance* (1981-3), there are passages which are microtonal and passages which aren't, and that was set up as a formal determinant in the work. And in *Coïgitum* I was very interested in working out a way of organising the harmonic material such that it could be used both by the piano keyboard, and by the flute, oboe and voice parts which are in quarter-tones throughout, and also by the percussion part which is functionally unpitched. But in the heterophonic ideas which give rise to *Anatomy* (1986) it really is an essential part of the way the material works, and it wouldn't have been possible to use an equal-tempered chromatic instrument because the semitone is too coarse an interval to use in the normally distributed heterophonic texture.

Yet in *Anatomy*, and even more so in the later *Temptation* (1987), the effect of the microtonal usage is far from clinical; it may be emotionally bleak (what else should one expect from a Beckett devotee?), but it is also extraordinarily turbulent in a repressed and disturbing way.

Dillon, probably the most metaphysically turbulent of all four composers, simply denies the validity of the tempered interval:

I don't actually hear in terms of tempered tuning anyway. Our division of the pitch continuum was a practical solution to deal with when you bring a lot of musicians together – we don't actually hear like that. Anyway, our perception of sound-phenomena in time is so contextually based – you're forever mapping one sound onto another sound; you're very much aware of the interlink, in this omnidirectional continuum, of sound itself and how it works in nature.

Style

The notion of 'style' is always problematic, especially in relation to new music: depending on how you view the term, it could denote either the trivialities or the essentials of a composer's oeuvre. For reactionary critics, it becomes a matter of principle to deny the existence of style in works using organised 'parametric thinking' (to borrow Ferneyhough's phrase); for style is personal (*'le style est l'homme'*), and how can the composer enslaved by numbers (as they imagine) have a personality? At the other end of the spectrum, the composer may have some justification for believing that 'style' is a means of journalistic stereotyping which leads to works being judged in terms of their conformity to whatever the critic in question has determined a particular composer's 'style' to be. In keeping with this latter view, all of Finnissy's works would be piano solos in which all seven octaves were constantly hyperactive; Dillon's would grapple relentlessly with some post-Varèsian 'harmonic block'; Dench's would begin with some sort of aural 'chaos' which gradually dissipates into more identifiable melodic lines, while Barrett's . . . well, hard to say, but it is rather like Xenakis (paradoxically, as we shall see, Barrett is the only one of the four to feel comfortable with the notion of a 'personal style').

Such stereotypes are not entirely misleading. Although, for me, one of the many attractive features of these composers' outputs is that they are perpetually in transit – always searching rather than settling – it is also true, I think, that each of them has a set of very strong 'behavioural patterns' that they bring to bear on each new situation, and that is what I would call 'style'. Still, it is no discredit to them that they see the issue differently:

JAMES DILLON: I have problems with the word 'style': it carries with it a whole set of notions that are problematic. Obviously there is something one can discuss in terms of

approximations . . . But style for me is to do with a kind of 'ideo-structure' in a work: perhaps it exists as certain idiosyncratic or idiomatic things that exist almost out of one's control. I don't want to sound over-mystical about this, but they exist as a kind of emanation of practice itself; it's problematic for me, because on the one hand it's very difficult to pin down, but on the other it always implies (for me) a certain inauthentic relationship with one's practice. I think that if one were actually aware of a 'style', in the sense of some kind of foreground activity, then I don't see how one could regenerate the necessary astonishment about what you're doing: being able to codify that, to put it into neat formal classifications, sort of denies your engagement with what you're doing. It's rather frightening when you look at it that way, because you become terribly aware that maybe you're just going round in circles all the time.

MICHAEL FINNISSY: It (the idea of 'Finnissy's style') is immensely irritating, but if I become at all aware of it I try and change direction *abruptly*, and I would refute any attempt to try and categorize the music as anything. I am interested only in going on perceiving and trying to convey the important aspects of what I feel passionately about to someone else – to my hypothetical 'other', at the very least. Everything else follows from that. 'Style' in itself I'm not interested in cultivating, or conscious of. You are yourself, so I suppose you *are* your style without having to try to be, but I don't think it's interesting to try and be a 'stylist': that would mean almost writing the same piece over and over again.

CHRIS DENCH: I've always been very unhappy with the kind of personal identity fetish that a lot of composers have, which makes them compose out terribly carefully these intricate, very narcissistic structures on the skin of their music. I always regard the notes – the skin of the music – as a kind of ephemeral stylistic phenomenon: as 'fashion' basically. I think it's very important not to intervene consciously (in the compositional idea) or rather, to intervene *almost without knowing it* is the essential point, to let the intervention be out of one's innate musicality, rather than out of some conscious desire to form it in a direction: to allow it to try and do what it does itself.

RICHARD BARRETT: Brian Ferneyhough has said to me on various occasions that all my pieces are totally different from one another, and I think that's quite true inasmuch as at the moment I'm in the process of moving around and attempting to define the centre of it all – what you might call a 'style' beneath the various movements to and fro. I can now begin to feel certain stylistic constants beginning to work their way out of me, which I'm not suppressing, because that's what the whole experimentation process has been about so far.

Cyclomania

Perhaps the most unexpected point of contact between these composers is that, at the moment of writing, all of them except Finnissy (who says 'big projects scare me', but still creates big *pieces*) is committed to an extended cycle of works: Dillon to a *Nine Rivers* cycle which will include *East 11th St NY 10003* (1982), and Barrett to a six-part *After Matta* cycle (including *Coïgitum* (1985), *Ne songe plus à fuir* (1986) and *Illuminer le temps* (1987)) and a potentially nine-part *Fictions* cycle (*Anatomy* (1986),*Temptation* (1987), *nothing elsewhere* (1987), *Earth* (1987-8), *I open and close* (1988) and others to be announced), while Dench, in addition to a pre/post-nuptial 'Venice' Trilogy *Venezia* (1986), *Acqua alta* (1987-), *Sulle scale della Fenice* (1987-) now projects a larger *Afterimages Sequence* that will probably incorporate the 'Venice' pieces.

In a situation where many of these composers have difficulty enough in securing adequate performances of single pieces, one cannot help asking 'Why?'. Is it a publisher's perception that cycles are 'in'? There are precedents, of course, as diverse as Gerard Grisey's *Espaces acoustiques* (1974-85) and Ferneyhough's *Carceri*

d'Invenzione (1982-86). But was it not also a cycle (*Firecycle*, in fact) on which Ferneyhough came to grief in the late sixties, even if it was another one, or at least a series (*Time and Motion Studies*), that brought a *'retour à la vie'* in the early seventies?

In his 1986 Darmstadt lecture, Richard Barrett comments:

If [my] musical works are to be optimally self-contextualising, it is preferable that they be presented in the company of one another, rather than in the environment of an inevitably disparate programme whose listeners are required, often in vain, to reacclimatise themselves at short notice perhaps as many as eight times in the course of a concert. Given the evaporation of any kind of 'common practice', individual works can become almost meaningless in such environments. I feel that we should be ready to grasp the implications of this situation, rather than apathetically bemoaning it . . . If we therefore wish to concern ourselves with composing *programmes* rather than *pieces* . . . we have the opportunity to compose the relationships between works as a kind of extended *formal* planning.

It is by no means a unique response: ever since the early seventies, Stockhausen has sought ways of ensuring that his new pieces share a programme with no-one's works but his own. And Dench, too, has the same attitude; despite his very broad musical tastes, he says:

Each piece of mine begins and ends with an infinity of silence, which is one reason why I hate having them in concerts with other pieces. I didn't write my music to have a Haydn symphony played after it. Personally, I can't stay in a concert hall after a piece of mine has been played – or even *before*, because I can't hear my piece if my inner ear has been 'corrupted'.

Tastes, Influences, Relations to Traditions

Student days apart, there is no particular reason why any composer should feel drawn to the works of others, and a sober look at the documentation concerning major figures of the past generally reveals anything *but* catholicity of taste. The familiar, rather desperate attempt of conservative music-lovers to assess the credibility of a new composer by asking, 'Does he/she like Beethoven too?' is an impertinence in all senses of the word. As Richard Barrett puts it:

One comes in with the idea that there is all this music around, and some of it is great, and one might just be able to do something. Then one gets to the stage where one has more affinity with one's own work – it seems a strange thing to say – than with anybody else's, and eventually you get to the point where interest flags in anything else. I'm not trying to strike a pose of 'hating music' – for a composer to say that is obviously dishonest or stupid; maybe it's just that something is lost along the way – that one's ability to have the patience to come to terms with other music is grossly attenuated. But there's no alternative: that's the way it is.

Of the four composers considered here, Barrett's position is probably the most 'exclusive': he acknowledges the influence of Xenakis, and notes some affinities between a piece like *Coïgitum* and some of Finnissy's music but for the most part receives his 'outside impulses' from painting and particularly from literature: Flaubert, Lautréamont, but above all, Beckett, quotations from whom are to be found at the beginning and/or end of almost every score.

Dench, on the other hand, admits to an almost bewildering diversity of origins and inspirations, unified only by the fact that they are all 20th-century:

The poles of my musical language are Scriabin, who supplies all kinds of harmonic controls; Ives, who supplies the kinds

of densities and pluralities, and all those wonderful conceptions of layout; and Xenakis, who supplies the *Angst*. Those are the three composers that matter to me. There are plenty of others I admire enormously, like Ferneyhough, and James [Dillon] and Michael [Finnissy]; but I don't really engage with their music at the level I do with those other three.

His enthusiasms are by no means restricted to 'constructivist' schools: he admires Dusapin's 'red-hot fury and intensity of vision', his ability to 'write pieces that simply spurt onto the page, almost completely unmediated' – Radelescu and the later Nono are other major enthusiasms.

Finnissy's tastes are no less eclectic – more so, in fact, since from the viewpoint of composer (as opposed to pianist, or simply music-lover, which composers *can*, after all, also be) he is interested in the music of earlier centuries, as well as this one. He refers to 'a general catholicism of taste' which exists, however, not just as a guide to passive 'consumption' but as a seemingly endless stream of influences and inspirations to be 'worked through':

I guess quite a lot of (my) music comes from other types of music. I found folk-music inspiring very early on, and if I am influenced by other composers then I sometimes like to write little 'homage' pieces which acknowledge the fact: *Ives* (1974), *Grainger* (1979), and *Nancarrow* (1980). Recently I've done two such pieces, one of them a homage to my teacher Bernard Stevens . . . and it has a companion piece – *GFH* (1985) – which honours a composer I have been very interested in for the past couple of years, Handel, the clarity and ebullience of whose music has been very inspiring to me.

Contemporaries, while by no means a matter of indifference to Finnissy, are not 'inspirations' in the way that older music is. Of Ferneyhough, whom he knew back in Royal College days, he says:

I have immense respect for what he does, and I get immensely angry when I see people misinterpreting it, or putting it down. Our attitude to a lot of things in music is very similar, but the end result of digesting those things is very different, and has become even more so over the years. Our music is *not* similar, *at all*.

Finnissy's attraction to Xenakis, too, is that of a listener rather than a predatory composer, as an aspect of being 'automatically drawn to Eastern European music'. For James Dillon, on the other hand, Xenakis offers a series of valuable, yet not incontrovertible, ways of looking at musical material (see the interview below). Interest in the past tends to be linked to particular genres and even to particular types of performance which bring out in past works those qualities which Dillon seeks to implant on his own:

The quartets in the literature that I love all have, I think, a certain labyrinthine quality about them: a certain density of information everywhere, if you like . . . I find it impossible, in fact, to listen to certain 'quartets' playing quartets, and I have a fascination with the Busch quartet – hearing them play something like Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden', I find them bringing out so many things that other quartets don't. I think the thing with Busch is that you get a polyphony of timbre, a polyphony of sensibility – it's not just in terms of polyphonic voices. But of course, the late quartets of Beethoven are the most obvious examples of that kind of density. And yes, the Schoenberg quartets . . . but I think there is only one post-'45 quartet 'in the tradition', so to speak, and that's the Ferneyhough Second Quartet.

Michael Finnissy

A whole host of legends and images have grown up around Finnissy, the vast majority of which (unlike the subjects of most legends) he is vehemently inclined to deny. Some of the denials are justified; others are just southern Anglo-Saxon modesty. Even more than Ferneyhough, he has acted as a father-figure for many of the young English radicals, even if their work has turned out, almost without exception, to be very different from his. He has offered both the concrete model of a committed artist adhering remorselessly to his beliefs in the face of shoddy performances and public scepticism, and that of an eloquent performer-advocate of his younger colleagues. Finnissy dislikes being thought of as a professional virtuoso pianist. Fine: in that case, one can say without fear of contradiction that he is one of the world's most sensationally gifted amateurs (how many 'profession-als' could manage his *English Country-Tunes* or the end of Barrett's *Coïgitum*?) and that the total failure of recording companies to preserve those gifts on record, compact disc, or tape, is yet another English cultural disaster.

Finnissy is also, arguably, the arch-Romantic of new English music. For all the 'rationality' of certain procedures outlined below, one could almost imagine him uttering the words Schumann wrote to Clara Wieck after composing the *Humoresque*: 'This whole week I have scarcely left my piano, composing and laughing and crying, all together' (and the *Humoresque*, let us remember, is also a very 'constructed' work). His work list is large, not on account of 'facility', but because of consistent, obsessive work. From the last five years one should note:

1983	*Vaudeville*, mezzo-soprano, baritone, two mimes and seven players
1984	*Cantana*, nine instruments
	Ngano, mezzo-soprano and tenor solos, chorus, flute and two percussionists
	Celi, two sopranos and five players
	Haiyim, chorus and two cellos
	String Quartet
1985	'. . . *above earth's shadow*', seven players
	Contretänze, six players
1986	String Trio
	Verdi Transcriptions Book 1, solo piano
1985-88	*The Undivine Comedy*, opera
1987-88	*Gershwin Arrangements*, solo piano
1986-88	*Red Earth*, orchestra

MICHAEL FINNISSY: Years and years ago, when I first read Busoni's essays in the Dover paperback,[6] there was a lovely essay there on transcription, which started off as a defence of Liszt, of the process of taking another composer's material and actually transforming it. But the conclusion that Busoni arrives at, which I find most interesting, is that 'notation is itself the *transcription* of an abstract idea. The moment that the pen takes possession of it, the thought loses its original form' – in effect he's saying that *all* written musical composition consists of transcription in one way or another: a transcription of the substance, or the inspiration, or whatever it is that comes to you. Then the audience, listening, transcribes that experience after the performer has, in fact, transcribed the notation. It's the kind of on-going process of taking

something and treating it, via the realm of one's inner experience, so that something else comes out as a 'message', or piece of information, for an audience or a performer to grasp. And so for me, taking another composer's material is a means of highlighting a musical process: if I don't originate the material, then the *process* of composition, meaning 'what is actually happening to X', is perhaps clearer for people to understand.

RICHARD TOOP: You mention Busoni, and rightly or wrongly I also tend to think of you, up to a point, in terms of Grainger. Has this model of the virtuoso composer-performer had an influence on you?

MF: No, not consciously at all. In fact I didn't start giving professional solo-concerts until 1977, and even that was an accident; by that time I already had a certain small reputation in Europe as a composer.

RT: That's curious, because younger composers like Dillon, Dench and Barrett tend to cite you as a model of the composer 'doing it himself'. Was that something that came later?

MF: That was never my intention at all, and I don't have any aspirations towards virtuosity. Indeed, I curse the fact that I ever played the piano every time I practise for a concert, because it takes so much time. I fundamentally think of myself as a composer; I get up in the morning and I think of music paper, not the piano keyboard. Frankly, as soon as I can ditch that side of things, I will: there are people now like Damerini who can cope with that.

RT: Thinking back to your early pieces, like *Song 9* (1968), isn't there an inherent 'grand virtuoso' style lurking in them? I remember they also reminded me of certain aspects of Bussotti.

MF: Bussotti was a composer whose scores I first saw when I was eleven or twelve years old. I got a copy of the *5 Piano Pieces for David Tudor* (1959) when they came out, but I never heard the music, and when I did hear it I didn't think they were very interesting. Sorabji is another person that people have thrown up as an influence; but the sound of his music is atrocious! No, what is at the origin of those pieces is also a very fundamental part of my compositional philosophy, or aesthetic: trying to capture phenomena moving at different rates, to impose a rhythmic grid somehow on different kinds of metric pattern. It's an influence that comes from Ives, if anyone, but I really caught up on it from film, or from simply looking out of the window, trying to perceive the phenomena around me. Things don't move in regular 4/4 or 3/4: they move at all manner of rates – speeding up, slowing down, independently. I wanted to capture that excitement, that dynamic, kinetic quality. And so the 'complexity' of things like *Song 9* is in fact an attempt to come to terms with *those* things, and not just on a small scale: the form itself is a description of that, with many (so-called) silences interspersed amongst the material, which is a way of trying to incorporate *non*-action, or things going out of sight which you assume are nonetheless continuing into the formal structure.

RT: How *do* you approach the whole business of formal structure? Is it something you pre-plan, or is it something that arises naturally out of the material as you work on it?

MF: A bit of each. I try to develop an attitude towards the form, an *intention*, which I then play with –

expand, sometimes alter. Usually the forms are very simple: a progression from one point to another, or an interrupted progression. I try to make them as mono-lithic as possible, just so that I've got a simple framework for a complex series of actions. The implications of the material sometimes change, and mostly the timings of things change. The intention I don't think ever does: if I wanted to have a piece doing a particular kind of thing, then that would remain, whatever the material itself dictated as a result of my working on it.

RT: In that case, are big forms there to give more latitude, because you seem to concentrate more and more on big forms these days – I was thinking of the *English Country-Tunes* (1977) and the *Verdi Transcriptions* – or do you just prefer something massive to relate to at a given time?

MF: No, I don't, and big projects scare me. *English Country-Tunes* is actually not that recent – it's ten years old – and the Verdi project started about three years earlier than that, but at the time I simply didn't have the technique to transform the material in a way that would produce the kind of on-going structure that I wanted. Every time I picked it up, I would be frustrated at my inability to carry it through. Now, at least, I do feel I'm at a different stage where I'm more able to reconcile myself to the original material – I see more scope in it than I did when I started work in 1973-4. And the big forms are similarly a result of being more confident about handling larger spaces of time . . .

RT: When you talk about 'technique', are you thinking in terms of specific dependable devices – ways of working the material that you enjoy using – or is it simply a matter of accretion, of a familiarity in handling *any* material?

MF: Yes, familiarity in handling *any* material. Fluency is really what I mean. I'm interested in a sort of armoury of technical devices, and in absorbing all those other techniques that I've always been interested in, such as those of folk-music. In a sense you can never stop; you can never have enough technique. Everything you do makes new demands on you, and you have to go and learn other things, by researching and so forth.

I do have certain routines, which I need as sort of trip-mechanisms, if you like, for evolving material in the first place. I use random numbers a great deal, simply to filter the material, or shake it up: to present possibilities. Basic pitch choices and things like that can come in two ways. Either I generate – I get an impression of what I want to do in terms of overall sound and then work from that generalisation towards particularising it in some way or other – or I work from specific motivic material, which is usually very restricted.

For example, in the String Quartet I decided that I wanted the lines, the polyphony, to implode on itself as much as conceivably possible. So virtually all the melodic material of that piece occurs within the interval of a minor third or considerably less (in quarter-tones) which makes the explosions of more chromatic material so much more dramatic. That was a conscious choice, and from there I had to decide to evolve the material in certain ways, and most of the other things just come out of that.

RT: Is the fact that some instruments are more susceptible to microtones than others, and some not at

all, a major consideration when you write a piece? For example, wind instruments *can* produce microtones, yet listening to *Contretänze*, the basic decision seemed to be that string instruments *are* microtonal, and wind instruments aren't.

MF: That's another kind of compositional decision. There's a kind of harmonic quality that results from microtonal working which is different, obviously, from chromatic working, which is different from modal and pentatonic working. And if I were fascinated by interfacing those different types, or a selection of them, then that's a choice I would make either in terms of instrumentation, or the sections of a piece.

In the piano piece *All. Fall. Down.* (1977), *'All'* pretty systematically uses all the notes of the keyboard as rapidly as it possibly can. But within that, some subsections of that material are fully chromatic, some are all white notes, and more rarely, some are all black. So you notice shifting types of harmonic feel. Now having reconciled myself to the fact that pianos can't play quarter-tones – I didn't really want to re-tune pianos – I evolved a type of material which compensated for the lack of microtones by covering enormous areas of space with resonances: you obliterate a conventional sense of harmonic development and replace it with something which is very similar to listening to microtonal working.

RT: That's a charateristic I always used to associate with your music, perhaps because I mainly knew the piano pieces put out by Universal Edition. Was that kind of saturation of harmonic space general in the other pieces of that period, too?

MF: It was pretty general.

RT: It seems less so now.

MF: Well, one can't go on doing the same thing for ever. I think that as a composer one probably has about half a dozen basic compositional precepts. One goes through different stages in evolving these precepts: at a particular time you're interested in one or two of those six, and then you come back to others. Working on a composition, I separate everything out – pitch, rhythm, and so on – for individual consideration and working, but that's with the acceptance that finally all those things are blended together. I separate them out so that I can examine them under the microscope, as it were. But the end result is what I suppose one could call *harmonia*, a moving harmony in which pitch and rhythm are the most obvious components, and dynamics and timbre the next most. All the pieces I write in a given period have pretty much the same characteristics; but then, over a year – or two or three years – they evolve to a different point, and that's because *I* have evolved too, and I'm examining something else.

RT: What are the current precepts?

MF: I don't think I'd be able to identify them clearly, because I'm working through them – uncovering them, re-discovering, re-revealing them.

RT: You can look *back* at them, but not actually *at* them?

MF: Yes, retrospectively, seeing what they *were*. I feel that it's overly self-analytical, or just too self-pre-occupied, to examine these issues too constantly: it detracts from writing freely and spontaneously. I have now become dissatisfied with the period represented, I suppose, by the String Quartet, as a *ne plus ultra* of

working with very densely impacted pitch-materials – which in its own way was an attempt to get away from melodies leaping around over two-octave spans: I decided, 'Well, O.K., you've done that, go the opposite way!' I'm a creature of extremes – black and white, no grey!

And now? I don't know: English folk-music has always been of great interest to me, because once I realised that I was automatically drawn to Eastern European music, I thought, 'Well, this is a bit silly: you're not Eastern European, so look at your own folk-music'. And that's very fascinating too, but the modalities of English folk-music were initially harder to reconcile with the kind of aesthetic attitude that came out of Webern and Stockhausen, composers that at fifteen or sixteen I was deeply fascinated by, and imitated. But over the years I have attempted to come to terms with more 'exclusive' pitch material – things which are not chromatic, but have things left out. And I think that quite a substantial part of my continuing interest in composition, if I have to say anything about it at all, has to do with being fundamentally fascinated by melody, by line: line, and juxtapositions of lines. Long ago, I had sort of reasoned to myself that folk-music was at the origins of music: it is part of a search for archetypal musical gestures which are the fundamental characteristics of all types of music. I'm very interested in 'archetypes' – in uncovering them and being able to reveal and use them.

RT: Can you elaborate on that a bit?

MF: I hesitate to – it's getting into deep water, but obviously it comes from reading Jung – the business of certain kinds of fundamental psychological attitudes and reactions; that in one's perception of the world one reacts to stimuli, and that some of them are archetypal. I spent a long time reading Eliade, Levi-Strauss, and other anthropological writers: their studies of tribal notions and folk notions; the way in which customs (which then lead to forms of theatre and, by implication to other forms of literature, folk-song, shamanistic ritual and this kind of thing) arise from those basic 'archetypal' responses to nature. Man's attempt to come to terms with his environment, I suppose one might say. I don't think of myself as any different from that kind of artist, except in terms of living in a so-called 'civilised' country.

RT: Well, that's the big question. Do you think these things are transferable to an urban environment?

MF: Yes, because I think they are integral to the human psyche. Obviously they occur in different mutations, and you have to find them in yourself, but all human beings cry and laugh, and have an attitude to what they see and hear and generally experience around them. I'm expressing my feelings, my laughter and tears, in the music I write. So I decided that if I were to study folk-music, I would do so to seek out the roots of music itself, to try and find out what the 'archetypal' musical gestures were, and – perhaps – what they were the symbols of in human experience, and (in connection with that) to try to perceive anew what the components of music were. A minor second, a major third: what does that actually *mean* to me, aside from its traditional functions or its historical outgrowths? Because when you're dealing with music of any type, you're also dealing with its social history.

RT: But I wonder, if one is looking for these archetypes and then deploying them in such a densely polyphonic style, how much of the archetype remains?

MF: I believe that if you plant a seed, and a tree grows, you still know it has come from a seed. Maybe someone else doesn't, and if you look at a tree, you don't see its roots – you simply know they're there. But there is something about that structure which is dependent on the roots being there, and I think that's pretty much the same with a piece of music. If the intention is strong enough, then something of that intention communicates itself, and by analysis you can work back to what it was. For example, if I make a piece like the String Trio which is fixated on the interval of a minor third, then everything about the piece is based on that interval: the modulation schemes, and so forth. But when you're listening to it you don't think, 'Oh my God, another minor third – how tedious!', because hopefully the composition has eradicated that. Yet that *is* what a piece like that is about, at any rate in one sense. So whatever the archetype is – whether it is a certain rhythmic characteristic, a kind of driving percussiveness, or some more euphonious kind of thing, certain kinds of archetypal melodic patterns – if you imbue enough of the structure with that, it somehow grows into something else.

RT: Your output is quite substantial. Do you think of yourself as a rapid composer?

MF: No. A piece usually begins *very* slowly and *very* painfully: it's like pushing a heavy object up a hill. Sometimes I put a lot of precompositional stuff on paper, but on the whole I prefer to have it swimming around in my brain to sort it out, and when I've got it to a certain point I start making notations of the 'elements' of the piece: rhythmic ideas, pitch ideas, instrumentation ideas, things like that. It can also be very frustrating, but I enjoy it a lot: the creative situation of finally, having seized all these stimuli, being able to make choices. That is an important and exciting step for me. Then, actually doing the composing can be *so* frustrating, because you've got this idea of what you want to achieve, and getting there sometimes takes such a long time. The maximum of music I can ever write in a day is about a minute, and that's with any instrument – solo line or anything else.

During this year – admittedly it has been a disturbed year in some ways, but not essentially different from any others – I have written three pieces: a String Trio which is a long piece, admittedly, but not immensely complex, a five-and-a-half-page piano piece lasting around four minutes, and a song cycle for voice and piano which I should say lasts eight or ten minutes. I don't think that's a vast amount of work, 44 minutes of music in 365 days. Obviously I'm starting other projects which will take longer, and completing others (like the *Verdi Transcriptions*). But I don't think of that as work which has been done *exclusively* this year, simply as work which has just been started, or come to fruition.

RT: Once a piece *is* finished, what is your relation to it? Do you sever an umbilical cord, or do the pieces follow you round?

MF: Some of them haunt me! Inevitably, though, I wait for the first performance, and the response to that performance, because I think if people like them I'm happier about letting them go. If people don't, then I clutch them back like a mother or father clutching their child to their bosom. But I don't necessarily do anything to them; they go into the cupboard or onto the shelf. I try very hard to forget about them and get on with the next piece. But that process doesn't happen until a piece has actually been performed – till then, it's still hanging around in the background, and it's sometimes very difficult for me to get on with other pieces.

RT: How much sense of communality do you have with younger composers like Chris Dench and Richard Barrett? Their work is very different to yours, but do you feel that it's something that you're part of, broadly speaking, if only because of the influence you may have had on it?

MF: No, I don't like to be imitated or parodied. When Richard first showed me *Coïgitum*, I said, partly joking, 'Oh that's good, I never need to write that kind of piece again.' I think composers misunderstand each other: often quite deliberately, and inevitably for their own ends. Dench, Dillon, Barrett and I know each other, so there is that (very superficial) community feeling, and sometimes it's fun to talk to them – though I find their preoccupations very intellectual! – but I'm against the idea of a *Davidsbund*, against 'exclusivity'. I like Howard Skempton, Christopher Fox, John White and Chris Newman, and want to play their music just as much as that of the other composers we've mentioned. I feel close to it even if it seems different from anything that I'm doing; it's all music that I passionately believe in, and needs hearing and cherishing, and I just don't like the idea of ghettos of any kind.

✳   ✳   ✳

Any selection of works to represent Finnissy is likely to seem arbitrary. I have settled for what seem to me to be the two most impressive of his recent works, the *Verdi Transcriptions* and the String Trio. Given its importance in Finnissy's output, the piano almost inevitably had to feature in my choice, and the Trio can be taken, among other things, as a *ne plus ultra* of his microtonal style.

Verdi Transcriptions Book 1 (1986)

The first book of *Verdi Transcriptions*, though amongst Finnissy's most recent works, has origins that go back to 1973 and reflects preoccupations that go back still further: I think the first piece of Finnissy's I ever saw was a beautiful but slightly perplexing paraphrase (now withdrawn) of the 'Love' Scene from Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette*. Each of the nine pieces is based on a melodic fragment from one of Verdi's first nine operas: in order, *Oberto*, *Un Giorno di Regno*, *Nabucco*, *I Lombardi*, *Ernani*, *I due Foscari*, *Giovanna d'Arco*, *Alzira* and *Attila*. In principle, there should be another three books and another seventeen pieces (one for each opera), but at the time of writing (December 1987) this seems unlikely: there are sketches for another seven pieces (let's hope that a *Falstaff* transcription is among them! . . .), and there may be one more book forthcoming, but that could be all.

The broad notion of transcription, in the Busoni–Finnissy conception, has been mentioned above. More specifically, in an introduction to a performance of *Verdi Transcriptions*, Finnissy remarks:

Transcription means [here] that the musical material of the original Verdi opera is transferred from his psychology to mine. At times one can hear fragments in the music that sound a little like Verdi, but for the most part not.

And elsewhere, he notes:

The original Verdi material never, in any of the pieces, determines more than the general melodic/rhythmic/harmonic contour. There are, even in the straighter transcriptions, wide divergences of harmony, rhythm and melody; and fundamentally, once isolated from their *dramatic* context, Verdi's materials are like fish out of water: I needed to create an environment for the music to swim in, and this inevitably means rethinking the 'form' from top to bottom. So I took the melodic (or whatever) material that I needed and reduced it to whatever *Gestalt* I could then re-shape and compose with as my own.

As a whole, Finnissy says, the pieces are a homage to Busoni, and while Verdi (in a rather Godowskian guise) makes his presence strongly felt in the left hand of transcription no.V, he is somewhat outdone in no.VIII by Busoni, part of whose *Indianisches Tagebuch* provides a very perceptible rhythmic and gestural matrix for the whole piece (see Example 1). Taken all in all the *Transcriptions* are also – even more than the better-known *English Country-Tunes* – a remarkably comprehensive résumé of Finnissy's various approaches to keyboard composition. The spiky counterpoint of piece no.IV, the sultry opulence of no.V, and the transcendental virtuosity, in forms both ancient and modern, of no.VI, and much else besides, could easily form the basis of extended comment. Here, however, I shall confine myself to the first and seventh pieces, with the aim of giving some indication of Finnissy's working methods, at least as they apply to this work.

Though it is quite possible (and in this context, essential) to look at the pieces singly, one should not underrate the degree to which they are conceived as part of a large cycle. One obvious aspect of this is the way in which the end of each piece evolves towards the start of the next. Another is that the pieces were not composed sequentially from first to ninth, and their structure sometimes needed to be modified to balance them with preceding or subsequent pieces.

Example 1

a) Ferrucio Busoni: *Indianisches Tagebuch*

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b) Giuseppe Verdi: 'Il pianto . . . l'angoscia', from *Alzira*

c) Michael Finnissy: *Verdi Transcription VIII*

Asterisked chords are directly drawn from the Busoni excerpt, as is the general texture; there are, clearly, striking parallels between melodies *a* and *b*.

The first transcription (on 'Sciagurata! a questo lido ricercai l'amante infido!' from Act 2 of *Oberto*) is typical in this respect. The piece consists of four sections, of which the fourth is much the longest:

1. Presto (14 bars): a tumultous chord-sequence in the bottom register, heavily pedalled, for left hand alone, articulated by a sequence of eight crescendi from *ppp* or *pp* to *ff* or *fff*.

2. Poco allegro (12 bars): a 'quasi recitative', again in the lowest register, and with almost the same dynamic extremes, but with constant oscillations between one and six notes, whereas the Presto was almost entirely in two or three voices.

3. Più tranquillo (19 bars): the introduction of a polyphonic texture – three layers of chords, with mainly three-note chords in the top voice, two in the middle, and four-note chords at the bottom. Both hands are now involved, but the tessitura still does not go above the F below middle C.

4. Largo gravemente (29 bars): a more complex continuation of the texture of the Più tranquillo which gradually rises to the F *above* middle C.

The only really systematic sketches – i.e. sketches in keeping with the kind of notations for separate parameters referred to above – are for the final section, leading one to surmise that it was the first to be composed. Finnissy confirms this, and puts the fact in a broader perspective:

As I try to allow pieces to grow organically, rather than rigidly prescribe a form at the outset, I often begin pieces *in media res*. Particularly with longer pieces, I make a point – some way into composing – of considering 'endings' and 'beginnings': trying to assess how to 'frame' or otherwise 'get into' a piece, or what the moment of 'lift off' will sound like – trying to hear *through* often fairly well evolved material to its origins or eventual extrapolations.

In the case of *Verdi I*, the Largo was indeed the first moment of *that* piece to be sketched. I had already got sketches, and one complete piece, for later in the cycle, and the 'general melodic contour' (Example 2) crops up as an ongoing *idée fixe* in several of the other pieces (a sort of Verdi thumbprint!) – so I was also conscious of building up towards later statements and (like the good stripper!) trying not to give too much away too soon, almost in the manner of the finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony: gradually discovering the tune.

Having got the extension of the Largo material right (so I thought), I went on to sketch *Verdi II*, the music progressing up the keyboard from bass to treble registers. Then, at some point, I realised that the proportions of the first piece were wrong – it was too short and felt only like an introductory peroration, rather than a self-contained entity – so I added the Poco allegro, trying to develop the material 'backwards'; and once I'd done that, the *feeling* of the opening was 'wrong'. So the Presto was added, like a long 'upbeat' to fling the material into the air and then watch it settle.

Example 2

General melodic contour for *Verdi Transcriptions I*

Example 3   Finnissy: *Largo gravemente* – Fourth section of *Verdi Transcription I.*

Largo gravemente

Taking my cue, therefore, from the compositional process, I shall look first at the construction of the Largo section (Example 3). How much is really supplied by the Verdi model, over and above the tiny cell Finnissy quotes above?

Perhaps it is not too fanciful to suggest that the close-packed chords which form the top layer do reflect Verdi's melody in that, in both, the closest packing of three notes is a semitone+semitone, and the widest, a semitone+major third:

Verdi:

1 + 1

1 + 4   (semitones)

a

Finnissy (chords):

a

upper interval:	2/2	1/1	1/2	1/4	4/1	3/2	1/3	2/1	3/1	2/3	semitones
lower interval:											semitones

This is, of course, a reordering of all the possible triads (in the broad sense) within a span not exceeding a perfect fourth:

$$\frac{1}{1}\ \frac{1}{2}\ \frac{2}{1}\ \frac{2}{2}\ \frac{1}{3}\ \frac{3}{1}\ \frac{2}{3}\ \frac{3}{2}\ \frac{1}{4}\ \frac{4}{1}$$

using a ten-notes series as the basis for transposition:

The middle voice uses a chain of nine dyads transposed to the same series (with a few *ad hoc* changes of order), and the bottom voice consists of a chain of twelve chords, composites of the triads in the top layer, initially transposed so that G sharp is alternately the upper and lower note:

The permutations and transpositions applied to these materials are, essentially, a matter of 'fluency' (to use Finnissy's term) — a controlled statistical means of effecting an end, rather than an end in themselves. As such, it is probably enough to describe their general character, without a welter of detail. The pitch series shown for the top layer is permutated in such a way that the original pairs of notes (first + second, third + fourth etc.) remain together; every second permutation is read in reverse order. The intricate rhythmic structure, worked out independently of the pitch structure, is something like one of those late-14th-century *ars subtilior* motets (for example, by Matteo da Perugia) in which enormous care has been taken to ensure that the various layers coincide as little as possible. The top voice employs an enormous range of values and patterns, and is primarily responsible for the music's turbulent, restless quality; the middle voice uses a smaller range of generally much slower values, while the bottom chordal layer has a sort of fractured periodicity based on juxtapositions of the following five units:
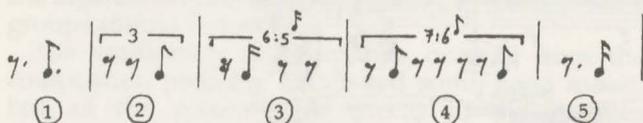
The broad strategy of the Largo section is an ascent in register (of a minor ninth for the top two parts, and a tritone for the bottom), taking the upper voice into the lower ranges of the treble clef. Accordingly, each new permutation of the chord-sequences is transposed up a semitone (in the top parts, to delay this process, there is a 'false start': after a few transpositions they return to roughly the original pitch and start transposing upwards all over again).

The texture of the Largo is conceptually 'seamless': the only rests that occur are those which are structurally incorporated in the bottom layer. In 'constructing backwards' from the Largo, Finnissy first creates a two-section 'prelude' – Poco allegro and Più tranquillo: the Poco allegro works with a single line of increasing density (one to five notes) in the very lowest register, thus preparing the way for the bottom layer of the Più tranquillo. The Più tranquillo, in turn, starts with a fragmented version of the Largo material (all three layers), and gradually works towards the continuous (seamless) texture of the latter. The upper part, for example, which is based on rhythmic retrogrades of the Largo (compare the opening of the Più tranquillo with the Largo, foot of p.6), has pauses at the end of each phrase which gradually and irregularly reduce from ◗ to ◖.

The general 'pacing' of the Poco allegro is that of the middle voice of the Largo, which is why, arguably, it would have made for a rather flat opening. Instead, still using the lowest register, Finnissy composes a Presto anticipating the Largo's top layer, and once again appearing to draw on the Largo for its rhythmic structure. Thus, for example, the last line of the Presto reversed turns out to derive from the fourth line of the Largo, with rationals and irrationals exchanged or modified (see Example 4).

I shall look at transcription no.VII (on 'So che per via di triboli' from *Giovanna d'Arco*) from a more general point of view. In the broader context of the cycle, it acts as a sort of interlude between the fairly cataclysmic résumé of Finnissy's virtuoso styles in the sixth piece, and the rather strict 'Busoni parody' in the eighth. It also introduces the rather wistful monodic style,

Example 4
Rhythmic manipulation in *Verdi Transcriptions I*
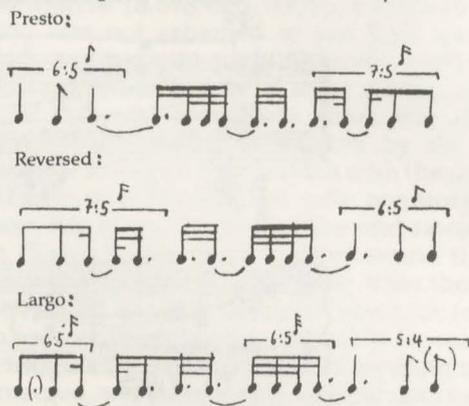
particularly familiar from the *English Country-Tunes*, which will be put through its paces on a much larger scale in the transcription no.IX.

The opening is a fairly clear paraphrase of Verdi's melody:

Verdi: 'So che per via di triboli', from *Giovanna d'Arco*
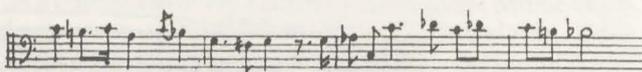
Finnissy: *Verdi Transcription VII*
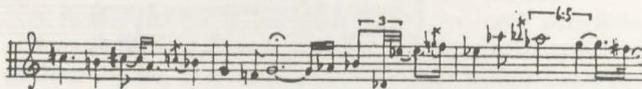
What follows is, in effect, a set of free variations, in which Verdi's original undergoes a number of transformations as illustrated in Example 5. Just *how* free the variations are, can be gathered from the sketches, which not only show a very large number of pitch changes being made on a fairly *ad hoc* basis, but also indicate some rather drastic changes between the original conception and the final one. A first indication is the sketch for the 'tag' which leads from VI to VII. As remarked earlier, the function of these tags is to anticipate the texture of the next piece. Yet in the sketches, the tag runs as shown in Example 6, which vaguely anticipates a brief passage later in VII, but could scarcely be further removed from its opening (or from the later stages of VI).

Example 5
Three excerpts from *Verdi Transcription VII*

Example 6
Sketch for *Verdi Transcription VII* (fair copy by R. Toop)

Another example of the composer's almost Schubertian ability abruptly to change his mind occurs about half way down p.38 of the score (second page of VII). After the held B flat at the start of the third line, Finnissy commences with a rather arid continuation of the previous texture (Example 7) then changes his mind completely, and replaces it with the luxuriant, almost Szymanowski-like passage given in Example 8, which begins to pave the way for the *Indianisches Tagebuch* references in VIII.

Example 7

Sketch for *Verdi Transcription VII* (fair copy by R. Toop)

❊ Notated in the sketches 𝄢 on both staves.

Example 8

Verdi Transcription VII

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this first book of *Verdi Transcriptions*, apart from the sheer quality of the music, is that despite such last-minute changes, and despite the huge range of 'musics' it contains, one really does hear it as one big piece, and not as an anthology of pieces with linking passages. Partly this is because of a degree of cross-referencing between sections that I have not been able even to touch upon here, but mainly, surely, it is a reflection of the intensity that Finnissy brings to the act of composing.

String Trio (1986)

If the eighth of the *Verdi Transcriptions* was a parody (in a quasi-Renaissance sense) of a piano piece by Busoni, the String Trio is one huge parody: it takes as its framework the psychological programme of the first movement of Mahler's Ninth Symphony, and the titles of its 28 parts are Finnissy's 'transcription' into Italian of Mahler's German markings. In addition, the opening F sharp−A−B of Mahler's symphony permeates the structure of Finnissy's Trio at many levels.

The 28 sections are grouped into five larger sections (7 + 4 + 3 + 7 + 7):

1. Andante comodo
   Piuttosto vigoroso
   Corrente
   Allegro
   Tempo I. subito (ma non trascinato)
   Molto moderato ed indugiando
   Un po' esitando − − − cedendo al − − tempo I.

2. Allegro risoluto. Furioso
   Appassionato
   Più lento, raddolcendo
   Calmandosi

3. Largo sostenuto
   Nebbioso, tenebroso
   Più chiaro e sonoroso

4. Tempo I. (Andante)
   Con moto (quasi allegro)
   Pesante
   Più sostenendo − − − pesante − − − stringendo
   Rit. − − −
   Come da principio
   Aumentando

5. Subito misterioso. Molto lento e dolcissimo
   Di nuovo animato
   Rit. − − − Largo assai
   Sognando
   Ansioso − − − molto sostenuto
   A tempo (molto lento)
   Perdendo − − −

I cannot imagine a composer like Finnissy taking up a Mahlerian model lightly, and given the persistent emotional intensity of the String Trio, one can't help surmising an autobiographical element. Perhaps, as Adorno once said of Berg's 'Lyric' Suite, it is a matter of 'latent opera'; still, that is for a future George Perle to unravel − here, I shall deal with it simply as a remarkable piece of chamber music.

Before looking at the Trio in more detail, I shall offer a few words on Finnissy's string writing, which is not, after all, as much a 'known quantity' as his keyboard music. It is not an experimental style *per se*: it does not seek to re-invent the violin. The bow stays resolutely on the fingerboard side of the bridge, the left and right hands are not de-synchronised *à la* Ferneyhough/Hübler, and the player's aim is always to produce audibly the notated pitch. In fact, the basic technical vocabulary does not go beyond Bartók except, perhaps in the matter of compound *glissandi* (often in contrary motion).

And yet one really cannot talk of a 'conventional approach', since the result is so original and convincing. Looking for parallels, if one must, one might think of Scelsi (in terms of the constant search for intensity of sound), though the deliberately claustrophobic pitch-ranges in much of the String Trio never quite reduce to the Italian composer's 'one-note' obsession, and Finnissy's music is full of the polyphony which Scelsi's so scrupulously avoids. More relevant perhaps, is the Eastern European folk-music that has fascinated Finnissy since his teens: parts of the Trio suggest an imaginary, 'hyper-Balkan' folk-lament style (and it is this, I think, rather than any 'vectorial *glissandi*', that sometimes brings him close to the later Xenakis). It is surely folk-music, too, that provides the background for the Trio's constant, though not absolutely pervasive, use of quarter-tones; and it is these, above all, that determine the melodic, harmonic and emotional 'colour' of the work. Unlike Ferneyhough or Dench, Finnissy does not use microtones simply as an expansion of available pitch-resources − they are, above all, *expressive* resources. And since we respond to them most readily when used within a relatively narrow pitch-range, that is precisely how, for the most part Finnissy uses them; within the entire work, there are only two sections (the

Example 9
Rhythmically independent double-stopping in Finnissy's String Trio, p.32.

Più chiaro at the end of the third part, and the Di nuovo animato just after the start of the fifth) that use the jagged leaps that were the signature of the post-Webern era. One particular aspect of the violin writing (also found once in the viola part) requires comment: the use of a polyphonic double-stopping in which the two parts are rhythmically independent. This also occurs in Dillon's work, but Finnissy's version of it is spectacular in the extreme (Example 9).

One of the most impressive aspects of the String Trio is the way in which, despite a vast number of small subsections (each of which is clearly distinct from its neighbours in terms of surface articulation), the work avoids all trace of 'bittyness'. It seems to me that there are many concrete reasons for this. At the most local level, new sections are sometimes 'prepared' by the same kinds of tags as operate at the end of each of the *Verdi Transcriptions*; but a very rich cross-referencing of characteristic figurations also operates throughout the work, many of which have already been introduced more or less discreetly in the course of the first few pages. Moreover, there are broad registral and dynamic strategies which operate across a number of subsections, or even whole movements. For example, the First Part (subsections one to seven) consists essentially of a very slow *crescendo* from *pp* at the outset to *f* half-way through the Allegro, and then a *decrescendo* down to *pppp*. Similarly, the Second Part starts with an abrupt *fff*, and slowly dies down to *pppp* at the end of the Third Part; the process is not absolutely linear, but has a certain sense of inevitability, all the same. Registrally, the First Part gradually ascends about one-and-a-half octaves from the middle register (with artificial harmonics at the end anticipating the sudden outburst of the Second Part in the high register). But the frequent changes in surface articulation, coupled with the overall *crescendo-decrescendo* process, remove all danger of the slow ascent being too didactically obtrusive.

The longest thread through the Trio is that provided by the opening bars of Mahler's Ninth Symphony (Example 10). From this, Finnissy extrapolates a pitch sequence, which is gradually woven into the evolving texture of the Trio, in ever-lengthening strands (a, b, c,

Example 10
Gustav Mahler: Ninth Symphony (opening).

The pitches used by Finnissy as drones in his String Trio are asterisked.

etc) — first in the viola, alternating with microtonal melodies that set the basic tone for the work, and then, once the violin has entered, in the cello:

(the Mahlerian *portamenti* fuse very happily into the microtonal surroundings).

At a much broader level, a – e are deployed through the entire length of the work as a sort of broken *cantus firmus*: transposed up a minor third (the 'generating interval' of the work), they provide a series of drones or pedal points:

| Score: | pp.1-6 | 12-14 | 26-34 | 42-47 (end) |
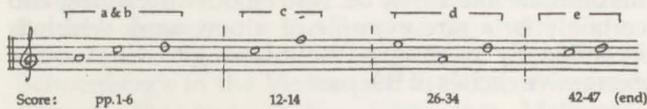
The treatment of the pedal points differs slightly each time. The first group has the function of leading from almost complete stillness – via the microtonal melodies, measured tremolos and unmeasured trills of the first subsection, and the more agitated tremolo figures of the Piuttosto vigoroso – to the double-stopped *glissandi* and almost Donatonian *gruppetti* of the Corrente (which was actually the first part to be composed). Since the material of the piece is in a constant state of evolution and flux, the drone itself remains totally impassive, the only moments of 'drama' being when it changes instrumentation or pitch, in accord with the rotating instrumental roles:

Vln:	*(tacet)*	trem.	micro-mel.	drone	
Vla:	Mahler + micro-mel.	drone	trem.	micro-mel.	etc
Vcl:	drone	Mahler + micro-mel.	drone	trills	

| (drone): | A———————————— | C————————— | D |

The second drone-group (C/F), emerges gradually from a trill-dominated Allegro (which is also the dynamic climax of the First Part), and having established itself on C, gently rocks to and fro between the C and F during the Tempo I., which follows. The next group comes with the start of the Fourth Part: the E remains stable for twenty bars, but the A is constantly 'tugged at' by microtonal groups in the other two instruments (i.e. whichever pair does not have the drone at the time . . .), and the D serves as an accompaniment, passed between viola and cello, to the violin solo at Come da principio. All these drones have been on, or just below, the treble stave; the last pair, which enter in the course of the Ansioso

subsection, are in artificial harmonics at the top of the audible range, and gradually fuse into a double drone.

Having looked, in the *Verdi Transcriptions*, at some of the ways Finnissy handled pitch materials (and bearing in mind that the transposition and permutation procedures used there are also relevant to most of the String Trio), let us look now at two simple examples of the ways in which he builds up rhythmic structures. The Allegro passage in the First Part (p.10 ff.), which begins only with sharply rhythmic trill-sequences that are gradually eaten into by melodic figures and held notes, is in 3/8 almost throughout, and for the first page involves no irrational values. Finnissy sets up a 'vocabulary' of rhythmic units each lasting three quavers:
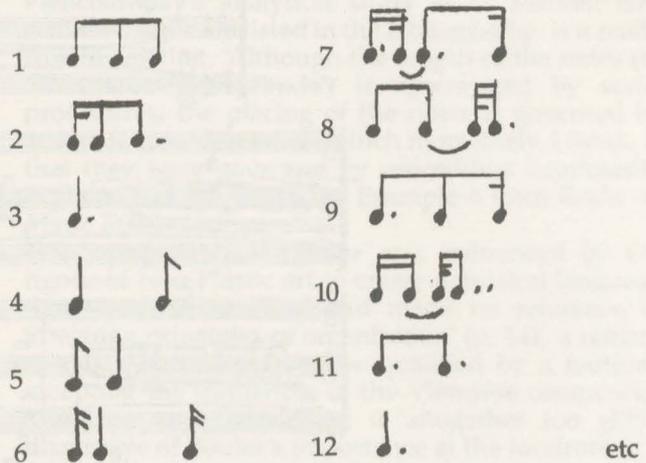
The opening of the Allegro distributes these as follows (cf. Example 11):

Vln:						6	4	2	1	3	11	11	5	5	7	4	9	4	
Vla:	6	5	3	11	10	11	2	5	11					4	5	8	4	3	etc
Vlc:	4	6	2	10	5					4	7	1	11						

Cells of this kind are, admittedly, uncharacteristic of Finnissy to the extent that they are a) short, and b) designed to emphasise the bar-line, rather than

Example 11 Finnissy: Allegro, from the first Part of the String Trio.

eradicate it. A more characteristic example would be the sequence of rhythmic cells and single durations at the beginning of the works (see Example 12, nos. 1 to 7) which, along with cells from the beginning of Second Part and elsewhere, are built up into an inventory of 30 units, and recapitulated in permutated order at the start of the Third and Fourth Parts (Example 13).

It probably cannot be sufficiently emphasised, however, that although such examples may have a quasi-serial appearance, they are light-years removed from any kind of 'grand serial master-plan' mentality, *à la* Stockhausen: once again, they are examples of 'fluency' – the way in which a craftsman soberly martials and deploys his materials, however emotive his ultimate intent may be. And emotive the String Trio certainly is: a rare example of a new work which is intentionally 'moving' without having to resort to the expressive clichés of the past.

Example 12   Finnissy: opening of the String Trio.

The numbers 1-7 refer to rythmic cells which are recapitulated in permutated sequence later in the work.

Example 13

Finnissy: String Trio, opening of the fourth Part.

The numbers refer to rhythmic cells recapitulated from the opening page, as in the previous Example.

Chris Dench

Chris Dench was born in London in June 1953 and, until his recent move to Siena, in Northern Italy, spent most of his life either on the southern fringes of London, or on the south coast (Dover, Southampton, Brighton). Like most of the composers considered here, he is self-taught, though he took a year of the BMus course at Southampton University in 1971. He cites the major impetus to his composing career as being a recital given by Roger Woodward which included Takahashi's *Chromamorphe II* and Scriabin's Preludes op.74; as he says, 'I went home and wrote *Helical*' (1975), a three-minute piano solo which is much the earliest of the pieces he still acknowledges. At the time he made a precarious living by running a series of record shops specialising in contemporary and classical *arcana*; his huge record collection bears witness to a continuing catholicity of taste. Another uncompleted course at City University, London, took his omnivorous intellectual appetite in other directions – semiology, ethnology and various scientific domains (he still would like to have been an astrophysicist), most of which have had a solid role to play in his subsequent compositions.

His first major performances came in 1980, when Michael Finnissy played *Topologies*, and The London Sinfonietta premiered *Kinjiki* (now retitled *Sans Soleil*). International attention came when the French Ministry of Culture commissioned *Énoncé* for the 1983 Metz Festival. Dench has an almost Boulezian propensity for withdrawing and/or revising pieces, which makes any kind of works list a hazardous undertaking. But at the moment of writing, it looks like this:

1975   *Helical*, solo piano
1977-80 *Sans Soleil*, chamber orchestra*
1978   *Lonely*, solo clarinet*
1979   *Topologies*, solo piano
1981   *Shunga*, mezzo-soprano and four instruments*
        Time, solo basset- or bass-clarinet
        Caught Breath of Time, solo flute
1982   *Paravents*, nine brass, and two percussion
        players*
1983-4 *Énoncé*, fifteen instruments
1985   *Strangeness*, string quartet*
        Tilt, solo piano
1985-6 *Recueillement*, eight instruments*
1986   *Esperance*, solo piano
        Venezia, solo flute
1987   *De/ployé*, solo piccolo
        Afterimages, 21 players*

(* = under revision; however, all works except *Sans Soleil* may be performed in the initial versions)

Works in progress include two further flute pieces (for his wife, the Australian flautist Laura Chislett): *Acqua Alta* (for solo flute) and *Sulle Scale Della Fenice* (for flute with twelve amplified instruments).

More than most composers, Dench follows Baudelaire in asserting the artist's right to contradict himself. What follows, therefore, should not be taken as in any way definitive, but simply as a Portrait of the Artist in November 1986. Two months earlier, at the Gaudeamus Festival in Amsterdam, he had caused some perplexity at the composers' forum chaired by

Klaus Huber, through his idiosyncratic use of the term 'musical archetypes'. I asked him to elaborate:

CHRIS DENCH: Well, I don't mean the same thing as Michael Finnissy, who thinks of archetypes in terms of linear and harmonic gestures – as something that is very definitely in the fabric of the music. So in *English Country Tunes* he feels he has gone back to British folk-music archetypes, which is a reasonable statement. But I'm using 'archetypes' in a way I tend to think of as being my own. It seems to me that the only reason human beings are able to communicate is because there are certain kinds of brain phenomena which are congruent throughout humanity. Whether that is to do with actual structural things, I don't know – neither, it seems, do most neuro-anatomists. However, it seems to me that there *is* a kind of ubiquity of gesture: if one thinks of a piece as being notes which are scattered through the piece, then the way the notes fall is governed by a kind of force-field – which is not the same thing as the structure (which is generally something that is dropped in, in a rather artificial exo-skeletal way) – and I tend to think of that as being the 'archetype'. It seems to me that the evidence is very strongly in favour of 'mind' being simply a description of the operating mode of the brain. Similarly, then, there must be a kind of *Gestalt* phenomenon which is not necessarily reducible to a particular location in the brain, but is the product of many locations, and can be described as the archetypic phenomenon. It means that everything we do is governed by certain underpinning and automatically generated models. What I'm saying is that if I believe that to be the case, then *that*, and not the surface, is the thing that matters in the music.

I feel music's fate ought not to be stuck in a kind of ongoing progress, because music isn't like that. I don't think that music really does move forward, I don't believe in this notion of musical history. Inevitably you are a product of your age, and it's foolhardy to pretend otherwise, but I don't believe in the current vast and rather dreary teasing-out of musical fabric to make the music interesting. I feel that the fabric is a by-product, almost a digression really. I think the great composers are the ones who not only do that well but have actually got the underlying force-fields very much under control.

RICHARD TOOP: If one accepts that, does it mean that it's something one can actually operate with? Or is it just a matter of knowing that, whatever one does on the surface, the real significance lies deeper?

CD: What I'm really saying is that it provokes in me a distrust of received musical notions of form, content, and what is musically meaningful. When someone says, 'Oh, there is enormous profundity in the way Schönberg manipulates a particular series', I look at it and say, 'But God, that's not a lot more interesting than the inside of my toaster.' There *are* very pregnant musical things, but somehow in the past two or three hundred years we seem to have gone down this false track of thinking that what is musically valid is what is derived directly, historically: that one does the same as one's teacher, only better, and that these things are meaningful. But of course, these are culturally received 'meaningfulnesses', and I would like to go back as best I can to *pre*-cultural 'meaningfulness'.

RT: Is there any concrete respect in which this affects how you actually set about writing a work?

CD: Absolutely: it means that every time I write a piece I look for a structural model *ex nihilo*. And it has to conform exactly to the notion of the piece – which is why *Tilt* (which is about pinball machines and things) is a piece about spectacular random fluctuations. *Énoncé* is a bit less pure – well, not even 'pure', because I'm a composer, not an automaton. One intervenes all the time, so inevitably Mishima's 'liquefying sensibility' gets in there and does its job. I think that first of all you come up with a conception, and then you work the thing through, and then you look for a title. And quite often, by that time, the conception has gone several major steps away from where it was to begin with, and the piece has inevitably achieved a certain distance from the origins, which are no longer relevant. So what one looks for is a title that resonates towards the music in a way that is novel, and is perhaps an additional aspect. For example, if you heard *Énoncé* without knowing it was called *Énoncé*, that would be fine, but knowing that the title itself has a symmetry which fits with the symmetry of the piece . . . and also Foucault's notion of those different degrees of truth (that there's the truth that is given, in pre-Socratic Greece, by the eminence of the utterer). In my music and Michael Finnissy's that's something you have to take as read because, unlike Ferneyhough, our musics don't have the kind of linear authentication of utterance where the second note validates the first note, and the third validates the second (the opening of *Carceri I*, where everything validates everything else retrospectively, is the most obvious example of this). Mostly, Michael and I take the stance that the fact we have written something already means that we mean it.

RT: The charts and 'maps' you work from seem, if anything, to be a way of distancing yourself from the work; of limiting the capacity for intervention.

CD: They are exactly that – that's quite right. At least, hopefully there's an equilibrium. I wouldn't want to 'erase' C. Dench, because that's all I've got to offer, really . . .

RT: Isn't there a certain masochism, then, in the preparation of these huge 'distancing' charts?

CD: It's not so much masochism as a kind of deliberately caused frustration: it's like withholding orgasm – it means that when you *do* do it, when you actually come to writing the notes, that final kind of engagement with the fabric of the thing is so much more red-hot.

Venezia, for example, was a piece I wrote in full recognition of the noise *I* like to make. There is a terrible tendency on my part, when I don't mechanise some part of the music, to write Puccini. I am basically a lyrical composer, but I want actually as a composer to do more than that. And again – because my personality is, I hope, quite strong – I can introduce quite a lot of levels of sieving, and large chunks of it still remain there. And when I hear my pieces, I know they're 'mine'; that I'm not capable of eradicating the element at all, even after sieve, after sieve, after sieve. I can still intervene at that stage and weed out the things that are distinctly *not* me. It means that everything that's left is hyper-me; not in a Nietzschean sense at all: it's a less inhibited Dench than you'd get otherwise, a rather less limited one, with more synchromesh.

RT: You cite the notion of quixotism in relation to *Tilt*. Can I ask you to digress on that subject a little?

CD: In *Tilt* the quixotism is really in the *tone* of the piece. The other kind is actually the compositional quixotism, the idea of compositionally pushing yourself further and further into this realm of no-man's land. It's a kind of adventurousness I enjoy enormously, and that's why, if my pieces fail, I gnash my teeth but I turn round and say, 'Well, dammit, I had a good go'. You know the thing was worth doing. The thing that really depresses me is when I feel that the composition has not actually 'had a go'. I can stand failure, but there's nothing I hate more than being compromised by time-pressures into not doing a piece that is authentic.

Let me go back to the notion of validation, of music which is valid simply because Michael or I have written it. I don't feel it quite as extremely as Michael. He seems to be quite happy with the idea of writing a music which simply utters – I'm sort of ambivalent about this. I like my utterances to have content as well as tone, although what often happens with my pieces is that they start off sounding as if they are completely irrational, but there *is* a certain amount of retroactive validation through the way things evolve. Another thing I like very much is to use structures which are only perceptible in hindsight – so that changes *will* occur, but too slowly for your short-term memory to pick up on them. For example, the big piano solo in *Énoncé* thins out from chords of up to six notes down to single notes, but you don't notice it until you are down to single notes or somewhere in that direction.

RT: How does this affect the second hearing? Presumably, if the thing is perceptible with hindsight, it is perceptible in advance next time one hears it?

CD: Well, I think that familiarity is the way that one gets to love a piece, because you can't love it until you are familiar with it. So it's also like getting to know people: there's a stage at which you slowly learn the secrets, and once you know the secrets you can just appreciate the skill with which they are laid out. But hopefully it takes quite a while to get to that stage, because if it doesn't – if it can be done quickly – then the piece doesn't hold any real engagement.

In *A Lover's Discourse*,[7] Barthes quotes a lovely notion, *atopos*, which he says is something 'the amorous subject ascribes to the amorous object'. And this *atopos* means 'of a ceaselessly unforeseeable originality', which is something that I strive for in my pieces; but I want that to be within a framework of consistency – 'unforeseeableness' but 'naturalness' as well.

*   *   *

The following analytical material will be concerned mainly with *Tilt* and *Énoncé*, partly because they are substantial pieces which I happen to admire, partly because they introduce many of the characteristic features of Dench's recent compositional method, and partly because the score format does allow for the intelligible reproduction of excerpts in reduced form (a consideration which makes the recent *Afterimages*, for instance, rather hard to deal with). First, however, I shall look at some broader stylistic and technical considerations.

Since *Tilt*, Dench's pitch processes have had a clear family relationship to the procedures of Xenakis's *Herma*. That is, the available pitch material has generally been divided up into four basic sets (in which

octaves are regarded as non-equivalent), and different parts of the piece, or different instrumental groupings, have been characterised by particular sets (A, B, C, D) or their various conjunctions (AB, AC, AD, BC, BD, CD – it seems likely that the last of these has a rather Schumannesque significance for the composer). The size of the sets depends, of course, on the range of the instruments used and the decision as to whether quarter-tones (if employed) are to be incorporated into the basic sets (as in *Recueillement*) or applied subsequently as inflections (*Venezia*).

If the former is the case, then conjunction sets will often contain a formidable number of notes, and the *tutti* passages in Dench's works which are based on such conjunction sets have tended to give rise to some controversy concerning their acoustic coherence (a controversy which, given the generally low standards of pitch accuracy in performances to date, is hard to resolve empirically). In recent pieces Dench has evolved a so-called 'looping technique' which allows a limited number of pitches to be systematically recycled in an unpredictable yet coherent manner. He gives Example 14 from *Afterimages* as an illustration.

Example 14

An illustration of Dench's 'looping technique', from *Afterimages*.

The sequence:

gives rise to:
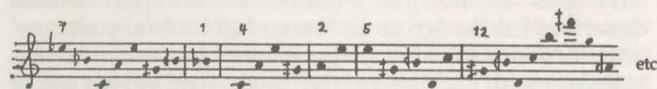
The number above each note in the upper stave implies a group of *that* number of pitches, starting with *that* note, i.e. seven notes from the first pitch, one from the second (i.e. just the second note), four from the third (C) and so forth. (♭ = flattened by a quarter-tone, ♯ = sharpened by a quarter-tone.)

Conversely, recent pieces for solo instruments have employed means of extracting more complex pitch-groupings from the basic sets. In *Esperance* this is done by letting one hand use a transposed version of the conjunction sets, and in a preface to *De/Ployé*, Dench shows how notes drawn from two of the basic quarter-tone sets:
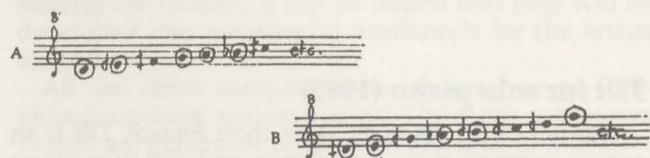
and their semitone composite AB (in which the quarter-tones are 'rationalised')

are re-ordered:
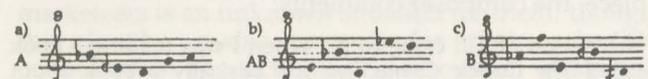
and interlocked on the basis of a permutation column:

```
a b c
a c b
b a c
b c a
c a b
c b a
```
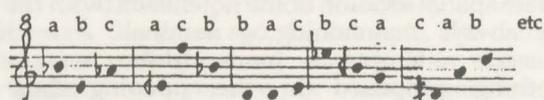

(where *a b c* is the first note of each group, *a c b* the second note of each group etc.).

The formal use of the various simple and composite sets will be considered in more detail in the analysis of *Tilt* (below). A final general point worth making here is that, where possible, Dench likes to re-use the same basic sets in different works (thus *Esperance* and *Tilt*, for example, work with the same pitch materials):

I don't like generating new ones, because I don't know them – they're unfamiliar under the hands. And with the ones I do know, I know their registral characteristics and their harmonies. I feel I have a very serious personal investment in these harmonies: I'm getting to know them well, they're getting to be very personal.

From *Énoncé* onwards, the most striking rhythmic feature of Dench's work is the use of chains of periodic values, continually 'changing gear' through the use of irrationals in relation to the basic tempo. To some degree, as noted earlier, this is characteristic of all the composers discussed here, but with Dench it plays an especially significant role – the rhythmic structure of *Esperance*, admittedly a brief piece, is completely based on it. The right hand at the start of *Esperance* gives an untypically simple instance of the technique (Example 15). The point is, though, that usually the relationships are *not* so simple, and are not meant to be. The whole purpose of this technique is to create a multi-layered tapestry of shifting pulse-rates (or 'pseudo-tempi') whose components are at least nominally perceptible (hence the periodic rhythms). Inevitably this leads to notational difficulties: a phrase may look difficult, and be mentally hard to 'place', even though the actual notes are physically quite easy to play. The composer is well aware of this fact and concerned about it. In a BBC feature on the 'New Complexity' he commented:

Notationally I have reached a point of a certain amount of redundancy, and I am striving to do something about that, but my perception of pieces that have been notated much more loosely has always been one of inarticulacy. I don't want to release control of the rhythmic life of the piece.

Example 15

Basic values (in ♪.):	3	1	2	4
No. of attacks:	2	4	3	1

The opening of Chris Dench's *Esperance* (right hand only).
This shows various numbers of periodic attacks fitted into various 'basic values'.

The solution, in recent works, has not been a simplification of the musical substance but an attempt to make the score itself more 'user-friendly', or at least less visually intimidating. In *Esperance* this takes two forms: the use of 'prolation signs' which remove one level of irrationals (e.g. $\frac{5}{6}$ indicates that until the next such sign, five notes in the right hand have the same duration as six in the left), and meticulously accurate spatial location of the noteheads (with the left hand always maintaining a nominal ♪ = 120). *Afterimages* attempts a more drastic version of something proposed in the opening bars of Lutoslawski's *Trois poèmes d'Henri Michaux* (1963): the conductor gives large downbeats, which are interpreted by the players in terms of individually differing time-signatures (or, in Dench's case, differing tempi).

There are other rhythmic processes, of course, some of which involve statistical movements from long to short values, or vice-versa. In *Afterimages* and particularly in *De/Ployé* there is also a tendency towards more complex internal sculpting of individual phrases. The opening bar of *De/Ployé* gives a clear example of the rather arcane means by which such rhythms are procured. The piece is based on the name of its dedicatee, the flautist Roberto Fabbriciani; or, more exactly, the second part is based on *Roberto*, and the first on *Fabbriciani* (modified to Fababriciani). The durations are based on the letter-numbers of each name (A=1, B=2, C=3 etc.), formed into permutation squares and, in order to vary the ratio between the longest and shortest values, subjected to a sliding scale which imposes varying degrees of 'flattening'.

The following diagram, referring to the seven letters (A, B, C, F, I, N, R) in the name Fabbriciani, is adapted from Dench's sketches:

A	B	C	F	I	N	R
1	2	3	6	9	14	18
1	2	3	6	9	13	17
1	2	3	6	8	12	16
1	2	3	5	8	11	15
1	2	3	5	7	10	14
1	2	3	5	7	9	13
1	2	2	4	6	8	12

etc.

The last line shown above (which Dench calls 'gradient twelve', since twelve is the largest number occurring in it) is the one used in the first bar of *De/Ployé*. The actual rhythmic values depend on the length of the bar within which the name is lodged, which in turn derives from the name Fabbriciani (thus at the opening, F = 6♪ = 3/8, A = 1♪ = 1/16 etc).

For practical purposes, any duration which would come out at less than one fourteenth of a second is regarded as 'massless', and either shown as a grace-note or, more rarely, omitted. In the first bar, 1 and 2 are treated as 'massless' (Example 16 – even here, some minor adjustments have been made).

Example 16 First bar of Dench's *De/Ployé*.

This illustrates the application of the letters in the name Fabbriciani to the durations.

Again, further aspects of rhythmic treatment will emerge in the analyses of *Énoncé* and *Tilt*.

Dench's approach to form is, as implicit in the interview earlier, harder to codify. Generally, though, one could probably distinguish between 'grand forms', where Dench works 'down' from a broadly conceived architecture, and 'local forms', where he works 'up' from a number of similar building blocks. Examples of the 'grand form' would be the broad arch-form of *Énoncé*, *Tilt* (with its rather cinematic cross-cuts between five basic materials) and, above all, the current (first) version of *Afterimages* (with its 'six peaks, each of less intensity than its predecessor, each slower to begin and end:

$$8 \times \frac{3}{8} \rightarrow \frac{7}{8}, \quad 7 \times \frac{4}{8} \rightarrow \frac{9}{8}, \quad 6 \times \frac{5}{8} \rightarrow \frac{11}{8}$$
$$5 \times \frac{6}{8} \rightarrow \frac{13}{8}, \quad 4 \times \frac{7}{8} \rightarrow \frac{15}{8}, \quad 3 \times \frac{8}{8} \rightarrow \frac{17}{8})^8$$

Examples of 'local forms', on the other hand, would include *Recueillement* (with its 23 metrically identical 'frames' of $6 + 5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1$ ♩.) and *De/Ployé* (with its assemblage of twelve *Fab(a)briciani*s and seven *Roberto*s). It should be emphasised, though, that the kinds of 'sections' invoked here are not just static blocks: the vast majority are in 'unsteady state', (that is, they are articulated by clear tendencies in register, density, dynamic, instrumentation, or some combination of these).

A word on the instrumentation of the ensemble pieces: with the exception of *Recueillement*, in which 'the instrumental layout was suggested by a north Indian ghazal band',[9] Dench's ensembles are very structurally conceived. Again, the recent *Afterimages* provides a sort of *locus classicus* (Example 17). The additional instruments within the wind and brass 'triangles' are not just a matter of coloration: Dench describes his design as an 'extended timbral staircase' and, broadly speaking, the ensemble descends this staircase with each successive peak. And yet his use of these instruments is relatively austere: after *Énoncé* there have been almost no trills or even string *pizzicati and, apart from* some fluttertongues at the opening and artificial harmonics at the end, *Afterimages* totally eschews idiomatic instrumental 'effects'. *Recueillement* allows the bass clarinet a few trills and flutter-tonguings, and the double-bass some harmonics and *pizzicati*; otherwise the treatment of the ensemble is of monastic severity.

Nevertheless, the creation of distinctive small instrumental groupings as structural elements has been typical of the ensemble works since *Énoncé*; examples of their use are given below.

Tilt for solo piano (1985)

Though chronologically later than *Énoncé*, *Tilt* is in certain respects more straightforward and thus offers a simpler path into the details of Dench's working methods. In passing, one should also comment that, thanks to the efforts of pianist Andrew Ball, it is one of the very few works by Dench that one can hear in an exemplary performance (Ball's BBC recording is all the more remarkable for having been made in a single 'take', without editing). On the origins and title of the piece, the composer comments:

The notion of *Tilt* came to me when I was reading a book called *The Cosmic Connection*; it's basically a book about

Example 17   Instrumentation for *Afterimages*

flute(s)	trumpet(s)	double-bass
oboe 1 oboe 2	sax. 1 sax. 2	cello 1 cello 2
clar.1 clar.2 clar.3	tbn.1 tbn.2 tbn.3	vln.1 vla. vln.2

ob.1 & { oboe d'amore / cor anglais

ob.2 & { cor anglais / baritone ob.

cl.1 & { Eb / bass

cl.2 & Eb c'alto

cl.3 & { Eb alto / Bb c'bass)

sax.1 (Bb) = { soprano / tenor

sax.2 (Eb) = { alto / baritone

tbn.1 = { alto / tenor

tbn.2 = { tenor / bass

tbn.3 = bass

& 3 percussion

quantum physics and sub-atomic particles and the cosmos. In the middle of this book there's a chapter on randomness, in which he describes how at the very centre of the known world, in the centre of Jerusalem, there's this very ancient building in which, presumably, the Christian Church first started up, and it's now a pinball alley. So here we are in the heart of the world – in the heart of the universe, if you like – and in the middle of it there is a pinball machine. And the author comments that the art of the future will be an art of randomness.

And there's the notion of quixotism, and very difficult piano music (Paul Griffiths described it as 'Don Quixote at the pinball table', which is about right) – of tilting at windmills combined with tilt on a pinball machine. And quixotism combined with the notion of geophysical tilt, where you get sudden changes in the strata of a landscape: that's quite a strong image in *Tilt*. There is no 'drama' in *Tilt*: there are all kinds of interesting juxtapositions.

An overall scheme for *Tilt* is shown in Example 18. Essentially, the piece cross-cuts five kinds of music.

The life-line throughout the piece is supplied by the opening material, which begins as a continuous two-part texture and soon acquires two additional layers while also becoming progressively more fragmented. If we call this Material 1, then the remaining materials, in order of appearance are:

Material 2: brusque chords, marked 'impassive, brutal';

Material 3: wild chains of chords, marked 'like a deranged carillon';

Material 4: presents the four '*ur*-sets' on which the pitches of *Tilt* are based – the first and third are delicate, the second and fourth extremely aggressive;

Material 5: two-part 'melodies', at first 'murmuring and hazy', but becoming increasingly athletic and animated. This material dominates the middle part of the work.

Example 18   Form-scheme for *Tilt*.

This shows the cross-cutting between the five materials, and the metrical schemes associated with each. Heavy lines show the end of each bar-sequence (e.g. 3 × 9/8), dotted lines show the bars within each sequence. Where a sequence is broken by the cross-cutting to another material, an arrow indicates that the sequence will be resumed at the next occurrence of the 'interrupted' material.

Example 17 Instrumentation for *Afterimages*

```
        flute(s)                    trumpet(s)                  double-bass
     oboe 1   oboe 2            sax. 1   sax. 2             cello 1   cello 2
   clar.1  clar.2  clar.3       tbn.1  tbn.2  tbn.3          vln.1   vla.   vln.2
```

ob.1 & { oboe d'amore / cor anglais

sax.1 (Bb) = { soprano / tenor

& 3 percussion

ob.2 & { cor anglais / baritone ob.

sax.2 (Eb) = { alto / baritone

cl.1 & { Eb / bass

tbn.1 = { alto / tenor

cl.2 & Eb c'alto

tbn.2 = { tenor / bass

cl.3 & { Eb alto / Bb c'bass)

tbn.3 = bass

quantum physics and sub-atomic particles and the cosmos. In the middle of this book there's a chapter on randomness, in which he describes how at the very centre of the known world, in the centre of Jerusalem, there's this very ancient building in which, presumably, the Christian Church first started up, and it's now a pinball alley. So here we are in the heart of the world – in the heart of the universe, if you like – and in the middle of it there is a pinball machine. And the author comments that the art of the future will be an art of randomness.

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motion, which have nine-chord groups). Example 21 shows the structure of the first (divided) 33/8. Material 4 operates in almost exactly the same way, but with groups of four chords and a constant bar length of 18/8.

Example 21
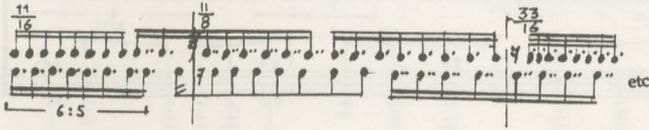
Material 5 is in many ways a mirror image of Material 1. The latter was based on three-bar units of increasing length; Material 5 is based on four-bar units of *decreasing* length: $4 \times 13\flat$, $4 \times 12\flat$, $4 \times 11\flat$, $4 \times 10\flat$, $4 \times 9\flat$, $4 \times 8\flat$, $4 \times 7\flat$, $4 \times 6\flat$ etc. The within-the-bar procedures of this material are the most complex in the whole of *Tilt* (in many respects they provide an upbeat to *Esperance*). Each bar has a different irrational subdivision for left and right hands, the left hand based on fives and the right hand on sevens (these irrationals remain constant for each four-bar group). The subdivisions are given in Example 22.

Example 22
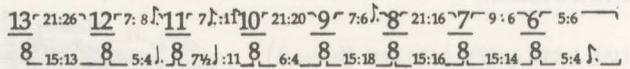
Finally, a few comments on the pitch structure of *Tilt*. The theoretical basis of the piece is the division of the 88 notes of the keyboard into four sets, and their six conjunctions (AB, AC etc), as shown in Example 23. Before looking at samples of the ways in which the sets are deployed, a few general observations can be made. Firstly the groups are, of necessity, large (22 notes in each source set, and 44 – i.e. half the notes on the keyboard – in each conjunction) but, apart from the four sections that present the 'Ur-sets', there is no attempt to present a whole set at once; rather, as part of a general movement in register, particular parts of a set are 'sampled' (there *are* more complex procedures, which will be touched on later) and given that even the conjunction sets have, on average, only six notes within each octave, there is plenty of scope for particular registers to acquire a distinctive harmonic colour.

Example 23 Pitch-groups for *Tilt* (also used for *Esperance*).

A, B, C and D are the 'Ur-sets', AB, CD etc are their various conjunctions. Sketch supplied by the composer.

Example 24

Tilt: first occurrence of Material 3, using set AB (p.2, third system)

LIKE A DERANGED CARILLON (tempo 2)

Example 25

Tilt: Ur-set A (p.4, fourth system).

Note how closely the contour of the top voice matches that of the previous Example.

In principle, the elements of A,B,C and D are, for each set, spread across the entire keyboard range; but in practice, there are idiosyncratic 'gaps' in each. Thus A has only three notes in the top two octaves; B largely avoids the octave above middle C; C has almost nothing in the bass-clef range, and D has a gap of one and a half octaves above C''. Thus even the conjunction sets can have quite distinct characteristics in certain ranges, such as the diatonic patches in AB: 21-29 and BD: 22-29, or pentatonic groups like CD: 23-28 or AC: 17-21, to take just a few examples from the middle range.

The way in which the sets are sampled depends, in part, on the type of material and the nature of the registral process. Even so, there are some general features. Usually, rather than moving directly from top to bottom (or vice-versa), or simply exposing the whole sample 'stochastically', Dench uses wave-like contours to blur the registral process slightly. Let us take two strikingly similar examples: the first 'carillon' outburst (Example 24 using set AB) and the first '*Ur*-set' (Example 25, set A). There is, in any case, a close textural resemblance between the two types: both involve two-part chordal writing in each hand (the hands being rhythmically independent in a manner discussed above), but in this instance the 'wave-shape' in the top part of the right hand is virtually the same in both, as is their use of ten attacks in the right hand against nine in the left. And if we describe the four 'voices', however implausibly, as S.A.T.B., then in both cases there is a kind of 'sampling width', and the same marginal overlap between voices:

AB	S. 44 → 37	A	S. 22 → 17
	A. 38 → 32		A. 17 → 12
	T. 32 → 16		T. 12 → 8
	B. 27 → 21		B. 8 → 1

Other types (e.g. the Material 2 chords) alternate between conjunctions from chord to chord. Here again, I shall precede a simple example – the first chord-sequence, on p.2 (Example 26) – with a brief 'theoretical' comment. Of the fifteen possible 'conjunctions of conjunctions' which occur when one compound set follows another (e.g. AB/BC), three are 'non-discriminatory' in the sense that they simply make the entire chromatic range available (i.e. AB/CD, AC/BD and AD/BC) – these Dench tends to avoid, except at clear formal 'cutting points'. The serially derived densities of these chords have already been noted; the wave-form here is the result of taking similar pitch-numbers from different sets as the upper note:

BC	AB	BC	BC	AB	BD	BC	
40	39	39	37	38	38	38	etc

A much more elaborate version of this procedure is used in Material 1; this can be illustrated in those bars of *Tilt* where the aim is to make a relatively protracted descent from the top register. To this end, Dench

Example 26

Tilt: first occurrence of Material 2 (p.2, second system)

cross-cuts *note by note* from one set to another, moving one step further down each set for each group (this does not apply to the accented notes, which form a separate 'skein': always CD for the right hand, and BC for the left). For the first three groups in each hand, this can be systematized as shown in Example 27.

Example 27   Cross-cutting procedures in *Tilt*

Right hand:

$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{CD:41} \\ \text{CD:43} \\ \text{CD:38} \end{bmatrix} \begin{array}{l} \text{CD:44} \\ \text{CD:43} \\ \text{CD:42} \end{array} \begin{array}{l} \text{AC:41} \\ \text{AC:40} \\ \text{AC:39} \end{array} \begin{array}{l} \text{AB:43} \\ \text{AB:42} \\ \text{AB:41} \end{array} \begin{array}{l} \text{CD:35*} \\ \text{AB:39} \\ \text{AB:38} \end{array} \begin{array}{l} \text{AD:42} \\ \text{AD:41} \\ \text{AD:40} \end{array} \text{, then}$$

Left hand:

$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{BC:29} \\ \text{BC:32} \\ \text{BC:31} \end{bmatrix} \begin{array}{l} \text{BC:28} \\ \text{BC:27} \\ \text{BC:26} \end{array} \begin{array}{l} \text{AC:29} \\ \text{AC:28} \\ \text{AC:27} \end{array} \begin{array}{l} \text{AB:31} \\ \text{AB:30} \\ \text{AB:29} \end{array} \begin{array}{l} \text{AC:26} \\ \text{AC:25} \\ \text{AC:24} \end{array} \begin{array}{l} \text{AD:30} \\ \text{AD:29} \\ \text{AD:28} \end{array} \text{, then}$$

* By the system, this should be AB:40; Dench says 'In *Tilt* I recall making "errors", mostly to make the line less jerky, more "pianistic".'

Arbitrary as the procedure may seem in some ways, I find that it leads to extremely striking and memorable results like virtually everything else in the piece. Dench is inclined to be slightly disparaging about *Tilt*, finding it 'shallow' in comparison to works like *Énoncé* and *Afterimages*. That seems to me rather unjust. Perhaps, compared to those other pieces, it is less 'committed', less 'personally emotive' (at one level, one could take it as a memory of the decisive Woodward concert: a sort of *Chromamorphe III*), but it also strikes me as being a remarkably successful and distinctive contribution to the new piano repertoire.

Énoncé (1983 – definitive revision 1984)

Although Chris Dench now regards *Afterimages* as signalling the arrival of 'the authentic Dench voice, only slightly distorted by lack of time', its predecessor *Énoncé* already establishes some clear expectations. Notably these include a plurality of musics within the one work, the large-scale application of fade-out and build-up processes, the systematic incorporation of quarter-tones in the melodic/harmonic structure (in *Shunga* they were largely confined to the vocal line), and a range of overtly extra-musical influences. Above all, though, it is the piece in which he first embraces the more general idea of the 'big statement' (doubtless one of the many implications of the title itself).

Dench likes to attach the three following, suitably pluralist quotations to the work:

In Greece, even as late as the 6th century BC, the truth – and power – of discourse resided, not in *what* was said, but in *who* said it and *how* it was said. A century later the highest truth resided, not in what discourse *was* or in what it *did*, but in what it *said*. To use Foucault's distinction, truth had moved from the enunciation (*énonciation*), the ritualised act, to the statement (*énoncé*), to its meaning and to its reference to the world.

Alan Sheridan, *Michel Foucault – the Will to Truth*

. . . you endeavour to make communicable sense out of natural order . . . you make government and Art, and realise that they are, must be, both the same . . .

Edward Albee, *Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf*

The main thing a musician would like to do is to give a picture to the listener of the many wonderful things he knows of and senses in the universe.

John Coltrane (quoted by Ralph J. Gleason)

The first of these, however crucial, needs to be seen fairly equivocally. In the interview above, Dench invokes the 6th-century version ('the fact that we have written something already means we mean it') but, by its very title, *Énoncé* adopts the alternative stance. By way of mediation, perhaps, he says (referring to the four basic categories at the bottom right of his 'map' of the work – see Example 28), 'there's a kind of saturation-definition of the notion of utterance there, and that's really why the piece is called *Énoncé*.'

Example 28   Chris Dench's 'map' for the overall form of *Énoncé*
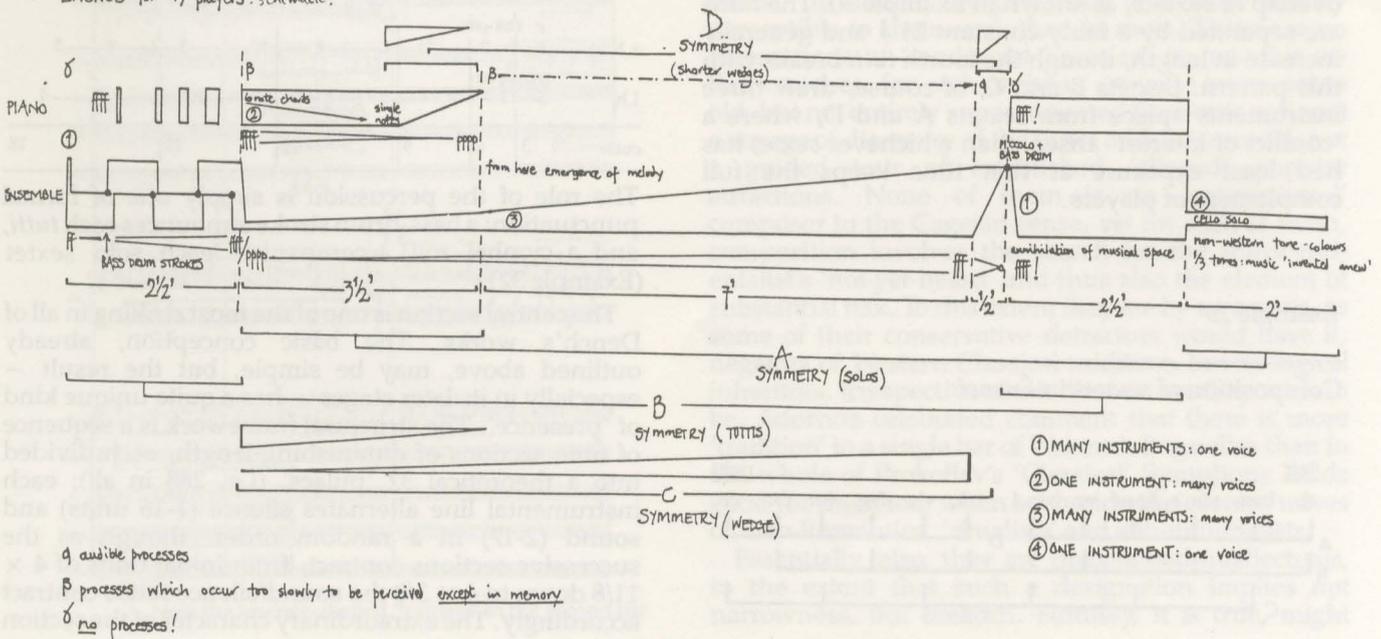
The composer's map permits a quick overview of the various symmetries and wedges which constitute the work. The outer pillars are formed by two dense *tuttis*, each followed by a solo which is underlaid by a sort of residual 'hum' from the preceding *tutti* – the first solo is for piano, the second for cello. The two solos, however, are utterly opposed in character: the piano solo is a grand virtuoso outburst over the whole range of the instrument which gradually reduces from six-note chords to single notes, and then trails off into the upper range of the instrument. The cello solo, on the contrary, has a quiet, introverted intensity – if the piano solo loosely evokes Xenakis, the one for cello is more like a 'homage to Scelsi' – which becomes slightly more animated as it proceeds. Both deviate from the quarter-tone norm of the work – the piano solo throughout being, inevitably, semitonal (as an emblem of 'The West'), while the cello uses third-tones, and in the words of the score's preface 'should sound very ''non-Western'' '. The *tuttis* too are quite distinct in character, the first being more obviously 'sectionalised' by the juxtaposition and overlap of various sextets within the ensemble, while the second is exuberantly chaotic in a rather Ivesian manner (*Tone Roads 3* comes to mind); the composer describes it as being 'rather like the electric light-bulbs in the Pepsi ad in Piccadilly Circus: lots of bright lights that flash around randomly'.

The central part of the work is another extended *tutti* that gradually emerges underneath the piano solo, and proceeds inexorably to a climax for another seven and a half minutes. At first the other instruments are silent, then they take up low held notes, and gradually build up ever longer chains of ascending pitches until, one by one, they are 'unlocked' from simple rising sequences, and become ever more diverse and active. Suddenly, the entire ensemble clicks into a high-speed re-run of the ascending passages (an 'ascent into heaven', as Dench puts it), before being unleashed on the second *tutti* proper.

Let us look now in a little more detail at the individual sections. The first *tutti*, as indicated above, arises from four sextets, selected from all the players except the pianist and two percussionists, and reflecting their seating positions: two 'close' sextets, and two 'spread' ones (Example $\overline{29}$). The *tutti* sections, each announced by a bass drum, arise from the overlap of sextets, as shown in Example 30. The *tuttis* are separated by a fairly constant 21 ♩ and generally increase in length, though the fourth *tutti* breaks with this pattern. Sextets B and C, of course, draw three instruments apiece from sextets A and D; where a 'conflict of interest' arises, then whichever sextet has had least exposure at that time keeps the full complement of players.

Example 29

Composition of sextets in *Énoncé*
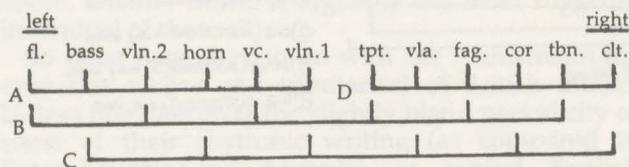
Example 30

Overlapping of sextets in the *tuttis* of *Énoncé*
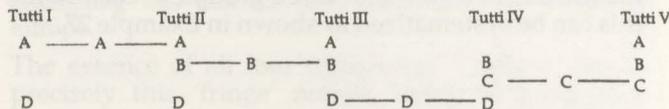
Each of the tuttis and interludes has a clear overall dynamic profile:

Tutti I	*ff* ⟩ *mf*
A	*mf* ⟨ *f*
Tutti II	*f cresc.*
B	*mf* ⟨ *ff*
Tutti III	*ff cresc.*
D	*f* ⟨ *fff*
Tutti IV	*fff cresc.*
C	*ff* ⟨ *ffff*
Tutti V	*ffff*

Within the sextets, each instrument operates separately in terms of register (four different 'bandwidths' in the composer's words) and rhythm, the latter governed by a 'pulse-flow matrix' which determines how many notes are played within how long a basic duration (these are calculated 'seamlessly' for each instrument, so that when a particular sextet re-enters, it picks up at the previous cut-off point.
e.g.
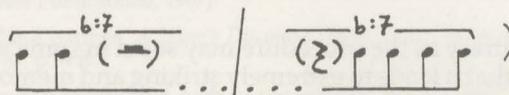
The piano and percussion operate independently of these schemes. The piano part is composed as a continuous chain of values increasing from 3 ♪ to 11 ♪ (i.e. 63 ♪ in all), with each basic value divided into eleven, and the values separately ordered for right and left hand. The result is 'chopped' at intervals of $3 + 6 + 9 + 12 + 15 + 18 = 63$ ♪, and the six 'cuts' of increasing length are, in Dench's words, 'distributed irregularly' throughout the whole *tutti* (Example 31).

Example 31

Metric organisation of the piano part in *Énoncé*

The role of the percussion is simply one of formal punctuation: a bass-drum stroke announces each *tutti*, and a cymbal roll accompanies each solo sextet (Example 32).

The central section is one of the most striking in all of Dench's works. The basic conception, already outlined above, may be simple, but the result – especially in its later stages – has a quite unique kind of 'presence'. The structural framework is a sequence of nine sections of diminishing length, each divided into a theoretical 32 'pulses' (i.e. 288 in all); each instrumental line alternates silence (1-16 units) and sound (2-17) in a random order, though as the successive sections contract, from initial units of 4 × 11/8 down to 4 × 3/8 the sound/silence ratios contract accordingly. The extraordinary character of the section

Example 32

Dench: *Énoncé* (p.3).

Note in particular the entry of Sextet D, signalled by the bass drum, and the first two 'cuts' of the piano material.

arises from two drastically simple decisions: firstly, each instrument has one note at its first entry, two at the second, three at the third, and so forth. Secondly, each instrument enters in its lowest register, and its materials consist of ascending scale patterns, each starting-note being slightly higher than its previous one. Given that, at the outset, the held notes are very long and the ensemble includes a bass clarinet, bass trombone, cor anglais, contrabassoon, cello, bass, horn and bass flute, the results are magnificently lugubrious. However, as the overall process gains momentum, and the instruments are gradually freed from their scale patterns, the music gains an almost Bergian intensity (not unlike the slow movement of the Chamber Concerto, in fact, with *its* ever more rapidly ascending scales). Towards the end of this section the instruments have risen to a medium-high register and included various additional figurations: grace-note groups, trills and measured tremolos (see Example 33). The dense second *tutti*, coming after the

Example 33

A passage from towards the end of the central section of *Énoncé* (p.51).

Almost all instruments (though not the bass trombone, horn and bass) have broken out of the initial ascending pitch model, and acquired additional 'decorative' elements – trills, tremolos etc.

'ascent into heaven' (see above), almost exactly reproduces the structure of the long central section, so that the part of the composer's 'map' shown in Example 34 can be applied to both; here however, the basic unit is a consistent ♪ pulse. The piano returns to the ensemble, and the cello's rhythmic structure is taken over, with curiously Ivesian effect, by a ship's bell (Example 35). The composer comments:

The ship's bell, I suppose, is a reference to my father, who is a sailor. We don't get on well, so I suppose it's a sort of palliative gesture, a kind of exorcism . . .

And of the concluding cello solo, he says:

It's a 'voice from another world', emerging from the catharctic overload of the previous five pages. After the 'super-climax', which is a complete wiping-out of musical space – 'annihilation' is the word I like – the only thing that can happen is this re-inventing of the musical texture, using third tones. I like to think of the ending, before the cello, as being a kind of white-out, or yellow-out. A Scriabinesque, joyous thing – that's how I regard it: a kind of outburst of ecstasy, a plateau of joy. You can't come down from it, so the only thing that can come after it is a kind of voice of intimacy speaking.

Example 34

Part of the composer's 'map' for the central section and final *tutti* of *Énoncé*.

For the *tutti* (cf. also the next Example), the scale of the map is one square = one quaver. Note that many of the verbal annotations apply only to the central section. The original uses several colours, but these, again, refer mainly to the central section. Some instrumentations have been interchanged.

Example 35

Énoncé p.58: the opening of the final *tutti*.

Richard Barrett

At the Darmstadt Summer School in 1986, Barrett began his presentation thus:

By way of introduction, I should point out that the processes by which I am beginning to define my compositional and paracompositional aims are necessarily at an early stage. (My involvement with composition began six years ago; fortunately or otherwise there still seems to be a great deal to do.)

In fact, with the exception of a short piano piece (*Invention 6*), all the works Barrett now acknowledges have been written since 1983. The first two works to attract widespread attention were *Essay in Radiance*, and more particularly *Coïgitum*, both premièred during February 1984. Both pieces had a clear 'Finnissy-circle' ambience and impressed, perhaps, mainly on account of the intransigence with which the musical ideas were pursued rather than through their assertion of a 'new voice'. It seems to me, though, that since *Anatomy*, a new voice *has* emerged, and it is a very striking one – wild, but hard-edged, using post-Xenakis compositional strategies to recapture, among other things, some of the 'chance encounters' typical of the free improvisation in which Barrett has also engaged as a guitarist. *Anatomy* broke something of a drought in the wake of *Coïgitum*; since then works have begun to come at a fairly rapid rate. As the composer puts it:

I seem currently to be involved in a spate of (for me) unprecedented, quite frightening, fecundity, which I was desperately predicting for myself at the time of the protracted inward gazing and research of 1983-84 but never really believed.

To date Barrett's main works are:

1982   *Invention 6*, solo piano
1982/4 *Principia*, male voice and piano
1983/4 *Essay in Radiance*, seven or eight players*
1984/5 *Coïgitum*, four instruments and mezzo-
        soprano
1986   *Anatomy*, eleven instruments
        Ne songe plus à fuir, solo cello
1987   *Temptation*, five instruments and live electronics
        Alba, bassoon and live electronics
        Illuminer le temps, eight players
        nothing elsewhere, solo viola

*One or two players may perform the percussion part.

If optimistic artworks of substance are hard to come by these days, there are at least composers who, like Dench and Finnissy, seem to espouse the 'principle of Hope'. The search for joy through art plays much less of a role in the music of Dillon and Ferneyhough, and next to none in Barrett's (the derisive ending of *Temptation* is a sort of frontal attack on what Anouilh used to call *'le sale bonheur'*). Both the basic precepts of the *Fictions* series, and the actual list of authors referred to, make this evident:

RICHARD TOOP: Can I ask you about the *Fictions* series?
RICHARD BARRETT: Basically, it's to do with externalising, and making into a compositional determinant, something which I have understood as being part of my compositional make-up for some time. That is, that music is fiction: that it proceeds from fictions which are necessary for the personality of the composer to believe, to make acts of faith in order to carry the work through. One can put this in banal terms as the belief that there will be a work of music at the end of it, and that it will be written down, will be played, will be apprehended or even understood, which, of course, are things we can't rely on. It is also not possible to rely on the validity of the precepts that go into the work, or their communicability, or anything like that. And there is also this feeling that the compositional process is one of gradual interference in, and betrayal of, something which may have been quite beautiful to start with - often not, of course. And the idea behind the *Fiction* series (beside its having various lines out to other disciplines) is that works have their psychological structure, their inner drama, in some way rooted in that process. And the process not only occurs in 'composition time', but is also dramatised in real time.

Another reason for choosing that name as the binding factor between the various works is the literary aspect of it: the Beckett, Lautréamont, Flaubert, and – later on – many other literary figures that I've been involved with (such as Robert Pinget, Ezra Pound and one or two others) – it's just one of those lists that you keep adding things to. And I think it's clear, if one considers that, and the Roberto Matta series, that my mental set of influences has a lot to do with what Marcel Duchamp wrote in about 1910; that he was not particularly interested in what was going on in his own discipline, so he saw it as his business to gain impetus from other artistic disciplines.

I think one of the most virulent problems with most contemporary music one comes across, is that it consists of polite conversation, of social pleasantries, whereas someone like Michael (Finnissy), for instance, is laying himself bare to a much greater extent and thus producing the kind of sincerity in his work which is what attracted me to it in the first place. And I think I see the musical process like that, almost as one of sublimation, or the Artaud-like process of transforming one's pathological impulses into an artwork in order to externalise them and thereby bring about illumination of some kind.

RT: It seems to me that an element of violence is present in all your inspirations – Matta, Lautreamont and, I suppose, Beckett too, though the actual surface is much colder, more detached.

RB: It is and it isn't. Sometimes it is, but I think that a lot of Beckett criticism is so tied up in stylistic factors of linguistic usage, that it fails to get to grips with the fact that, what is being talked about – if understood – is almost unpalatably direct and therefore violently emotional. I don't think there's a case for saying that there is any transposition of style from Beckett's work to my own: I feel it much more as a parallelism.

RT: Are the Beckett quotations that come at the end of your scores in your mind from the start as a 'postlude', or are they just one of a large number of phrases in your mind at the time?

RB: It's more the latter. For a long time I've been engaged with a written work which has to do with Beckett, a large part of which consists of a fairly exhaustive compilation of things which became important to me in reading and re-reading the work. In 1984, in connection with a string quartet which will come later in the *Fictions* series – the precompositional

work was, in fact, reading through Beckett's entire work twice and making a lot of notes the second time.

RT: How much *do* you pre-plan in a work like *Anatomy*, for instance?

RB: Well, pre-planning and composition are very much tied up with one another as far as I'm concerned. The process from the initial apprehension of what a work is to be to the final product is not an outward process of elaboration of material but an inward process of the gradual specification of the material. So, if you like, everything is pre-planned, but the specific pitches, durations etc, are actually the last thing which is absolutely set. The large-scale decisions are taken first and then it's like a process of distilling, or gradually focussing-in on the final product at various levels, so that each formal level is there and forms the substrate for the composition on the next formal level.

RT: So the schemes are arrived at more or less pragmatically, to satisfy the broader requirements of the work?

RB: To an extent, yes. I think the psychological function of each event in a work is the most important thing. But material for me always works in terms of processes which are statistically elaborated, using a computer. I'm particularly interested in the idea of an exponential process of various kinds, because the way in which an exponential process will increase its *rate* of change as it is changing seems to me axiomatic to the way memory works when the mind is assimilating music — that a given situation is appreciated and then a certain change to that situation can be appreciated and, as one becomes more used to the kind of network of ideas initially set up, it changes more and more rapidly without one losing track of it.

RT: How far does the computer usage extend into the composition? Does it generate pitch sequences?

RB: Well, that would depend on what one means by pitch sequences. Nowadays the pieces have a set of what I've called 'virtual' pitch material, which is by no means related to the pitches one hears, except by certain processes: it's what is done with it that is important, and not the specifics. Once I've made the decision that the virtual pitch material will have certain characteristics, then those characteristics are mathematically generalised and run through the computer to produce one level of the piece, which is then worked on using processes that might be tangential to that.. The mix between system and empiricism in the final result is so complex that it's very difficult for me to figure out myself a lot of the time. Obviously that way of organising the material has been arrived at as a result of generalising from the heard, psychological function of that passage, or piece, or whatever it happens to be.

RT: The computer, the glissandi, and other things inevitably make one think of Xenakis. Has his work been of interest to you?

RB: Oh yes, it would be pointless to deny that. But (in *Anatomy*) I'm probably concerned to control the content of the texture much more finely than Xenakis would do. He's obviously concerned to write as many pieces as possible in as short a time as possible, and most of them are very fine pieces, but I don't view the situation of composition in quite the same way, I expect. Because of this idea of externalising whatever metaphysical, philosophical and political influences come to bear on a particular work, it is important to me that a work is arrived at through a long period of excavation so that, as the piece progresses from its initial inspiration to its final version or its final demise (whichever way you like to look at it), everything finds its way in there somehow.

RT: If I were to make the banal proposition that your work does seem to have a lot to do with the conventional notion of music as self-expression, how would you respond? How would you want to qualify it?

RB: Well, I think there's a lot of rubbish talked about music as self-expression. It's a very loaded term which has all this 19th-century deadweight lying about it. But let's not lose sight of the fact that, if it's not expression of oneself, whose self *is* it expressive of? And a music which attempts to dissociate itself from the idea of self-expression implies, I think, a very dishonest way of looking at things because it's fairly apparent to me that that's not the way things are.

To make a music out of disembodied abstractions might be a very interesting exercise for a composer to indulge in, but why should anyone want to listen to it? What has it got to say to them? What has it in common, if you like, with the listener that is going to be productive of some kind of empathy — I hesitate to say 'communication', because then we begin to get into linguistics, and that's a huge grey area as far as music is concerned.

I don't particularly want to qualify it, except in as much as it's difficult to use *any* term once one gets into 'pre-verbal' areas like that without loading it up with a lot of nonsense which is going to mislead a lot of people. So I think it's probably better to say nothing. I think the important thing for me in that respect is that a music such as this, which I suppose *is* 'visionary', 'confessional' and all those things, has a function, which is to be productive of what we might call illumination of various sorts in a listener.

Some composers are, no doubt, interested in communicating to a listener the fact that they are not interested in communicating anything. But I think we should make a distinction here between communicating the lack of communication, and communicating the lack of interest in it. Going back to Beckett, as I must once again: in his *Three Dialogues* he says that he's talking about the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing from which to express, nothing to which to express, no desire to express, but the *need*. I think that puts it quite fairly and squarely: that the music comes about in the way it does because one is simply unable to do anything else, and it's counter-productive to say any more about it than that.

Anatomy for eleven instruments (1986)

> 'no the wish to be less wretched a little less
> the wish for a little beauty no when the
> panting stops I hear nothing of the kind
> that's not how I'm told this time'
>
> Samuel Beckett, *How it is*

Anatomy uses a considerably larger ensemble than any of Barrett's other acknowledged works; 'a previous version of this work, a shorter piece for four instruments', the composer recalls with gloomy satisfaction, 'was a total failure'. Although almost every previous piece reflected his preoccupation with Beckett in some respect, *Anatomy* was 'the first to bring such concerns to the point of being central to its conception'.[11]

Ideally, each instrument should be amplified and mixed in such a way as to ensure that the individual timbres do not *blend* but are exposed as nakedly as possible – this is one aspect of the 'anatomy' of the title, and another involves the deliberate exposure of incompatibilities between the various registers of instruments (the superstitious might find it no accident that the overall pitch-range is divided into thirteen overlapping registers). The mood of the work is uncompromisingly bleak: this does not mean that it is unvaried – rather, it is an anthology of desolations. The individual parts are in many cases virtuosic, but the surface exuberance of *Coïgitum* has disappeared and, whereas the pianist wrestling with the notorious solo at the end of the latter work can, at the very least, count on an air of *heroic* failure, the horn player in the second part of *Anatomy* faces the prospect of a failure that can only be abject.

Leaving aside the literary and autobiographical factors which undoubtedly contribute to both the title and substance of the work, another 'anatomical' aspect can be identified in the way in which much of the formal structure, relatively blurred in works like *Essay in Radiance* and *Coïgitum*, is here brought to the surface. Instead of a slowly unfolding continuum, *Anatomy* consists mainly of abrupt alternations between materials which are constantly in a state of complex and rapid internal evolution. In the first part of the work (whose three parts form a downward 'exponential curve' of four, two and one minutes respectively) the cuts are between *tuttis* and 'ensembles', the latter gradually reducing in size until only one instrument is left. The durations of each *tutti* and ensemble are determined by two principal considerations: first, the time allocated to the ensembles is twice that allocated to the *tuttis* (respectively 256 and 128 quavers at ♪ = 96); second, both *tutti* and ensemble alternate between two

exponential 'duration curves', one rising and one falling. The overall scheme is given in Example 36, and the various strands are characterised in quite distinct ways. The *tuttis* have a general tendency to glissando from relatively high or low registers to the centre, and to slide up *and* down in more or less equal measure when actually in the central registers. The extraordinarily 'unsettled' character of these *glissandi*, which play a major role in defining the whole 'feel' of *Anatomy*, arises directly from the conception of a 'virtual harmony' mentioned earlier in the interview.

Example 36

Duration scheme for the four alternating strands in the first section of Richard Barrett's *Anatomy*.

Tutti (i) :	6½	5	4	3½	3	2½	2	(↘)
Tutti (ii) :	8	10½	etc	13½	17½	22½	29½	(↗)
Ens. (i) :	2	2½	3	4½	6	8½		(↗)
Ens. (ii) :	82	55	37½	24½	17½	13		(↘)
Instruments:	7 6	5	4	3	2	2	1 1	
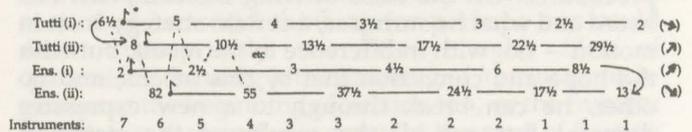
*Note that the two *tutti* strands *diverge* in length, while those for the 'ensembles' *converge*.

In *Coïgitum*, where this notion is first applied, there are four 'modes' which function as 'virtual pitch material' in the sense that their notes serve as the hypothetical centre of computerised, 'probabilistic' distributions – the most probable outcome at any moment is a note of the mode itself, the next most probable outcome a semitone above or below, etc.

In *Anatomy* the distributions are made not around static notes (fixed points) but around *glissandi* (vectors), so that even the 'virtual harmony' (which may never actually appear) is in a constant state of flux (Example 37).

Example 37

Richard Barrett: *Anatomy*, p.1.

As Barrett put it in his Darmstadt presentation:

Two simultaneous pitch-vectors, defined as non-discontinuous pitch/time relations, have certain apparent characteristics, their speed and direction relative to one another (as well as their individual differentials relative to the pitch and time axes), which have nothing to do with the fact that they generate "instantaneous dyads" whose sequence is, in harmonic terms, irrational; in any case, too complex to be perceived as rationally composable. The instantaneous chord-sequence of ten such independent vectors (as at the opening of *Anatomy*) has absolutely no chance of being perceived as such. Nevertheless, since they do 'exist', it must be possible to deploy them in an organised form such that their posited characteristics and relationships are congruent with their posited functions within a musical/psychological stream of events.

In short, there is no guarantee, no certificate of theoretical rectitude that can be attached to such procedures. On the basis of what the composer has heard and what he surmises, a certain strategy is set in motion – not with indifference to the result, but with the hope and conviction that by this means, and no other, he can break through to a new expressive domain. But not all the results of the statistical operations involve such imponderable outcomes. The longer durations are generally subdivided in a clearly audible way. The second 'ensemble' of 82 ♪ , for example, consists of sixteen units 'normally distributed' around an average value of 5 ♪ (in practice, units of 3-8 ♪ , with 4-6 ♪ being much the most common), and four of the six instruments have an accent plus *decrescendo* to *pp* over the whole sequence of units. As the section proceeds the level of the accent gradually rises from *pz* ▬▬▬ to *sffz* ▭▭ and this, combined with the *glissandi* off each accent, provides an increasingly ominous and disturbing 'bell effect', rather like a decayed remnant of the 'Coronation' Scene in *Boris Godunov*. Each *tutti* section has a similarly clear dynamic profile, extending from *ppp* to *fff*, and shifting from a *crescendo*, via various balances of ◁▷, to *decrescendi* e.g.
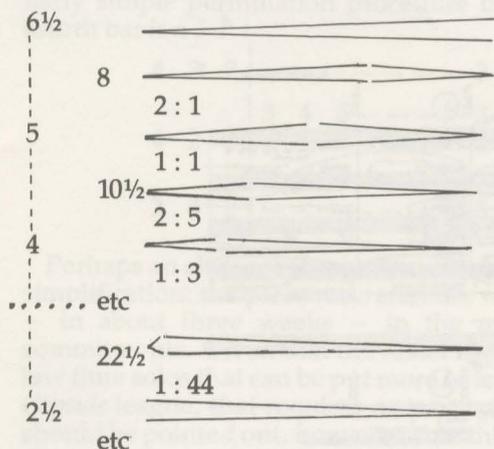
Let us turn now to the second section. The focus of this is a hideously demanding horn solo (for reasons both structural and practical, the horn is the only pitched instrument *not* used in the first part's 'ensembles'), which could be considered as a cross between an operatic 'Mad' Scene and Lucky's monologue from *Godot* (particularly the latter, to the extent that it explores every conceivable expressive domain at breakneck speed without having any perceptible effect on the rest of the ensemble). In fact the horn part is based on the kind of probabilistic modal treatment

used in *Coïgitum*, and even if its behavioural patterns do not affect the remaining instruments, its pitch structure does, at least in part.

These other instruments draw on four different pitch-strategies, the initial one being a residue from the first part of the work. In that section, each of the thirteen registers was constantly 'scanned' by a waveform (sawtooth ⋀⋀ in the outer registers, triangular ⋁⋀⋁ in the centre), and the pitches plotted around these waveform 'vectors'. The second section begins with a 'freeze' of the final position of section one in each register, which then becomes one of its own basic materials (the horn solo is, in a sense, a 'freeze' of the final 'ensemble' section). In another procedure, the horn part itself is used as a 'vector', and other parts are probabilistically distributed around it, either simultaneously, or slightly phased so as to produce a sort of distorted canon (see Example 38). According to Barrett's Darmstadt presentation:

The third type consists of harmonic use of the mode-sequence in the same way as the horn (apart from octave transpositions upwards for flute and violins, and downwards for bassoon, cello and bass). A fourth type, based on harmonic derivation from the horn part, occasionally interrupts the procession through the other three; this type may be identified by occurring always in *diminuendi*.

It is also associated with rapid *staccati* or *jetés* which then, with different harmonic origins, continue into the brief third part.

Whereas the first part of *Anatomy* consisted of sharp cuts, whether cinematic or surgical, from one material to another, and the second part allowed various material to evolve around a mercurial *cantus* (the horn part), the third part superposes three different materials not as synthesis, but as a confrontation *ad absurdum*, as a discourse on non-communication which may be less spectacular than that of the second part, yet is arguably more drastic. The upper and lower instruments (flute and bass) once again 'freeze' earlier material – this time the last version of the 'mode' structures from the second part. The remaining wind parts comprise, in Barrett's words, 'a tangle of descending sawtooth vectors' (with *staccato* articulations from the second part) while the strings take a triangular wave-form to the opposite registral extreme: wild swoops across the entire range of each instrument. All three types can be seen in Example 39. By its very nature, the music cannot 'end': it can only stop – and in a final ironic touch, the 'frozen' flute and bass take two bars longer than the other instruments to realise that the piece is 'over'.

Before turning to *Temptation* I should like to touch upon the work written immediately after *Anatomy*: the piece for amplified solo cello *Ne songe plus à fuir*, which is the second part of the projected *After Matta* cycle. Here the registral and vectorial procedures of *Anatomy* are mapped onto a solo instrument in particularly uncompromising fashion. The material of the piece is, in effect, the cello itself with its four strings (the two lower strings being tuned down to B and F sharp respectively): each string is divided into eight overlapping registers, each vectorially 'sampled', so that at any given moment, 32 pitches are potentially available (not necessarily 32 *different* pitches, of course). As Barrett observes:

This obviously is not something that can have any functional harmonic basis, but has a *cellistic* basis, as it were: that a pitch not only has a frequency value, but it also has a particular

Example 38

Barrett: *Anatomy*, p.21.

The parts for horn, cor anglais and second violin in the third bar offer a clear example of probabilistic distributions around a central line (the horn part).

Example 39 *Anatomy*, p.29.

This passage demonstrates the three types of materials referred to in the text:
a) 'frozen' modal structure: flute and bass in second and fifth bars;

b) 'tangle of sawtooth vectors': wind parts throughout;
c) triangular wave-forms over total register: strings in fifth and sixth bars.

place on a particular string. It carries further many things which were first approached in *Anatomy*: the uncompromisingness of the way it comes upon an audience, the fact that it

is for amplified cello, and that its material pays very little attention indeed to received ideas of melodic or harmonic structure . . .

Even considered in the wake of Xenakis, the cello style is quite extraordinary (see Example 40). The ideas underlying the piece, however, extend far beyond vectorial manipulations, or even the Matta painting which gives the work its title:

Ne songe plus à fuir depicts, in what may loosely be described as a 'surrealist' way (with all that *this* implies), a dark environment in which indistinct, vaguely human forms are seen in the midst of a thundery atmosphere swirling with luminous particles; some of these beings are desperately embracing, others cover their faces as if in terror or anguish, others stand in line like ancient monuments . . . this painting seems to relate directly to Matta's consistently outspoken denouncement of the fascist régime in Chile (and, by extension, to his stance as a revolutionary socialist, another set of convictions shared by myself). My work also attempts to distill some thoughts, reactions and experiences in the political sphere, both in surface-expressive terms (music extorted from the cello as if under interrogation, deliriums of hope, the grinding tedium of oppression . . .) and in the structural operations of the work (tension, destabilisation . . .), by which I don't mean that ideology implies musical style . . . or that I intend a certain awareness, or political will, to be kindled in an audience as a result of introducing a work in these terms. If music really were capable of operating on that level then it would long ago have been commandeered by reactionary institutions to render the populace completely stultified. But then again, perhaps that *is* what is happening, and the deployment of real intelligence in music is a subversive act in itself . . .[13]

Example 40

Two typically complex bars from Barrett's *Ne songe plus à fuir* (bars 76 and 101).

Temptation for five instruments and live electronics (1987)[14]

'No. One moment more. One last.
Grace to breathe that void. Know happiness.'

Samuel Beckett, *Ill Seen Ill Said*

The temptation of the title is St. Anthony's, as described by Flaubert; the piece belongs to the *Fictions* series. The ensemble may be smaller than that of *Anatomy* but, thanks to the live electronics, the sound is at times much larger, much more dense, and the whole character of the sound is quite different. If *Anatomy* is claustrophobic and sombre, *Temptation* has a savage, ironic glitter – wild and yet icy. Of Flaubert's novel, Barrett comments:

It does have the hallucinatory and feverish qualities of the other two writers' [Rimbaud and Lautréamont] work, but (crucially) its decadence and exoticism is (only just!) prevented from spilling out uncontrollably by a more characteristically Flaubertian tightness of structure. I think Flaubert would have said, '*Saint-Antoine, c'est moi*' in the sense that, like his character and some aspects of my composition, there is a constant unresolved opposition between a tendency towards the irrational, visionary, oneiric etc – and a fanatical mistrust of its emanations: I think this is apparent from, for example, the conclusions of both works.

The formal relations between the two are also close. Not only does Barrett's piece, like the novel, comprise seven sections; in the course of some characteristically cabbalistic preparatory work (also with a view to a possible music-theatre piece), he discovered that the number of lines in each section approximate closely to a (permutated) exponential curve, of the kind used in *Anatomy*. Inevitably, this was incorporated into the structure of his piece.

Let us begin our analysis by introducing some of the ways in which Barrett allows Flaubert's seven parts to impose themselves on his composition. Of the seven sections, all but one is divided into seven subsections; the durations of both sections and subsections are permutated segments of an exponential curve, which gets progressively steeper from section to section (see Example 41). Taking the number of lines in each section of Flaubert's *Temptation* as a model, and with the aim of composing a twelve-minute piece, Barrett arrives at a sequence of seven section-durations which increase by a factor of approximately $\frac{11}{8}$: 32″–44″–61″–84½″–116½″–160½″–221½″. These are reordered in the sequence 3 – 4 – 2 – 7 – 6 – 1 – 5, which again derives from the relative lengths of Flaubert's sections. The sub-divisions of most sections are also ordered (in terms of length) 3 – 4 – 2 – 7 – 6 – 1 – 5, as Example 42 shows.

Example 41

A graphic approximation to the duration 'curves' for all but Section F. The durations of each section have been ordered, from smallest to largest, and then plotted from an identical starting-point, though in fact these points range from 2½″ to 18″.

Example 42 Organisation of section-durations in *Temptation*

			(3)	(4)	(2)	(7)	(6)	(1)	(5)
Section	A	(3): 61″	normal distribution around 61/7						
	B	(4): 84½″ =	11½	+ 12	+ 11	+ 14	+ 13	+ 10½	+ 12½
	C	(2): 44″ =	5½	6	5	8½	7½	4½	7
	D	(7): 221½″ =	25½	30	21½	49½	41½	18	35½
	E	(6): 160½″ =	16	20½	12½	42½	33	10	26 *
	F	(1): 32″	this type of subdivision not used						
	G	(5): 116½″ =	6½	10½	4	47	28½	2½	17½

*All sections except E are at ♩ = 60, therefore duration in seconds = number of beats.
E being at ♪ = 88, the quaver proportions are 23½+30+18+62½+48½+15+38.

The 'virtual pitch' system, like that for the increasingly steep 'duration curves', is directional, in the sense that the number of virtual pitches available progressively increases from one to seven, with the probability of each pitch being used gradually decreasing as it 'ages' (see Example 43). As will be clear from earlier references, this does not mean that Section A, for example, consists only of F! It does mean, however, that at least the heterophonically derived material (see below) tends to flow around it. Other pitch processes will be illustrated later.

Example 43 The 'virtual pitch' system in *Temptation*

(Note, in Section E, how the 'exception' is becoming a virtual principle)

Example 44

Barrett: *Temptation*, bars 1-3.

The ensemble (trumpet, saxophone, cello, synthesizer, percussion) is not a polite 'new-music' ensemble *à la Pierrot Lunaire*: in fact, if the cello were a bass or a guitar, it would be an archetypal 'free improvisation' group. Its timbres are, for the most part, rich and rough and, apart from the cellist, all the players 'double' to some degree, with the trumpeter on slide trumpet, cornet, trumpet and piccolo trumpet (tending to move upwards in register), the saxophonist on alto, baritone, and on contrabass clarinet (tending downwards in register) and the percussionist alternating between bass drum and vibraphone (The Raw and the Cooked, so to speak). The synthesizer player has only one instrument (Yamaha DX 7 or equivalent) but seventeen programmed voices employing a vast range of timbres. The live electronics perform various functions: primarily reverberation, harmonising, and ring modulation.

The three opening bars (Example 44) illustrate some basic principles. The first section comprises seven such

In conversation, as in composition, Dillon is wary and distrustful of easy formulations – Schönberg's 'style' and 'idea', for example, are both treated as suspect unless they can be put in several sets of inverted commas or, in the manner of Derrida, 'under erasure'. The following interview picks up in the wake of the comments on and against style quoted above (p.7):

JAMES DILLON: I *can* trace my fingerprints in my work: they're really tied up with technique, and for me technique is something that is always in a state of genesis, that never really crystallises – if it *does* crystallise, then you're talking about something that gets close to this idea of style. The fingerprints are in some senses slightly suggestive of this thing that becomes rather frightening when you confront it (which is to do with whether we are just locked into some kind of karma – yet I didn't want to get mystical . . .)

RICHARD TOOP: What sort of things would you regard as 'fingerprints' in that sense?

JD: I think the thing that surprises me is that I can definitely hear a certain continuity in terms of timbral density in my work. There's a certain kind of quality in the sound that I think carries over from piece to piece. Of course, that again is a technical thing: it's wrapped up with the ways of making the pieces. Another thing is that I do seem to have certain tendencies in terms of phrasing which I seem to have difficulty doing anything about.

RT: Is that necessarily a bad thing?

JD: No. I'm not making any kind of value judgement about it: it just surprises me. It's a combination, I think, of the syntax of a phrase and its syntactical 'link' in terms of a concatenation, if you like.

RT: When you say that characteristic textures arise naturally as a result of certain technical ways of working, does this imply that there are circumstances where the technique has a sort of pre-eminence over the kind of sound it produces?

JD: No, I can't separate things out like that. When I say it's a technical problem, technique is not simply transcription. One of the great problems in composing is actually recognising the point where the techniques become almost self-suggestive. One brings a certain kind of notional level to a piece – whether you have a particular sort of sound that you want to manipulate, or some higher 'conceptuality' about how the piece is going to operate. The most difficult thing is that in some sense it has to ferment: quite often there's a kind of time-lag between the moment where you start work and the moment where the thing has somehow grown. And then comes this point where the technical solutions allow you to work in such a way that you are walking a tightrope between the conceptuality and creating a situation where the techniques remain open enough to have some kind of transaction going on *between* the conceptuality and something with a life of its own. The whole situation is like a continuum: it's impossible to string out the separate parts, because then you de-contextualise them.

RT: How far do you have an 'abstract' notion of musical structure?

JD: Musical logic only exists *inside* time. So in order to deal with time – and I say this rather guardedly, or

tentatively – one has to spatialise time to some extent. When I'm working, because of the vectorial kinds of situations in musical construction, I find it very easy to break them down into temporal units. But that's merely a kind of practical trick, if you like.

RT: When you say 'vectorial', do you regard this as applying innately to *any* kind of composition, or simply to how you work yourself?

JD: I think all of it, in terms of the organisation of qualities. One just has to examine the complexity of the single sound, the extraordinary complexity that's going on in terms of amplitude, time, frequency, phase relationships, spectral relationships: all these things which are internal to the sound are vectorial qualities, not scalar qualities. One can break down the individual bits into scalar qualities, and when one is talking in terms of a man-made system it's a purely practical solution to dealing with the whole complex of things that are going on in a piece. So that if you're working, as I do, essentially as an instrumental composer, we're talking about combining the internal qualities of sound with action, and so the vector takes on a sort of higher-level application. If you like, it's an easier way of keeping track of a very rich methodology.

RT: Is this a polemic, in part, against Xenakis's notion of 'outside-time' structure?

JD: No, I'm saying that musical logic only actually makes *sense* 'in time'. I think there are certain problems with this notion of Xenakis's of inside/outside time. It's actually quite a neat solution to dealing with certain kinds of problems that are inherent in musical composition, in so far as 'outside time' is a very efficient way of recognising that what appears to be generalised material in fact contains a certain kind of structure. I think that what Xenakis did was bring a kind of generalised thinking from engineering (and systems-thinking in general) as an aid to conceptualising certain things. I also see its usefulness as going beyond that: at the level of actually highlighting the embedded constraints in what is regarded as 'non-constrained' material – of recognising that these structures themselves have also been 'designed' in some way. But there *are* problems: in some senses this idea of 'outside time' is an absolute nonsense, because it decontextualises things to a degree that there's a danger of getting into what I would call some kind of design technology.

RT: In *Musiques formelles*,[15] one can't help being struck by the 'purple prose' which opens almost every chapter, and then the abrupt recourse to mathematical formulae, with almost no kind of mediation between the two.

JD: Well, listen to any Xenakis work, and that abruption is there all the way through. Maybe it's getting back to this business of fingerprints – maybe it's just the way you are; I don't know. But this mediation thing is actually very complex. I think that, say from the Renaissance onwards, there is the tendency to erase the ability to mediate like this: it's at its clearest and, at the same time, at its most esoteric in language. I think the last attempt at it was perhaps the Scholastics, in so far as there wasn't a dichotomy between recognising the mathematical nature of the cosmos, and discussing it. The advent of positivistic thinking, which is embedded in the whole rationale of the Renaissance, somehow had to bracket-off all that

stuff. And eventually the brackets fell off the edge somewhere: we no longer have the language to deal with it.

It's a very difficult problem, because either you're accused of mysticism, or else you're accused of some esoteric rationalist approach: either way, you can't win. Hence, with Xenakis, this abruption or disruption that occurs between the dreamer and the mad number-cruncher: I'm sure he's aware of it. He becomes *semi*-mystical, shall we say, at times.

RT: If you've been working at the computer screen in the initial stages, is there a sudden change in your relationship to the material at the point where you start putting notes on paper?

JD: I am rather calculated at the beginning; it's partly a personal problem I have about being incredibly lazy . . . In order for me to achieve a certain momentum I have to start out as some kind of 'mad scientist', if you like. I start working in a very logical, structured way so that I have a strategy to get myself somehow enveloped in this bloody work! So I start making calculations, very crude calculations such as looking at the ranges of instruments and the characteristics of the instruments in terms of tessitura and somehow trying to formulate how they link up with the notion of the piece. Gradually it gets to a stage where you saturate yourself with these calculations: it's partly a preparation for actually writing the piece in terms of notation.

For me, notation is not simple transcription, as it is with Xenakis. I think you can't disengage yourself like that, and one of the useful things about notation is its circumscribed environment. Ideally, you use it to make the state that you are in even more concentrated, which is why I tend to write things out neatly: it's not just a matter of graphism, of 'how it looks on the page'. It's also a question of forcing myself to work at an incredibly slow speed, so that you begin to become aware of the micro-detail of what you're working at in a different way from the initial moment you might have made those marks, somewhere else.

RT: So you're fighting for each note, rather than churning them out?

JD: Yes. I tend to explain it to myself by saying that it's just slow proof-reading. But of course it's much more than that because, regardless of my calculations, and regardless of the systems I'm working with, it's still my responsibility to 'save the piece', if you like, or to recognise the qualities the piece itself has taken on by that stage.

RT: From what you say, it seems that a work has a certain 'poetics', evolved before the calculations start, which recedes during the calculations, and reasserts itself in the process of notation.

JD: 'Poetics'? . . hmmm . . .

RT: Well, let's say 'a certain aesthetic constellation' . . .

JD: Yes. Again, I'm putting it rather calculatingly, but I like to see it in terms of certain kinds of enzymes. The biological function of an enzyme is as a catalyst – it sets off other processes. And this notion of a piece that I'm talking about: I feel it in every part of my body. I taste it, I have a kind of tactile feeling of it. I have certain ways, perhaps, of explaining it to myself without articulating it – explaining it in so far as it gradually takes on a sort of spectral notion of itself. I don't know; it's very difficult to put your finger on it. The reason I hesitate again over the whole 'poetic' thing is this

damnable problem of . . . Well, for me it's reductionism. You know, it's a term that is already lined up as a link with something else: 'this is how the artist works'. And I have no idea 'how an artist works'.

RT: Yet over and above one's general notion of music, there must be a notion of the specific form which that general conception of music is going to take?

JD: Yes. I can't calculate unless I have a fairly strong notion of what I'm trying to do. But having said that, this is where (partly tied up with practice) the whole thing is somehow in a continuous state of trans-formation, which is why the notion of programme music is inconceivable, particularly now: you're talking about a kind of transcription. And yet every piece has a *sort* of programme embedded in it, in a way.

RT: You once wrote to me about the flute piece [*Sgothan* = 'Clouds'], 'disexplaining' the title, or at least removing some of its obvious connotations – Debussyan or meteorological.

JD: Yes, but of course I'm aware, you see, of the poetic suggestion of the title. It's not wholly ironic: it's partly a technical thing, to do with breath (you know, it was a flute piece, and it's a very old problem). But having said that, I wouldn't have been interested in the technical problem if I hadn't already had some kind of meta-notion about what I was trying to do in the piece. I hesitate to speak about them, because it's too easy for one's attitude to be misunderstood, but I'm aware of symbolic levels in my work. It's just that there are certain levels you can talk about with a certain confidence, and others that we just don't have the language to talk about.

RT: But that's not to deny their existence . . .

JD: No. Actually you're a liar if you deny their existence, or an ignoramus.

* * * *

RT: There seems to be a sort of ritualistic aggression in much of your work.

JD: There's a marvellous fragment by Aristoxenes – I think it's in one of the Strunk *Source Readings* volumes[16] – and he is complaining (they're all moaners, the ancient Greeks, always whingeing about something), he's complaining about the decadence of music, and about how effete music had become, and that music should always be sexual and cosmic. And I always remember that when I first read this, I thought: 'That's it. He's absolutely right. He's hit it on the head'. I've always been fascinated by a lot of early literature, in so far as one often finds that quality in it: this pre-aesthetic and often pre-Socratic thing, this recognition – to put it rather poetically, in one sense – of the strong link between, say, sexual activity between humans or between animals, and some kind of cosmological activity. The ancient Egyptians would talk about the stars as being the result of procreation between the moon and the sun – there were always these metaphors. Partly, of course, it was totemic – a way of explaining, and introducing order into the way they explained things. But it also lends a very vitalistic quality to one's thinking.

RT: If what is involved there is not just eroticism as an explanation of cosmology, but also the ritualisation of eroticism, is it going too far to relate that to the mechanics of your work, on one hand, and the very 'physical' surface of the actual result? And is the

composition process the 'celestial mechanics' that organises the music into a certain cosmology?

JD: In some senses; I'm not wholly uncomfortable in saying yes, but for me it denies a certain complexity. Again, it's a question, for me, of engagement and a certain kind of authenticity. I think the whole literature about sex is very rich – I'm looking at it globally, in terms of cosmological thinking in societies right throughout the world – and, without being any more preoccupied with sex than any other healthy human being, I do find a situation where one is confronted with a highly potent moment, and it seems to me that my continuing interest in constructing music has some link with that same potency.

RT: At one stage you were very much concerned with the study of linguistics and thus inevitably with the new French writers, yet I would never think of your work as being 'Francophile', in that sense. And your latest piece [*Überschreiten*] is prefaced by a very typically Germanic piece of self-reflection (Rilke). If it comes to an actual philosophical stance, do you find you are closer to a Germanic way of thinking than a French one?

JD: There are two ways of responding to that. One is that the structuralist writers that interest me most (I'm aware that they both deny being structuralists) are Piaget and Foucault, who are amongst the most rigorous and systematic in their writing (there are precedents with someone like Gaston Bachelard, who had a tendency to poeticism). The other is that I was introduced to the poetry of Rilke when I was about eighteen, and Rilke seems to me to contain almost all the elements that I demand in art, in the sense that you get this complete unity between the technical solutions to something and the 'aliveness' of the work itself. And the clue for me is that Rilke really is very systematic, I think, in the way he works, but it's a systematic thinking that is always engaged – that completely encapsulates the texture of what makes art vital, if you like. I love the complexity of his thinking, but it's a complexity that always has a surface of extreme beauty.

RT: From many points of view it's a very hermetic surface!

JD: Yes, it is, and I think that probably if one examines my interest in artists, in the general sense of the word, they're all hermetic. I don't know quite what it is, but I like things that seem to be just continually disappearing as well. I'm not wholly consistent about that, of course, because equally I can think of moments in the poetry of Baudelaire that seem to me so astonishingly disruptive in their effect; and I also love those moments, which are so 'shocking' in the right sense of the word.

RT: Which is the one you hope will also emerge in your work, as the occasion requires?

JD: It's something I do find highly attractive, and I'm sure it does emerge in its own way. There is a poem by the American Amy Klampert;[17] she's talking about flowers, and she describes the amaryllis as 'a study in disruption', which again had a certain ring of something I recognised. It's rather like seeing one of those slow-motion films of flowers opening, where you become incredibly aware that the flower is not about 'this' or 'that', but something in between: it's this kind of moment where things are between order and disorder.

RT: Does this reflect a Northern sensibility rather than a Southern one? Wouldn't southerners be more likely to gather their amaryllis and stick it in a pot?

JD: Actually, I find this almost impossible to talk about, simply because for me as a Scot there is a massive difference between the Celts, if you like, and people who live in the southern part of Britain. There's no denying that, but it's not a big problem for me. In England it has become rather 'sophisticated' to try and deny this thing; it's partly to do with historically trying to congeal this island, to reinforce the alliance or whatever. But there's no doubt that if you live on the west coast of Scotland it is impossible to have this rosy view of nature: it's forever in flux. To what extent that has infiltrated my being, I really have no idea.

I think there *is* a certain kind of aliveness sometimes, even in the language and its use, a vitality that somehow becomes rather dissipated, rather difficult to recognise further south. I tend to think that one of the reasons I found Xenakis fascinating was that we both come from the fringes of Europe, and I can see certain links with his work in that sense. There's no doubt that if you are born and bred in Central Europe (or Southern England) there's a tendency to turn culture into something too cosy, which is why figures like Rilke are so extraordinary. They happen almost despite the culture, but of course, they are also wrapped up with the culture as well – it becomes so inextricably interlinked that you just can't disentangle it.

String Quartet (1983)

The String Quartet seems to mark something of a turning-point in Dillon's work; partly because, after a sequence of relatively 'linearly' conceived pieces like *Come Live With Me, Parjanya-vata*, and *(Time Lag Zero)*, it resumes some of the harmonic features of . . . *Once Upon a Time*, and partly because its formal construction is altogether more ambitious, both in scale and in manner. Roger Wright refers to it as a 'complex network of braids which overlap and interact'[18], and the composer speaks of the metric structure as 'a kind of imaginary concertina-like action, continually compressing and rarefying the interplay of events'.

Before pursuing the Quartet's structural aspects, let us briefly consider Dillon's view of the medium *per se*. Earlier (p.8) he commented on its 'labyrinthine potential', but the limitation factor also plays a role:

I think one of the reasons it works is not just a certain homogeneity of instrumental timbre – the fact that they're all string instruments with certain spectral similarities: for me the number four is symbolic, in a curious kind of way – when I went on to write the quintet [*Le Rivage*], and you add that extra player, the degree of complexity just explodes. And you have this microcosm, in a quartet, of a very concentrated social situation: in the best of the quartet literature you have what amounts to four soloists, and maybe there's a metaphor there for a kind of democracy (in the idealised Buckminster Fuller sense, not Maggie Thatcher's . . .). There are certain practical things you're always dealing with, and you're always imagining how the players will deal with them, in a situation where there's no conductor.

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I began to work out ways of generating certain kinds of material – then the technical problem would be looking for a method of combining them. One of the things that interests me about the quartet is the intimacy of the situation, within the actual quartet sound, and the way the size of the quartet

lends itself to a very rich interplay in the mapping of memory and time. You can play with the granular situation of suggesting things, and then perhaps allowing them to crystallise in some other context in the piece. So they may briefly suggest themselves in terms of some kind of figured gesture. And the thing I was trying to play around with, if you like, was what degree of concentrated trace you could leave behind, so that when it re-emerges, one begins to hear it in a new way, yet it has echoes of something. It's a question of 'presencing': it restates its own presence, rather than your being aware that it has 'come back again'. It's this whole problem, that we grapple with in music, between difference and invariance. In one sense it's a straightforward technical problem; in another, it's a problem at a much higher level to do with music itself and the nature of musical 'logic'.

The consequence of this outlook is not only a 'discursive' quartet, but also – however eliptically – a *thematic* one, to a degree one would scarcely have expected from any of the other composers discussed here. In its relatively slowly evolving pitch-fields, its use of register change to renew thematic shapes, and other respects, Dillon's approach to thematic working in this piece is not unlike Stefan Wolpe's, though I doubt whether the composer would be aware (or appreciative) of the fact.

Many of the essentials can be demonstrated from the first page of the score (Example 46). The opening bar is, at one level, a 'pre-echo' of the thematic kernel in bar three; at another, it proposes a harmonic 'cluster' with two fixed dyads (G/A and G/F sharp) and a 'mobile' component (*glissandi* above and below the 'focal' G). On a broader level, this bar can be seen not only as evidence of Dillon's debt to Varèse (static harmony brought to life by independent dynamics), but also as an essential Dillon 'fingerprint': the combination of a

sustained chord plus a narrow *glissando*, already used to open . . . *Once Upon a Time*, was subsequently to open (in slightly modified form) *Le Rivage*, *Überschreiten* and (albeit with a rather nominal *glissando*) *Zone*. And the viola's 'rhythmic polyphony', which played a modest role in *(Time Lag Zerø)* and plays a rather more significant one here, was also to be established as a 'fingerprint' in later string writing (e.g. *Überschreiten* pp.60/1)

The figure in the third bar casts shadows of many different lengths and kinds. It will return almost literally a minute later, at the beginning of the fourth of the work's 25 sections, and again in the middle of the fifteenth, as part of a masked 'recapitulation' not unlike that in the first movement of Beethoven's Op.111 Piano Sonata. More locally, it contains the essential materials of the next few pages. The F sharp/ G at the beginning and end of the first violin figure begins a process of transformation by octave transposition which is taken further in the following trill – all the more so since the *sul pont.* excursions lead to further octave displacements.

The G/A dyad leads considerably further. At the end of the fifth bar, which is basically a 'reshuffling' of the first, the low cello G initiates a slowly evolving melody which firstly fills out the F sharp/A cluster and then acquires most of the remaining chromatic pitches; the same thing happens quasi-canonically in the first violin (the viola C/D comes from the second attack in bar three; the third attack B/C sharp appears just over the page in the second violin's entry).

The whole Quartet is, indeed, a 'labyrinth' of such relationships, of figures which evolve ever more insistently until finally the piece dissipates in a cloud of

Example 46   James Dillon: String Quartet, p.1.

Example 47 *Tempo* scheme for the 25 sections of Dillon's String Quartet.

No attempt has been made to convey the relative lengths of sections; longer lines indicate two successive sections with the same tempo. Dotted lines are intended to indicate the overall tendency of the tempi.

ostinati, all room for new elements having been eliminated. Reference has already been made to the Quartet's 25 sections; without wishing to imply that the composer intended any kind of sonata form, one could justifiably assert that the first six sections are expository, in the sense that the materials are generally evolved one at a time, and that sections seven to fourteen are developmental, in that the materials evolved earlier are both expanded and interwoven, with the number of different materials in play at any one time tending, by and large, to increase. Section fifteen, as mentioned earlier, brings an 'embedded' recapitulation, interrupted by two passages (section sixteen, and sections 22-3) in which the material is virtually 'frozen', heading for a coda which gives the 'freeze' a more active surface through the use of several independent *ostinati*.

With three exceptions (between sections four and five, nine and ten, twelve and thirteen) each section introduces a new tempo, drawn from a scale of $\flat$ = 30, 40, 48, 56, 60, 63, 72, 80, 84, 92, 96, 104. (In general, as will be seen from Example 47, the tempo irregularly increases, the $\flat$ = 30 – which coincides with the 'freeze' – being a sort of insert/exception *à la* Stockhausen.) Of the work's metric structure, Dillon comments:

In the String Quartet I wanted to see if it was actually possible to use the metric structure as a way of heightening something that was going on internally. What I was doing in the metric structure was almost a kind of imaginary concertina-like action, that was continually compressing and rarefying the interplay of actions. There are a whole lot of different kinds of units.

The number of bars in each of the six 'expository' sections (1, 4, 7, 5, 3, 6) suggests a proto-serial approach as do the bar lengths themselves. At the outset these are (in $\flat$):

8 3 3(2+1?) 5 9 14 12 11 4 10 7 13 6

Instead of being serially rotated or permutated, the bar lengths of the opening sections seem to undergo 'development by elimination':

Any number of similar instances could be given, both for the bar lengths and for many other things, of a sort of *ad hoc* serial thinking (or perhaps one could more appropriately use Ferneyhough's idea of 'parametric thinking'): the ordering of four-note pitch-groups at the beginning of Section ten, or the number of notes in each melodic group at the start of Section thirteen are typical instances. More interesting, in a way, are the kinds of gestural models Dillon sets up in terms of, for instance, the balance of ascending and descending intervals within a phrase.

Example 48

Dillon: String Quartet, Figure 7 (p.4)

In Example 48, the rise and fall of the glissandi in the third bar:

(devised in such a way that the first violin and cello, as well as the second violin and viola, are 'inversionally related', while at each moment there are two upward *glissandi*, and two downward ones) is extrapolated from a slightly less rigorous version in the previous bar, which in turn derives from violin figurations some bars earlier, which in turn . . . Clearly, figures of this kind have almost limitless potential for gradual or abrupt transformation.

Finally, by way of illustration of the Quartet's 'labyrinthine' strategies, let us consider the subsequent fate of each of the three bars in Example 48. Earlier, I described certain figures as 'throwing shadows of different lengths': that aptly describes the situation here, in that of these three bars (27, 28, 29), the

first has a simplified echo at bar 52 and a double restatement at bars 88-9 (with parts interchanged – see Example 49), the second has four fragmented recurrences at bars 111, 127, 141 and 162, and the third forms the basis of the 'frozen' section from bars 175-191:

$$27 \text{——} (52) \text{——} 88\text{-}9$$
$$28 \text{————} 111 - 127 - 141 - 162$$
$$29 \text{——————————————} 175\text{-}91$$
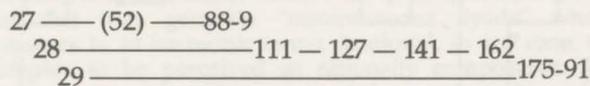
Example 49   Dillon: String Quartet, bars 88-89 (p.11)

Inevitably, the formal preoccupations of the String Quartet are reflected in subsequent works, though generally in less complex ways: the wind quintet *Le Rivage*, for instance, is broadly cast in six sections of equal length, while *Zone* (of which more below) consists of six sections of steadily decreasing length. Though clearly concerned with bar lengths as a structural component, both works retreat from the complex barring of the Quartet: *Le Rivage* operates only with bars of 3 ♩ and 4 ♪ , and *Zone* only with 2 ♪ , 3 ♪ , 4 ♪ , 5 ♪ and a solitary 7 ♪ . The same limitations are evident in *Sgothan* for solo flute, though it has a formal structure strikingly similar to that of the String Quartet: 24 sections of fluctuating length, of which the sixteenth, once again, is an 'exception': an extended *senza misura* passage, after which the remaining sections 'recycle' the bar structure of sections one to seven. The bar lengths themselves are the result of a fairly simple permutation procedure in which every fourth bar is a 3 ♪ :

```
4 3 2 | — — — — — — — 3 ♪
      | 3 4 5 — — — — 3
4 2 3 | — — — — — — — 3
      | 3 4 5 — — — — 3
2 4 3 | — — — — — — — 3      etc
```
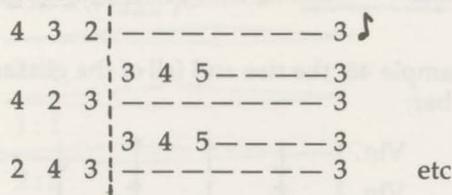
Perhaps an element of expedience is involved in this simplification: the piece was, after all, written quickly – in about three weeks – in the midst of other commitments. Given that the result is one of the very few flute solos that can be put more or less in the *Unity Capsule* league, that requires no particular defence. It should be pointed out, however, that the intentions of the piece are very different from those of the Quartet, not only in terms of the medium itself (*Sgothan* is very much 'about' breath, as well as the mechanics and acoustics of the flute), but also in terms of the way a formal structure is perceived. The String Quartet set out to create a labyrinth; *Sgothan* uses an analogous structure in 'testing the perceptual "margins" of a "form" ' . The 'clouds' of the title 'exist as partially-organized structures, that are subject to further constraints at a higher (and often also lower) level: each "cloud" exists as both "event" and "sub-event" ' .

Zone (. . . de azul) (1983)

While the poetic implications of titles like *Sgothan* are quite obvious to Dillon, he resists the idea that they constitute a foreground – that the works are in any sense illustrative. The one major exception to this rule is *Zone (. . . de azul)* for clarinet, horn, trumpet, trombone, piano and string trio, which seems generically to belong in the category of 'dreamed pieces', though the experience that gave rise to it was real enough:

It happened in Majorca, and it's the one piece of mine I can almost trace to a particular event. I was walking on the beach with Dee; it was the first time we'd been out extremely late, because of the kids. There was an incredibly clear sky that night: the Milky Way seemed almost suspended above us – it was one of those curious illusions you get, that gravity is somehow twisted or distorted. It was really a shock for me to see this fantastic sky – I had always been used to northern skies, which are very dramatic, but this had a presence about it . . . It wasn't 'milky': it had a hue, a blueness about it that I found really shocking, because the sky had become almost black behind it, and the blueness you can see in a night sky – particularly in the Mediterranean – seemed somehow to have been transferred into this band of stars going right across the sky, and offset by the dark purple – almost black – of the sky beyond it.

And all of a sudden, I knew what I had to do in this piece. I had this idea of a band of sound, with things breaking off it, with splinters: not a clean band with edges – but there was a kind of concentration at the centre of it. And this thing, as it moved away from you in distance, would gradually merge into a more statistical distribution of these contrasts. And *Zone (. . . de azul)* just means 'zone of blue' – while I was still out there I saw some kind of advertising thing that had '*de azul*' in it, and I just remembered it.

The work consists of six sections of diminishing length; the prevailing texture of three principal layers with shifting levels of intensity presumably 'mirrors' the night sky in Majorca that acted as the composer's inspiration. The ensemble itself – in principle exactly the kind of ensemble Dillon does *not* like to write for, with its disparity of timbre and, above all, the piano – is the residue of a request from Hespos to write a work for an even more arcane ensemble, including sopranino saxophone and flugelbone (sic), which must have seemed like a sure way of guaranteeing no further performances. In these circumstances, however, the stratified ensemble works very well – the strings provide a 'background', the brass a rather more active 'middle ground', and the piano glitters celestially, touched at the edges by clarinet trills.

The first section (almost half the length of the whole score) rests on a continuous string texture based, rather as in the Quartet, on three dyads rotated between octaves and instruments as illustrated in Example 50. Each string attack has a *crescendo/decrescendo* pattern, and the overall structure of the string layer is itself a '*crescendo-decrescendo*', going from (after the initial bars) $\mathrel{<} mf \mathrel{>}$ to $\mathrel{<} fff \mathrel{>}$, and back to $\mathrel{<} f \mathrel{>}$. The brass parts are less harmonically static, but each instrument tends to be confined to six pitches at a time, again with an overall *crescendo* to the centre of the section, and with a tendency for the durations to increase from ♪ to an average of ♩ . The piano part, in contrast, is a mosaic of interlocking gestural and pitch structures rather reminiscent of the Quartet's 'labyrinthine' moments. In passing, one might note that for a composer who professedly dislikes the piano, Dillon has a remarkably distinctive and effective way of writing for it. The early solo piece *Spleen* apart, it is far removed

from the 'full-on' Finnissy/Dench style, and any surface resemblance is largely a matter of short note-values (though usually associated with rather slow tempi) and irrationals. Both in *Zone* and in *Überschreiten*, the keyboard writing has a crystalline elegance that contrasts sharply with the more rugged treatment of the other instrumental forces (Example 51).

As in the Quartet, there is a clear overall tempo strategy – or rather, two strategies: the first part zig-zags downwards, in a sort of inversion of the Quartet's tempi, while the five remaining parts constitute an overall 'arch' of tempi. In fact, if one were – speciously – to graft the Quartet's first three

tempi onto the *end* of the tempo plan, one would have almost exactly the same kind of straight-line-plus-arch format, and with almost exactly the same number of tempo changes (bearing in mind, though, that *Zone* is about a third of the length of the Quartet). See Example 52.

The remaining sections of *Zone* operate with simpler forms of the same kind of stratification. In the second section the piano is silent apart from a brief entry a third of the way through, which partly brings back material from the first section. The strings, now in a much higher register and playing virtually on the bridge (as opposed to the *tasto* → *pont.* fluctuations of the first section), maintain a continuum varied only by

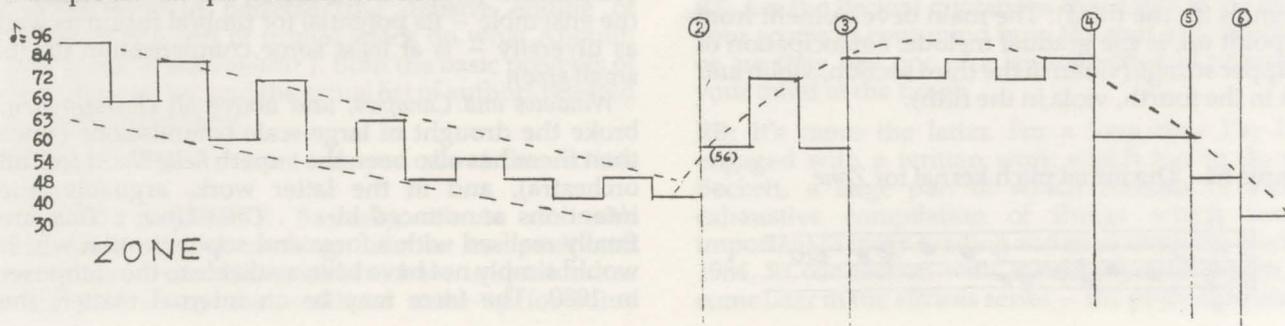Example 50 Rotation of three dyads in the sections of *Zone*

The signs after certain letters – ⌃ etc – refer to *glissando* inflections

Example 51 Dillon: first two bars of *Zone*.

*) transposed

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Example 52 Tempo scheme for *Zone*.

Example 53

Opening of the second section of *Zone*.

slow microtonal *glissandi* on violin and cello, and *crescendi/decrescendi* which – given the bow position – lead to constant shifts in relative pitch/noise content (a legacy not only from Xenakis, but also from the Parisian 'instrumental synthesis' faction – Grisey and Murail, for example – of which more below in connection with *Übershcreiten*). For the violin and cello both the dynamics and the *glissandi* (with two exceptions in the violin) are regulated by the bar-line, whereas the viola sets up a counter-pattern of *crescendi* etc based on longer periods.

A similar periodicity is established in the winds, which pick up the trills from the end of the first section: each pair of bars comprises a Tr. ⌇⌇⌇ | ♪♩· ➖ | for two instruments (principally horn and trombone – (see Example 53). The main element, however, and the one that effectively dominates the section, is an evolving melodic line, focussed on the trumpet but initially passing to the other instruments too. Here, in particular, there is a striking resemblance to the String Quartet; the initial pitch kernel of the melody (Example 54) is identical to that used at the beginning of the Quartet. The last four sections are linked by a low *scordatura* G on the cello which continues the <> pulsations (the viola chord from section two also continues for the third). The main development from this point on, is the gradual melodic emancipation of the upper strings (violin in the third section, violin and viola in the fourth, viola in the fifth).

Example 54   The initial pitch kernal for *Zone*

Überschreiten (1986)

In a footnote to his article *Speculative Instruments*,[19] Dillon comments:

Having tended towards a peculiar and granular *energy* that emerges from the large number of variables contained within, and emanating out from, the mediation of performance, I have deliberately steered clear of the electronic studio.

That 'granular energy' is very evident in the early . . . *Once Upon a Time*, and its implication was, very clearly, a music in which timbre played a central role, not just as a means of formal articulation, but also as the force that generates the 'inner life' of each musical moment. Yet that kind of approach also implies an ensemble of a certain size and timbral richness. The years following . . . *Once Upon a Time* saw a series of commissions for small ensembles which probably blocked Dillon's natural inclination (a letter from 1984 expresses frustration at never being asked to write for more than eight instruments), and it could well be that the linear-discursive style of much of the String Quartet represents a slightly desperate act of re-definition in the face of the lack of a more congenial commission (and in the Quartet, the homogeneity of the ensemble – its potential for timbral fusion as well as diversity – is at least some compensation for its small size).

Windows and Canopies, and above all *Überschreiten*, broke the drought of large-scale commissions (since then there has also been the superb *helle Nacht* for full orchestra), and in the latter work, arguably, the intentions announced in . . . *Once Upon a Time* are finally realised with a force and sophistication which would simply not have been available to the composer in 1980. The force may be an internal matter; the

sophistication can be established in three particular ways. First, Dillon's range of options in formal planning has grown; second, the 'discursive', quasi-thematic procedures of the Quartet are now available as a means of 'animating' timbral blocks; third, the composer can profit both from the IRCAM researches into the nature of timbre, and from the efforts of composers like Grisey and Murail to transpose the experiences of the electronic studio into instrumental music. There is no doubt that a piece like *Überschreiten* owes a certain debt to these composers, but it draws consequences which are some remove from their work, both technically and aesthetically.

The fundamental differences can be simply established by comparing the opening of *Überschreiten* with that of an ostensibly similar work, Gerard Grisey's *Partiels* – a piece of comparable scale and with the same size of ensemble. Both pieces open with the insistent exposition of an overtone spectrum based on a low contrabass E. But for all that Dillon might share some of Grisey's ideas about *'le devenir du son'* – the evolving sound as the substance rather than the surface of a piece, the similarity ends there. *Partiels* opens with a didactic/cosmetic exposition of the 'natural' harmonic series, using an approximation of studio filtering techniques to 'highlight' certain areas of the spectrum in each systematic build-up: the result is elegant, but perilously close to kitsch. In *Überschreiten*, on the contrary, the 'partials' are in turmoil from the outset: the fundamental (E) is constantly present, but blurred to a large degree by tam-tam and piano. For a moment, the 'partials' have something like a plausible octave layout, but their timbre and dynamics are fluctuating wildly, and within moments they are being 'folded into' one another (see Examples 55 and 56).

Example 55

Dillon: *Überschreiten*, bars 1-10, containing the first seven 'voicings' of the basic chord.

Example 56

Chord voicings for the opening sections of Dillon's *Überschreiten*.

Only wind and brass parts are shown here, partly for the sake of clarity, partly because the timbre modifications of the string parts make octave assignments rather nominal. The low E on double-bass runs throughout; connecting lines show the movement of individual voices.

At this point, a few words on the title *Überschreiten*, which derives from the last line of the fifth of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*:

> Und er gehorcht, indem er überschreitet.
> (In his very overstepping, he obeys)

Roger Wright comments that:

Dillon wanted to create a piece in which sections overstepped one another, and in which the music becomes 'auto-reflective', as if it inhabited a space between two mirrors.
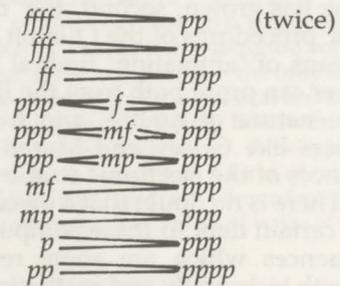
In fact there are many respects, from the smallest details to the broad form, in which one could demonstrate the 'overstepping' of the title. But I should be reluctant to confine its significance to technical procedures and, as Wright also indicates, there are many other lines in the *Sonnets to Orpheus* that could have served as motto for one aspect or another of the piece. The very first line of the first sonnet, with its fusion of the organic and the transcendental, could arguably serve as the emblem for a possible 'Dillon aesthetic':

> Da steigt ein Baum. O reine übersteigung!
> (A tree ascends. O pure transcendence!)

But the word '*überschreiten*' also has its dissident connotations: of excess, rebellion and transgression in the face of order (and something, too, of Shakespeare's 'over-weening ambition'), and the 'artificially' evolved compositional mechanisms of *Überschreiten* seem to bare their teeth at the 'natural order' of the harmonic series before ripping it to shreds so as to create a turbulent nocturnal maelstrom from its remnants.

We have already noted the eleven 'revoicings' of a harmonic series on E (the '*prima materia*' of the whole work) which together form a huge decrescendo, subarticulated by the sequence:

$$
\begin{array}{rcl}
\textit{ffff} & \longrightarrow & pp \quad \text{(twice)} \\
\textit{fff} & \longrightarrow & pp \\
\textit{ff} & \longrightarrow & ppp \\
ppp & \longleftarrow f \longrightarrow & ppp \\
ppp & \longleftarrow mf \longrightarrow & ppp \\
ppp & \longleftarrow mp \longrightarrow & ppp \\
mf & \longrightarrow & ppp \\
mp & \longrightarrow & ppp \\
p & \longrightarrow & ppp \\
pp & \longrightarrow & pppp
\end{array}
$$

The attacks are not, apart from the very first one, simultaneous, but are statistically distributed around an average value of 31 ♪ (each instrumental line ends with this 'reference value', see Example 57), and each value is reduced at the end by a series of rests based on prime numbers (2, 3, 6, 7 or 11 ♪).

The tempo-changes which intersect this process at five-bar intervals are part of a by-now-familiar overall strategy. Once again, there are 25 'tempo sections', organised into two broad processes. Yet there is a new twist: instead of a zig-zag descent and arch (as in the Quartet and *Zone*), there are two descending processes, the first relatively simple and with *subito* cuts from one tempo to another, the second more tortuous, with frequent *rubato* fluctuations within a given tempo (see Example 58, where the *rubati* are shown by dotted lines). The tempo scale is the same as in *Zone* and the Quartet; it is not a logarithmic scale *à la* Stockhausen, but is chosen to permit tempo shifts in various whole-number ratios (not unlike Carter, but without the overt 'bridging' processes of metric modulation). See Example 59.
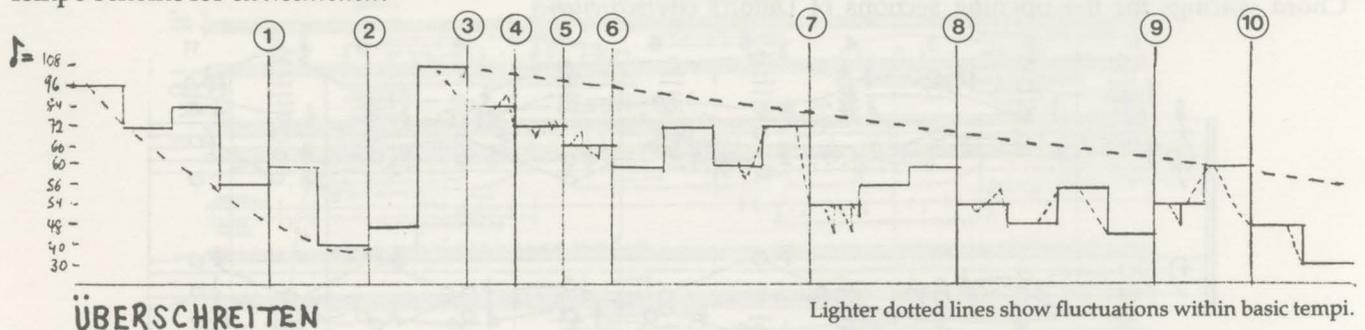
Example 57

Graphic representation of the scattered entries of the eleven chord voicings at the opening of *Überschreiten*.
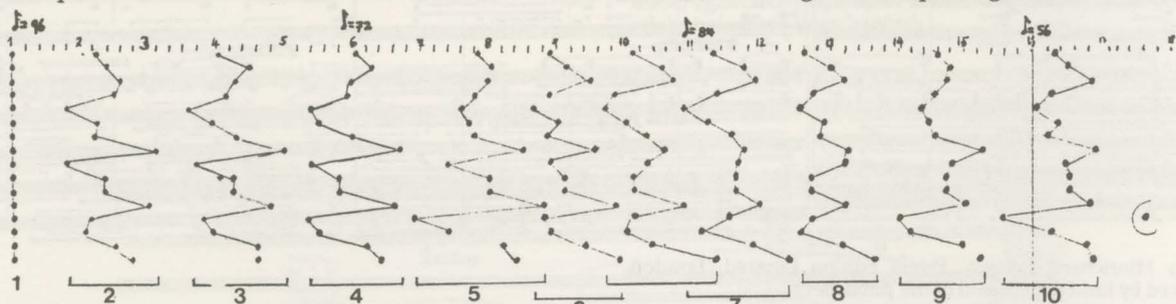
Example 58   The 'layout' from top to bottom is that of the instruments in the published score.

Tempo scheme for *Überschreiten*.

ÜBERSCHREITEN   Lighter dotted lines show fluctuations within basic tempi.

Example 59   Tempo shifts in *Überschreiten*

♪ = 96 — 72 — 84 — 57 — 60 — 40 — 48 — 108 — 84 — 72 — 66 — 60 — 72 etc
        4:3 / 6:7 / 3:2 / 14:15 / 3:2 / 5:6 / 4:9 / 9:7 / 7:6 / 6:5 / 11.10 / 5:6

Technically, though not in terms of sound, the 'spectral' preoccupations of *Überschreiten* almost inevitably bring recollections of Stockhausen's *Gruppen* and even the Cerha of the *Spiegel* series (and probably quite fortuitously, the opening of *helle Nacht* sounds rather like the start of *Spiegel I*): specifically, the piece is full of rhythmic and textural 'formants'. A simple example is the layout of the strings in the first numbered section:
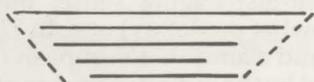
This is the putative source of any number of symmetries and fragments of former symmetries, scattered throughout the work with shapes such as:

etc
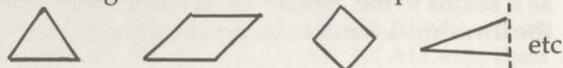
(see Example 60 for a relatively concise and exposed example). In fact, the whole work is, like the String Quartet, a labyrinth of traces, in which figures evolved near the start of the work re-echo at various distances. A particularly clear instance of this is the woodwind chord that gradually builds up, in alternation with a trombone pedal-point, behind the string spectra after Figure Two:

woodwind:
trombone:

Once established, this material then emerges in its own right as a sort of *ritornello* (at bars 82, 143, 203, 278 and, fragmented, at the end of the work), each time with a slower tempo, a louder dynamic peak, and the involvement of more brass instruments.

Example 60

Überschreiten, p.77.

Note the lozenge-shaped 'formant' in the second bar.

Finally, though a thematic element is less pronounced in *Überschreiten* than in the Quartet, it can clearly be shown to exist. In the Quartet, the opening dyads eventually give rise to a recurrent melodic shape whose 'standard form' is given in Example 61 a. Likewise from about bar 149, *überschreiten* is pervaded by a comparably contoured figure, shown, in Example 61 b, in an equal-tempered piano version from bar 163.

Example 61

Melodic shapes in *Überschreiten*

Epilogue

The more one looks at the work of any imaginative composer, the more 'unique' it seems to become, the more disjunct from other significant bodies of work. To the extent that, as in the preceding pages, one considers composers' works only in relation to themselves, this becomes virtually a self-fulfilling prophecy. From what these four composers have to say, and even more so from their works, it should be clear that one is dealing with four distinct creative outlooks, and four very distinct musics. Yet one only has to step back for a moment and place their work within the broader context of British music today – even that being written by their contemporaries – to sense an immediate, shared 'apartness'.

The essence of their apartness, perhaps, is that they compose without compromise (except, occasionally, in their own eyes), and without alibis. I would not claim that they have any monopoly, within current British music, on artistic integrity; but it is more readily perceptible in their work than in most. There are no recantations of 'modernist heresies', no neo-this-or-that crutches; for each of them, art is (to revive some old, but not entirely superannuated Romantic notions) a voyage of discovery of the inner and outer world, not a guided tour of established (alleged) popular attractions. None of them is an 'experimental' composer in the Cageian sense, yet for each of them, composition involves the search for the transcendentalist's 'not-yet-heard' and thus also the element of substantial risk. To this extent they are by no means, as some of their conservative detractors would have it, negators of Western Classical tradition, but its logical inheritors, irrespective of whether or not they wish to be. Adorno's celebrated comment that there is more 'tradition' in a single bar of Webern's Bagatelles than in the whole of Prokofiev's 'Classical' Symphony holds good for them too, when set beside the current waves of 'neo-Romantics', 'ritualists' and sub-minimalists.

Essentially, also, they are unashamed intellectuals, to the extent that such a designation implies not narrowness, but breadth. Finnissy, it is true, might

reject such a term; but is that not largely an outcome of the 1950s south-of-London grammar school education that I too, as it happens, went through at exactly the same time as him: an education that, as I recollect, scarcely encouraged intellectualist avowals in relation to the arts? In all four composers, it seems to me, one finds different versions of that counterpoint between instinct and reflection, or more crassly, between cerebral and glandular response, that I would regard as the hallmark of the intellectual artist. Helmut Lachemann's impeccable *dictum* that where 'emotional' and 'intellectual' listening to music are at odds, *both* are underdeveloped, is, it seems to me, also applicable without reservation to thinking about music (musicology?) and to composing it; and whatever may separate these composers, I would say that an intellectually secured passion is common to them all.

While on the subject of German musical *dicta*, let us add a third: Hanns Eisler's 'People who only know about music, don't know about that either'. In its historical context, the comment has pronounced social(ist) overtones which, of our four composers, only Richard Barrett would be likely wholly to embrace. Yet at very least, Barrett's comment on Duchamp – that he was 'not particularly interested in what was going on in his own discipline, so he saw it as his business to gain impetus from other artistic disciplines' – probably applies more to these composers than to most of their British contemporaries; and the fact that, in some cases, one could usefully delete the word 'artistic' from that quotation speaks *for* their art, not against it. It is their shared view of music as something which has to come to grips with perspectives far broader than purely 'musical' ones that releases them from the 'social pleasantries' that Barrett perceives (and denounces) in most contemporary music; Dillon's typically Varèsian 'cosmic and sexual' formulation may, at first sight, seem unduly apocalyptic, but it needs to be placed in conjunction with another favourite remark of Varèse (taken from the 19th-century physicist Hoene Wronski), that music is 'the embodiment of the intelligence that exists in sounds'.

Such notions are not, however, characteristic of Anglo-Saxon discourse about music. How, then, shall we locate these composers? As British, as Europeans, or what? Despite their compatibility with the various Germanic views enunciated above, and despite Dillon's passion for Rilke, there is nothing Teutonic about their work, nor is there anything significant in current German music (apart from Ferneyhough pupils like Klause K. Hübler) that remotely resembles it. Dench and Dillon have affinities to certain strands of post-war French philosophy (Foucault in particular) but, apart from a few Grisey/Murail traces in Dillon's later pieces, this preoccupation is unreflected in their music. As for the Italian schools, they are equally untouched by Donatoni's 'artisan' approach, Sciarrino's self-conscious virtuosity, and Bussotti/Sinopoli's neo-Borgia decadence (though there are faint traces of the latter in Dillon's *helle Nacht* – yet despite these 'resemblances', and others alluded to above, Dillon's music is arguably the most ruggedly individual of them all).

So what have they to do with the mainstream (or even the eddies and tributaries) of British music? Unless one interprets the slightly bland periodicity of some of their rhythmic writing (as compared to Ferneyhough's for example) as typical English

understatement, the answer must surely be: 'next to nothing'. So what are they? I think the key lies in Dillon's comment:

I tend to think that one of the reasons I found Xenakis fascinating was that we both come from the fringes of Europe.

The essence of all four composers, I believe, lies in precisely this 'fringe' notion, interpreted not in a negative, self-disparaging sense, but in a positive (albeit somewhat predatory) one. In *The Theatre and its Double*, Artaud claims that European theatre can only be revitalised by the radical incursion of non-European conventions and ways of thinking. He had in mind the traditions of Asian theatre; but for our four composers, as it seems to me, Britain too is sufficiently 'remote' for the invasion/assault to be artistically productive.

[1] PaulGriffiths, *New Sounds, New Personalities: British Composers of the 1980s* (London: Faber Music, 1985).

[2] For example: Richard Toop, 'From Outside Looking in . . .', *New Music 87* ed. Michael Finnissy and Roger Wright (London: Oxford University Press, 1987) pp.66-8.

[3] Unless otherwise stated, all quotations in this article are from interviews or correspondence with the author.

[4] Erhard Karkoschka, *Das Schriftbild der Neuen Musik*, (Moeck: Celle, 1966. English Edition, UE, 1972).

[5] Brian Ferneyhough's *Transit* was first performed in the Royan Festival, March 1975. The British première was given on 16 November 1977 in the Queen Elizabeth Hall.

[6] Ferruccio Busoni, *The Essence of Music and Other Papers* (New York: Dover Publications, 1987).

[7] Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), p.34 ff.

[8] The bar structure of each of the sections has its own metrical 'wave-shape' e.g.

(in ♪)	A	3	6	9	6		B	4	8	4	12		C	5	10	15	etc.
		4	8	12	8			5	10	5	15			6	12	18	
		5	10	15	10			6	12	6	18			7	14	21	
		6	12	18	12			7	14	7	21			8	16	24	
		7	14	21	14			8	16	8	24			9	18	27	
								9	18	9	27			10	20	30	
														11	22	33	

[9] From the preface to *Recueillement*.

[10] In this essay, as in all my other published work, I use the word 'serial' in the relatively informal way that is common practice among European composers; that is, to designate the integral or *ad hoc* manipulation of arithmetically conceived quantities or proportions within the compositional process. In no case should it be taken as implying the theoretical perspectives of the Columbia-Princeton school.

[11] This and the preceding quotation are taken from the composer's programme note.

[12] Given the composer's fascination with Beckett, it should perhaps be emphasised that this is simply my interpretation, not his stated intention.

[13] Quoted from Barrett's programme note.

[14] I am particularly grateful to the composer for supplying very helpful analytical comments on this work.

[15] Iannis Xenakis, *Musiques formelles* (Paris: Richard-Masse, 1963).

[16] Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1950).

[17] Amy Clampitt, 'High Culture' from *What the Light Was Like* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986)

[18] Roger Wright, 'Breaking Boundaries', *The Listener*, (London: BBC Publications, 29 May 1986), p.30.

[19] Published as *Le timbre, metaphores pour la composition* ed. J.B. Barrie (Paris: Christian Bourgeois/IRCAM, 1987).