

# **Forms of Luminosity**

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## Abstract

*Forms of Luminosity* is an experimental music-based performance that brings private listening experiences into the public sphere for examination. My research focuses on the relationship between a person, his or her iPod, and the private listening experience thus created. This public-private listening experience was staged as a demonstration of how personal listening experiences contribute to identity development. My interest is in how the iPod and other purchasable commodities have influenced identity development in Western youth culture. Through examination of the relationship between the culture and their consumerism, I argue that identity is definable by substantially more than what we buy.

The performance of *Forms of Luminosity* functions as an experiment of multiple iterations based on the caveat that performances are all subjectively singular incidents, related specifically to the surrounding environment at that moment in time. As well as presenting a tableau of consumerism, control, isolationism, and identity (as they are associated with the iPod), the performance questions whether pre-existing music can be engaging and relevant to an audience.

My project uses bricolage and standpoint theory as guiding theoretical principles. A selection of instrumental, electro-acoustic, and popular music is included as a folio that best represents my personal standpoint as a composer.

The performance is deconstructed in order to examine both the successful and ineffective elements of this first experiment. *Forms of Luminosity* is a contribution to contemporary art and music as these are the types of ideas that are being addressed and created by composers, choreographers, and artists active in today's society.

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**Declaration**

I declare that this thesis embodies the results of my own special work, that it has been composed by myself and that it does not include work forming part of a thesis presented successfully for a degree in this or another University.

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‘The noise of machines is invading everywhere, and the noise machines are more and more sonorous. In place of the word, reflection, or thought, we need noise.

- Hélène Cixous<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction**

Although written before the invention of the iPod, this description of auditory experience by Hélène Cixous perfectly articulates the modern cultural phenomenon. With regular television advertisements in the United States and the United Kingdom featuring artists such as U2, Feist, and now Coldplay, it may not be the only portable digital listening device available on the market today, but it is arguably the most recognizable. It is for this reason that I refer to and use the iPod for this experiment. It must be said that any other portable listening device would suffice as representation of our generation’s ‘noise machine’, as this experiment is about how these machines function to create an all-encompassing ‘noise’ into which we voluntarily submerge ourselves from when we wake to when we sleep, but I am partial to the familiarity and do appreciate the aesthetic appeal of the iPod. Presently, iPods are storage containers tailored to the musical -and now visual- taste of an individual. My research focuses on the relationship between a person, his or her iPod, and the private listening experience thus created.

*Forms of Luminosity* is an experimental music-based performance that brings private listening experiences into the public sphere for examination. The performance that has been recorded for submission with this project took place on a stage created to represent a familiar lounge-like setting, where the performer listened to her iPod in front of a live audience. At her discretion, she explored the musical collection. While certain pieces of music were

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<sup>1</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector, and Tsvetayeva*, (London: Harvester / Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 112.

repeated and others skipped around through, the performer also occupied herself with magazines, a bottle of wine, and her mobile phone. The random process of selection brought this collection of pre-recorded music into the present moment, and simultaneously evoked the influence of re-mix culture today. With variable megabytes – which adds up to thousands of tracks - of music accessible at the touch of a button, listeners are able and encouraged to interact with their iPod in a way that immediately satiates their ever-changing desires.

Because it is a simple procedure to re-mix, repeat, and replenish music on an iPod, the act of listening to music itself becomes a unique experience, tailored to the individual. This act of listening is one example of the modern personal listening experience. I believe these private listening experiences are extremely significant as a contributing factor to identity development in youth culture today.

My interest is in how the iPod and other purchasable commodities have influenced identity development in Western youth culture. Through examination of the relationship between the culture and their consumerism, I argue that identity is definable by substantially more than what we buy. I mention this in order to clarify that *Forms of Luminosity* is an experiment of how a private listening experience, with or without an iPod, is an important contribution to identity development in youth culture today.

My research follows the same lines articulated by Cara Aitchison in her essay ‘Leisure and Tourism Landscapes: Social and cultural geographies’, that private forms of leisure, although often undocumented, are a quintessential point of identity development in modern youth culture.

‘Hidden’ forms of leisure associated with the home, with children, or related to household work, shopping, or everyday consumption are ... frequently omitted from empirical research within mainstream leisure studies. ... these informal leisure forms have begun to be researched and theorized within social and cultural geography, cultural studies and gender studies where binary divides have been challenged and deconstructed within post-structural analysis.<sup>2</sup>

When privately experienced, music has the ability to communicate directly to the individual. In private, listening to music can act as a catalyst for expressing uninhibited desires and beliefs. ‘Forms of leisure associated with the home’ have also been researched by scholars such as Antoine Hennion.<sup>3</sup> Although Hennion has done a remarkable job researching the sociology of music and culture (see footnote 3), more research is needed to prove the significance of ‘hidden’ and ‘informal’ activities in modern society.

The iPod is currently a central ingredient in Western society’s, specifically youth culture’s, private experience of music. Because the individual customizes the iPod to suit his or her taste, it also functions as a vital element central to identity development. *Forms of Luminosity* allows an audience to experience a ‘hidden’ and ‘informal’ activity in order to convey that this form of leisure, in the shape of a private listening experience, is central to identity development.

There are a number of different possibilities for the execution of *Forms of Luminosity*, as it is intended for the musical material to be cut-up during the course of the presentation in order to create a degree of realism and indeterminacy. The performance that took place on Tuesday, 4 September 2007, documented in DVD format and submitted with this project, is the performance to which I will heretofore refer. It is necessary to remember that this

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<sup>2</sup> Cara Aitchison, ‘Gendered landscapes: Constructing and consuming leisure and tourism’, in *Leisure and Tourism Landscapes: Social and cultural geographies*, ed. by Brian Goodall and Gregory Ashworth (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 110 – 135 (p. 122).

<sup>3</sup> Antoine Hennion, ‘Music Lovers: Taste as Performance’ *Theory, Culture, & Society* 2001 (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), Vol. 18(5): 1 – 22.



performance was only one permutation of what could be countless alternative performances using different music, performers, and locations. *Forms of Luminosity* functions as an experiment based on the caveat that performances are all subjectively singular incidents that are related specifically to the surrounding environment at that moment in time. For example, a performer may choose to repeat one track for the duration of the performance or listen to everything in alphabetical order. The ground rules for the performance remain the same, but the execution is always different, creating these forms of luminosity.

*Forms of Luminosity* was chosen as the title of this experiment because of its relevance to the many levels of my research. The term “forms of luminosity” was coined by philosopher Gilles Deleuze and used to describe Foucault’s notion of visibilities postulated in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. My interpretation of Deleuze’s visibilities as “forms of luminosity” is that which is observable without occupying physical form, such as an aura or fireworks; though no full examination of visibilities will herein be made. I first came across “forms of luminosity” in a paper on contemporary youth culture by Angela McRobbie titled ‘Four Technologies of Young Womanhood.’ McRobbie quotes Deleuze in order to examine the shift in attention towards youth culture, and writes that

these [visibilities] are ‘forms of luminosity which are created by the light itself and allow a thing or object to exist only as a flash, sparkle or shimmer.’ [...] The power they seem to be collectively in possession of, is ‘created by the light itself.’ [...] The luminosity functions on the basis of the illusion of movement and agency[...] The light simply picks up and traces these movements while bestowing on them a spectacular cinematic effect.<sup>4</sup>

She uses this analogy to articulate her standpoint that youth culture has become the center of today’s mainstream consumerist marketing. However, there is no guarantee that this focus

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<sup>4</sup> Angela McRobbie, ‘Four Technologies of Young Womanhood’, presented at the Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Frauen und Geschlechterforschung on 31 October 2006, and in forthcoming *Gender Culture and Social Change: the Post-Feminist Masquerade*, (SAGE, 2007).

will last or even exist tomorrow. The ‘light.’ or popularity, currently shining on the younger generation is fickle and insubstantial due to the fact that it is ‘created by the light itself.’ Like a display of fireworks, it captures the eye for a moment before disappearing completely. Those who direct their marketing towards Western youth culture understand that a product’s popularity has a limited shelf life. And although the iPod has maintained its popularity for a few years, the manufacturers are always changing its presentation prowess just enough for it to remain in the limelight, thus reassuring our culture that it is still a must-have fashion - and identity - accessory. Fireworks are a tangible manifestation of McRobbie’s description of luminescence and illusion, making them an apt visual example of the innumerable performance possibilities and interpretations available for *Forms of Luminosity*.

Scholars regularly debate the pros and cons of the perceived power that corporations have over consumers in our culture. McRobbie addresses this in ‘Reflections on Young Women and Consumer Culture’, presented in 2004, where she sympathizes with the standpoint Theodore Adorno has taken against the ‘architects of the new mass media.’

Of course Adorno was venting his anger against the architects of the new mass media and the banal and simplistic meanings which they conveyed to those whose powerless position in work and in general made them vulnerable to the desire for escapism and who were so tired and worn out that simplistic entertainment was also a relief.<sup>5</sup> (p 6)

McRobbie uses Adorno’s argument to point out that the majority of people in our culture are too ‘worn out’ to protest against the banal entertainment presented to them by those corporations in charge of mass media. Take for example the simple act of listening to an iPod while homebound, or once at home after work. To some this may be construed as an example of the power the iPod’s producers have over consumers, as the consumers’ mode of escapism relies on the use of their product. In truth it is a simple matter of ‘relief’ escapism - an

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<sup>5</sup> Angela McRobbie, ‘Reflections on Young Women and Consumer Culture’, presented at HM Treasury as part of the AHRC Cultures of Consumption Programme, April 2004.

example of our culture's tendency towards isolationism – because the consumer is not relying on that product to perform the escapist act. The iPod, though created by 'the architects of the new mass media,' does provide a 'simplistic entertainment' and a form of relief that is *desired* by consumers. The fact is the iPod would not exist were it not for a strong demand made by the consuming population for such a product.

In an article about consumerism and control, Ana Lopez reasons that 'popular culture forms may present attempts at social control, but they also have to meet the real desires of real people.'<sup>6</sup> My understanding of her standpoint is that although it is true that we, as a culture, are being fed 'simplistic entertainment,' which Adorno vehemently abhors, it is also true that this must therefore be the form of entertainment we desire. With regards to exactly where the iPod falls in the relationship between consumerism and isolationism, Ashley Smith writes, 'products become purchasable signifiers for a public space on behalf of a culture confined primarily to private, or otherwise protected spaces.'<sup>7</sup> What these statements reveal is that ours is a culture 'confined... to private', even 'hidden', places, and that we as a culture desire our isolation so much that we are willing to pay to ensure that we are comfortable and content within it. In *Forms of Luminosity*, the audience is presented a tableau of consumerism, control, isolationism, and identity, as they are associated with the iPod. It will be discussed in more detail later in this essay that by the end of the first experimental performance, audience members were provoked to examine their views of youth and consumer cultures.

According to Nicola Richards and Katie Milestone in their essay 'What Difference Does it Make? Women's Pop Cultural Production and Consumption in Manchester', the 'gap between production and consumption needs to be closed through analysis of the ways in

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<sup>6</sup> Ana Lopez, 'The Melodrama in Latin America: Films, Telenovelas, and the Currency of a Popular Form', *Wide Angle*, 3(7) (1985), 5 - 13.

<sup>7</sup> Ashley Smith, 'Girl Power: Feminism, Girlculture and The Popular Media' (unpublished master's thesis, University of North Texas, 1999), p. 6. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

which ... understandings of popular culture reinforce particular patterns throughout the process of consumption and production.’<sup>8</sup> Through my research, an attempt is made to generate an understanding of how the process of consumption relates to youth culture today by portraying a single individual’s experience in a capitalist society. Although purchased items such as an iPod and a mobile phone are included in the ritual, these acquired objects do not define the private listening experience. An iPod may be crucial in shaping a private listening experience to today’s culture, but it is the time spent listening, rather than the products being used, that contributes to the development of one’s identity.

The live experience of *Forms of Luminosity* draws on what Antoine Hennion calls, ‘a sociology of listening’,<sup>9</sup> and the importance of how music is *heard*. During the performance an individual listening experience is framed through the concepts of bricolage,<sup>10</sup> as explored by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *The Savage Mind*, and standpoint theory,<sup>11</sup> as initially argued by feminists like Donna Haraway in the 1980s. In recent years standpoint theory has been expanded upon in fields such as sociology and economics.<sup>12</sup> Using these as guiding theoretical principles, the ritualistic process of developing a personal universe around a private listening experience as representation of an individual moment of self-communication is created.

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<sup>8</sup> Nicola Richards & Katie Milestone, ‘What Difference Does it Make? Women’s Pop Cultural Production and Consumption in Manchester’, *Sociological Research Online*, 3(1) (May 2000), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Antoine Hennion, ‘Music Lovers: Taste as Performance’, *Theory, Culture, & Society* 2001 18(5) (1997), 1 – 22, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Bricolage*: The process of creating a personal, unique universe through the juxtaposition of disparate objects.

<sup>11</sup> *Standpoint Theory*: An approach that suggests that inquiry and research grounded in the standpoints of women and other marginalized groups is more objective and more complete than research based on the perspectives of the privileged.

<sup>12</sup> Christina Ho & Ingrid Schraner, ‘Feminists Standpoints, Knowledge and Truth’, *School of Economics and Finance: Working Paper Series*, (Sydney: University of Western Sydney, 2004) pp. 1 – 26.

On the subject of bricolage, Lévi-Strauss writes, ‘a bricoleur not only speaks with things, but also through the medium of things: giving an account of his personality and life by the choices he makes between the limited possibilities.’<sup>13</sup> It is the nature of a consumerist culture for people to use bricolage as a way of creating identity through an assimilation of objects and a re-designation of their meanings. These consumers venture from shop to shop, collecting pieces to express their identity. No one individual’s collection is the same as any one else’s because a bricoleur is constrained to making choices based on objects present at the time. My work engages musically and visually with the process of bricolage by incorporating elements that are seemingly unrelated in order to create realistic example of a personal universe. In this project, the music on the iPod and the material objects the performer has provided are representative of the choices she makes as regards her personal universe. A crucial aspect of bricolage is that the end result never occurs in the way it has been originally imagined or intended, but though ‘the bricoleur may not always complete his purpose he always puts something of himself into it’ (p. 21). Assimilating the theory of bricolage in order to create a ritual – in this case a private listening experience - Roland Barthes identifies that elements of bricolage which make up the ritual itself are ‘systems of signification.’

Semiology aims to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all these, which form the content of ritual, convention or public entertainment: these constitute, if not languages, at least systems of signification.<sup>14</sup>

All of the ‘signs’ chosen by the performer to represent different aspects of her personal universe have been reconstituted, which is to say the original meaning of the object has been altered to mean something subjective to her even during this common ritualistic experience.

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<sup>13</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), p. 21. Where possible, further references are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>14</sup> Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), p. \_\_.

Moving away from the performer's perspective and deeper into musical semiotics is the Tripartition of Musical Activity which suggests that there are three ways through which music may be interpreted: through the composer, through analysis of the score, and through the listener's experience of the music itself.<sup>15</sup> Initially postulated by Jean-Jacques Nattiez, the third branch of the Tripartition suggests that responses that occur through active listening are a part of the analytical process of how the performance is communicated. The presentation and performance of *Forms of Luminosity* rely on Nattiez's Tripartition of Musical Activity and Barthes 'systems of signification' as means of explaining the relationship between the performance of a private listening experience and the reaction by an audience to a pre-recorded body of music. In using these as guiding theoretical principles, the ritualistic process of developing a personal universe around a private listening experience is recreated as a representation of an individual moment of identity development.

In *Forms of Luminosity*, the performer realizes elements of bricolage musically through reconstruction and recombination of the prerecorded music. The personal items she chose to bring to the performance – a mobile phone, magazines, and a bottle of wine – further accentuate the bricolage elements while simultaneously making the set as personal and realistic as possible. The point illustrated is that the performer controls the choices she makes about the usage of her possessions. How she avails herself of these musical and physical elements gives the experiment its uniqueness, as the performance could never be executed the same way more than once.

To engage principles of bricolage in my compositional methodology, I have written pieces for this project in a range of genres. This is meant to reflect the diversity within an individual's musical collection and the way in which said diversity reflects one's subjective universe. The impetus for including in the project a selection of instrumental, popular, and

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<sup>15</sup> Naomi Cumming, 'Semiotics', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (accessed [7 November 2006]), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

electro-acoustic music – for which I use a compositional technique resembling bricolage, of recombining and sampling a mélange of collected sounds – is to holistically articulate my personal standpoint, being as these are all the elements that make up my chosen compositional universe. An abundance of materials was included to allow the performance many possible permutations. The audience formulated their opinions of the performance from the perspective given to them as a result of the performer's choices. In this way the cyclic nature of standpoint theory transferred the perspective of the performer to that of the individual audience member.

## Folio of Music

The musical folio for this performance contains notated instrumental as well as electro-acoustic contemporary art pieces, and three songs. This variety of music is used to show that *Forms of Luminosity* represents my personal standpoint, as these are many of the elements that make up my chosen compositional universe. By including in the folio music that has been improvised and remixed from the notated music, additional elements of bricolage are brought to this experiment: these are means of generating multiple and varied permutations from a fixed amount of musical material. Rearranging the instrumental contemporary art pieces in the mixing room after they had been recorded directly from notation<sup>16</sup>, and working with the same materials in different ways, this reorganization creates an additional expression of materiality to this music's character. Where initially, the instrumental pieces were in existence as a *whole* (in a formally notated way), after they had been recorded, they had a new function: to become *part* of other pieces. This was an exercise in testing the expandability of music, working with pre-existing material parts to create new, improvised pieces; taking my compositions through another level of bricolage. It is in much the same production manner that the electro-acoustic sounds for this project were organized and arranged.

The various genres of music were recorded with the best available tools and software. The acoustic pieces were recorded onto ProTools 24-Bit tracks above the Concert Hall at the University of Glasgow, on two AKG 414 large diaphragm condensers. The sounds that have been used for the electro-acoustic pieces were recorded on both an M-Audio Microtrack

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<sup>16</sup> See tracks 10 - 13, 15, 16, 18, and 20 on *Forms of Luminosity* CD.



24/96 and a portable DAT recorder. These sounds were then transferred to Garage Band and ProTools for the purpose of editing and mixing. A Rode nt1000 microphone was used to record vocals, and a Roland keyboard was used for the piano tracks on the songs. Garage Band versions 1, 2, and 3, Logic Express, and Logic 7 were used for the production of the songs. In order for the audience to hear the music played during the performance, the iPod was connected to a mixing board and fed out to four Genelec speakers placed in the corners of the Concert Hall, so the audience could experience a similar sensation to that of the performer: being surrounded by music, although on a much larger scale.

The impetus behind the electro-acoustic pieces included in this folio came from Cixous's notion that 'the noise of machines is invading everywhere, and the noise machines are more and more sonorous.'<sup>17</sup> The sonic material was sourced from different industrial locations around Scotland, so as to literally capture the 'noise of machines'. The Falkirk Wheel was the first industrial location from which material was sourced. The sounds captured for this project were recorded on particularly wet and empty day, when, in desperate need of oiling, the structure emitted a lamenting groan with each pivot, which was subsequently followed by a shattering crash as the gears fell into place. I have returned to the site many times since, and never again have I heard the Wheel create those sounds: the machine is virtually silent now as it transports boats from one side of the canal to the other. The sonic material recorded that day was used in the creation of three pieces submitted for this folio: *Seaside Town*, *Whale Hunt*, and *Tidal Caverns*.

Using the 'Filter Delays' option available on ProTools 7.1, a program of pre-ordained filter passes and other effects, I endeavored to make the raw material for these three pieces 'more sonorous', as per the original intention of this part of the folio. The built-in filter taps were used as templates from which adjustments were made in order to achieve the type of

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<sup>17</sup> See Footnote 1.

sonority that would best suit the piece. For *Seaside Town*, I wanted to create the sense of a desolate and abandoned place that at one time had been a scene of amusement. ProTools Filter Delay was the first step in my search to create a haunting atmosphere. From there, the feedback was increased by just short of sixty percent in order to create bouncing echoes, the global delay scale was raised up by a factor of five so that it would seem as if the sounds were coming from far away, and readjusted the balance of the sounds to be fifty-five percent more wet than dry in order to saturate the track as much as possible.

The resulting piece possessed the acoustic sense of sonority that represented the idea of sonorous noise machines as described in Cixous's aforementioned quote, and so in working with the raw material to create what became the other pieces from the Falkirk Wheel recordings, I employed the same compositional techniques. In the original, unaltered recording that became *Whale Hunt*, the Wheel emitted a moan that was strangely reminiscent of a whale call, and in filtering these sounds for the electro-acoustic piece, my attempt was to find the best way to accentuate this familiar, forlorn sound. As with *Seaside Town*, *Whale Hunt* has only one filter delay (option six from the drop down menu), and it was similarly adjusted so that the source material is saturated to the point of sustaining constantly. This filter also includes eighty-two percent additional feedback, for the echo-effect, and the delay is reduced by half, in an attempt to create a sound that would be recognizable to listeners on some level. As an experiment, four filters were used on the four tracks that make up *Tidal Caverns*. Options two and seven were used for the first two tracks; seven and eight were used for the second two tracks. The end result is that the original sound has become nothing more than a catalyst for a number of filtered effects. The original recording of sounds that became *Tidal Caverns* is unrecognizable, although the end result possesses sonority of such surreal quality that it could represent the future sound of Cixous's 'noise machines'.

Another location for industrial source material was Edinburgh's Woolen Mills. The monotonous, arrhythmic drone of the mills was to become a driving factor in the composition of *Bricolage*<sup>18</sup>. In *Bricolage*, the sounds of the mills are combined with other untouched sonic events made by household and found objects, addressing the relationship between the sonorities of man-made object made by machine and hand. *Bricolage* was arranged in the traditional manner for electronic music: by (virtually) cutting and pasting bits of sound, and endlessly re-arranging the sound sources until, after hours of tinkering, a workable structure that somewhat resembled the original intention emerged. The compositional style employed for this piece was the first to showcase a materiality-based aesthetic. Materiality is inherent in all aspects of *Bricolage*, as the sound sources were hand-made and industrial, and the compositional style involved manipulation of their position in order to generate a structure reminiscent of an electro-acoustic piece of music.

An ice-cube factory in Aberdeen was the location for the final source for raw material. Unlike the recordings made at the Falkirk Wheel, where the sounds presented themselves and then quickly morph into another altogether different sound, and even the recordings at Edinburgh's Woolen Mills, where the mills would run for five to ten minutes before a snag in the fabric would break the established rhythmic pulse, the recording at the ice-cube factory created a steady stream of sound from the laboring machines from the moment it was switched on to when it was turned off at night. Chamber reverb, feedback, and delay were the only sonic alterations made to the original raw material for *Manufacturing Ice*<sup>19</sup>, as my desire for the resulting piece of music was only to exemplify the factory's enormity. The layers of raw sound: the whirr of the machine, the drips of water, the clink and clatter of the falling ice cubes, already possessed an intricate sonority without interference from an external source. Materiality is represented in this piece through offering an unobstructed sonic view to the

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<sup>18</sup> Track 4.

<sup>19</sup> Track 5.

inner workings of an industrial factory. Where it begins to hint at the aesthetic of spirituality is in the sonorous repetitive – one could say meditative – drips and clatter, the sound of progress being made.

Of course, it could be argued that all sounds, natural or man-made, are sonorous without external influence. With these sounds, and others that I have worked with to develop electro-acoustic pieces, my intention is to create an atmosphere. As exemplified by the pieces presented in this project, creating an atmosphere is possible through sonic manipulation (*Seaside Town, Whale Hunt, Tidal Caverns*), structural assembly (*Bricolage*), or enhancement and editing (*Manufacturing Ice*). The electro-acoustic sound objects in this project all stem from recordings of different sources of industrial, a-rhythmic patterns. I found the sounds from the Falkirk Wheel, Edinburgh's Woolen Mill, and the Aberdeen ice-cube factory to contain an ethereal spaciousness based on repetition, productivity, and time. There was an inherent materiality to these sounds, because they were created by massive industrial structures, and it was this materiality that led to my decision to incorporate them in this project, as I heard within them the potential to create music based on my spiritual aesthetic.

There are six instrumental contemporary art pieces written for indefinitely pitched and pitched percussion: *Time Management, Simple Time, Overtime, Windchime Haiku, Harmonic Meditation, and Philosophy*. These pieces form the basis for the re-mixed and overlaid instrumental pieces included in this folio: *Time Layers, Windchime Haiku<sup>2</sup>, Haiku Overtime, Harmonic Improvisation, and Simple Harmonic Philosophy*. All instrumental music on the CD is performed by local percussionist John Poulter, except *Mbira Intro*, which was performed by Americo Alhousema. In this paper, as with the CD, the pieces are presented in the following order: *Mbira Intro, Time Management 1, 2, and 3, Time Layers, simple time, A Short Overtime, A Long Overtime, Windchime Haiku, Windchime Haiku<sup>2</sup>, Haiku Overtime,*

*Harmonic Meditation, Harmonic Improvisation, Philosophy, and Simple Harmonic Philosophy*. Following is an explanation of the compositional and recording processes for this section of the music folio.

*Mbira Intro* is an improvisation based on a brief melodic idea that was recorded at home and very nearly forgotten about. There is not much to say about *Mbira Intro* other than in an inspired moment I recognized the true beauty of this simple improvisation. The recording sounds as though the music is coming from just inside the walls, or even through a different plane of existence. The mbira itself is representative of my instrumental *oeuvre*, percussion, which is another example of my material aesthetic.

*Time Management* is the first notated instrumental piece in the folio. Written for three triangles, it is a rhythmic exercise demonstrating a focused activity, density, which fluctuates between spacious and condensed, chaotic rhythms using variations of tempo and dynamics. My aesthetic approach during this compositional process was, again, materiality: to express a large-scale rhythmic and earthy pulse. I was in search of a sound that contained a life force that would seem, at times, controllable, and other times, would lose control entirely. In theory, it seemed a simple enough idea, although writing this piece proved much more difficult in practice. *Time Management* began conceptually as a piece for pebbles. My desire was to encompass the earthy aesthetic as much as possible. However, pebbles did not create the depth and resonance I was in search of, and after this brief and unsuccessful incarnation, the instrumentation was changed to triangles. As a percussive instrument, triangles also conveyed an earthy aesthetic, and the tones generated by the different sizes of triangles gave *Time Management* the depth of resonance I was looking for. The reason for the three different versions of *Time Management* on the CD is because of the three different performance possibilities. The triangles were set up in the first recording to rest on a foam

egg-shell pad, in the second, they were suspended and dampened with cloths, and in the third, suspended without any dampening.

With regards to the musical structure of *Time Management*, I can say in hindsight that I was overly concerned with incorporating the process of bricolage to every aspect of this piece. Sonically, to resemble tinkering, there are a number of unfinished musical motives, as compositionally I was trying one thing, elaborating upon it, and moving on to something else before concluding in a cadence. Structurally, I organized these musical motives as one would an array of objects in a mosaic, by moving them around until they could fit within multiple time signatures, to be performed in various tempos (*example 1 and 2*). My self-imposed compositional rule which comes across most clearly in *Time Management* is that at the start of the piece, the pulse is on the beat, but as the piece progresses, the pulse continuously moves away from the beat.

*Example 1:*

Example 1 consists of two musical staves for Triangles. The first staff is in 4/4 time, with a tempo marking of  $\bullet = 60$  (steady) and a dynamic marking of *mf*. The second staff is also in 4/4 time, with a tempo marking of  $\bullet = 100$  and a dynamic marking of *mf*.

*Example 2:*

Example 2 consists of two musical staves for Triangles. The first staff is in 9/8 time, with a dynamic marking of *p*. The second staff is in 3/8 time, with a dynamic marking of *p*.

That *Time Management* expresses both meticulous (in control) and frenzied (out of control) states of punctuality is another compositional achievement, although there were other elements related to bricolage which could have been stressed less and the intention of the piece would still be communicated accurately.

*Time Management* is intended to suggest an elemental quality as illustrated by the choice of metallic, indefinitely tuned percussion for the work's instrumentation. The metallic tones of triangles create a sense of depth and a feeling of elongated time. I sensed that triangles would articulate my material and spiritual aesthetic as I became more familiar with the lucid relationship triangles share with time, because it is possible to keep to a rigid, rhythmic structure when playing triangles, even as they resonate through the beats. Percussion and punctuality represent the material state, and resonance represents the spiritual state.

*Time Management* exemplifies the way my approach has been informed by the investigation of John Cage's music and musings. Evoked while composing this piece was Cage's music for prepared piano, recalling the idea of composer as bricoleur. In the case of the prepared piano, Cage successfully re-created a familiar object - the piano - to make it do otherwise unintended things. This concept was put to use in altering the elemental structures of time, tempo, dynamics, and musical motives in *Time Management*; everything, in fact, but the instrument. However, it must be said that although the idea of composer as bricoleur was made use of during the process of composition, because the instrument itself had not been not physically altered, the end result of *Time Management* does not sound like bricolage.

*Time Layers* is a result of the combination of music from *Time Management*, *Simple Time*, and *Overtime*. This piece is the first of the re-mixed and overlaid pieces of music. *Time Layers* is easily accessible in its subtlety, and I feel it is the first successful piece of music composed through the process of bricolage in the instrumental section of the folio. It is the result of combining music that already exists in a completed state, and splicing it together

to create something that was not originally intended. In a way, this and the other pieces of re-mixed instrumental music are reflections of my spiritual aesthetic, because the music no longer comes from live instruments. It exists digitally, in the ether of ones and zeros before I re-appropriate the sounds in order to build different sonic landscapes using only my ear and imagination.

*Simple Time*, *A Short Overtime*, and *A Long Overtime* make up part of the re-mixed section of instrumental music, although unlike the other pieces of overlaid music, in these, the improvisation is part of the performance, and has not taken place in the recording studio. The aesthetic of materiality is addressed here because these pieces are live performances. However, as much of the music is made up of improvisation, the aesthetic of spirituality is also present in this music, due to the state of consciousness in which a performer must be to improvise. All three pieces are based on ideas that have come from *Time Management*, focusing on aspects of pulse and dynamics. *Simple Time*, written for Tam Tam, is also engaged with pulse as a compositional argument. The pulse of *Simple time* begins on the beat, slowly shifting away as the piece progresses, but unlike *Time Management*, in *Simple Time*, the tempo remains the same. *A Short Overtime* and *A Long Overtime* are based on the concept of a gradual tempo and dynamic crescendo: at the beginning, the piece is quiet and moderately pulsed, and by the end, it is hard, crashing, loud, and fast. It is a piece that perpetually builds until the performer decides to finish at a climax. There is much room for improvisation in *Overtime*, and it is at the performer's discretion whether the piece will be two or ten minutes long, which is why there are two examples of this piece presented in the folio.

Progressing from indefinitely pitched percussion pieces, *Windchime Haiku* is the first piece to weave melody into rhythm. Using a vibraphone, the aim was to create a piece of



notated music based on vertical pitch structure and intermittent rhythmic notions that would sound like a set of wind-chimes on a breezy afternoon. My material aesthetic continues with this piece, as again I have employed a percussion instrument to carry out the compositional ideas. However, in *Windchime Haiku* I have also deliberately incorporated my spiritual aesthetic to the melodies based on the concepts of meditation and etherealness: so that the music sounds like a recognizable something that is untouchable and yet ever-present. By loosely basing the structure of the written music on the rules that govern the structure of Haiku<sup>20</sup> poetry, *Windchime Haiku* has an intrinsic meditative quality, expressed through the spaciousness of the tones, motives, and phrasing of the music.

The restricted tonal vocabulary was generated and influenced by the pentatonic scale:



In writing this piece, attempts were made to create a more improvisational feel, as though *Windchime Haiku* was a recording of wind chimes on a breezy afternoon. It is intended to be a meditative, peaceful, reflective, and restful piece of music. The space between sounds extends an invitation to the listener to gracefully open into a calmer state of being.

*Windchime Haiku*<sup>2</sup> is the culmination of two of the takes of *Windchime Haiku* from the recording session with John Poulter. These takes were overlapped and played together in order to create the sensation of time colliding in some places and pulling apart in others. There is a sensation of being in two places at once, or at the top of a canyon when listening to *Windchime Haiku*<sup>2</sup>; the echoing nature enhances the initial compositional ideas of meditation, relaxation, and improvisation that were present in the writing of *Windchime Haiku*.

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<sup>20</sup> *Haiku*: A form of Japanese poetry with 17 syllables in three unrhymed lines of five, seven, and five syllables, often describing nature or a season.

*Windchime Haiku* and *Windchime Haiku*<sup>2</sup> are similar in nature to *Rothko Chapel* by Morton Feldman<sup>21</sup> and *Meditations on a Chinese Character* by Anne Boyd.<sup>22</sup> The repetitive, minimalist nature of these pieces has been a continual inspiration to my compositional process. To continue working in this manner, my aim would be to create meditative musical journeys like the aforementioned as well as pieces similar to those by Pauline Oliveros. These composers are masters of filling a space with music, and understand that there is as much significance to be found in a resonating tone as a complex musical motive. Oliveros's Deep Listening exercises are individual listening experiences, and are responsible for the initial inspiration that led to *Forms of Luminosity*.

*Haiku Overtime* is another addition to the remixed section of instrumental music. This piece combines glimpses of *Windchime Haiku*<sup>2</sup> with the developmental section of *A Long Overtime*, a combination of indefinitely pitched and pitched percussion music: a sketch of ebb and flow between melody and rhythm.

Deliberately moving further into the multi-faceted world created by the use of harmony, the next composition for pitched percussion is titled *Harmonic Meditation*. This piece is also written for solo vibraphone, and demonstrates similar rhythmic intentions as *Time Management* and *Windchime Haiku*, but does so from within a harmonic framework. Like *Windchime Haiku*, this piece is slow, steady, and meditative. From a compositional perspective, of all the percussion pieces included in this folio, *Harmonic Meditation* had the least amount of background research. The idea came abruptly, and the piece was composed in a matter of hours. While writing *Harmonic Meditation*, there was a natural progression to the music, articulated by the symbiotic relationship between the motives and dynamics. It,

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<sup>21</sup> Morton Feldman. *Rothko Chapel; Why Patterns?* New Albion Records, 1991. CD NA039.

<sup>22</sup> Anne Boyd. *Meditations on a Chinese Character*. Australia: ABC Classics, p1997. CD 420.

too, is representative of my materialist and spiritualist aesthetics. The 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 13<sup>th</sup> harmonics that permeate this piece create a spaciousness that allows for the listener to float between the upper and lower melodies at their discretion. Theoretically, the piece could be heard differently with each listen. This linear spaciousness of harmony accompanies the musical space as an invitation to meditative listening. What appeals to me most as composer is that although it sounds improvised, *Harmonic Meditation* is written and strictly regulated through fully notated tempo and time signature changes.

*Harmonic Improvisation* has been included because it expands upon and enhances the meditative qualities of the original piece. Here, the performer, John Poulter, based his improvisation on the material written for *Harmonic Meditation*. This is another piece of remixed music that was improvised live, and not touched in the studio. *Harmonic Improvisation* articulates my chosen aesthetics because it possesses the earthy materialism of a percussion instrument, and the spiritual element of harmonic improvisation.

All of the pieces for vibraphone were recorded using rubber mallets. *Windchime Haiku* and *Windchime Haiku*<sup>2</sup> were played with the softest available mallets. *Harmonic Meditation* and *Harmonic Improvisation* were recorded using medium-bodied rubber mallets.

The compositional process for *Philosophy* included slightly different elements than those I had worked with for the pieces written for vibraphone. This piece for marimba incorporated the relativity of decay through rolls notated in the music itself. To create this effect, this piece was recorded using rubber-based marimba mallets. During composition, the structure of *Philosophy* developed linearly, as a journey up to the midway point, and reflection from then on until the end. It incorporates both melodies and harmonic elements, expanding from a one-voice melody to four-part harmony by measure 14. After the climactic descent of chords that takes place from measure 30 to 34, the music is reflected, literally in reverse, from the harmonic rolls backwards, until it nearly ends where it had begun. The title,

*Philosophy*, refers to a journey that can take you far from what you think you know, but in the end leads back to where you are, only now seeing things from a different perspective.

In the studio, working to compose another meditative journey, I stumbled upon this combination of instrumental music that became *Simple Harmonic Philosophy*. The layers of Tam Tam from *Simple Time*, Vibraphone from *Harmonic Meditation*, and Marimba from *Philosophy* are dreamlike. Where the trills and rolls line up brings out another dimension of music that was perhaps hinted at before, but never addressed so directly. This quality, and also the amalgamation of both aesthetics and three different percussion instruments seemed an appropriate way to conclude the instrumental section of my folio of music.

The final three pieces included in this folio to represent my compositional standpoint are songs. The songs submitted for this are ‘Tacoma’, ‘When’s it Gonna Rain?’, and ‘Oblivious’.<sup>23</sup> To illustrate the vast number of possibilities for production of songs, ‘Tacoma’, ‘When’s it Gonna Rain?’, and ‘Oblivious’ were all made with different genres, techniques, and styles in mind. Using a keyboard and the settings available through Garage Band and Logic, I was able to create a range of effects in their production, from electro-acoustic to environmental. The software available in Garage Band and Logic provided me with a way of convincingly creating other acoustic instruments to accompany my voice and the piano.

‘Tacoma’, the first of the songs, is influenced by a number of different styles and genres. A traditional band arrangement has been used in the instrumental selection, made up of vocals, piano, bass, guitar, strings, and drums. The style of production is an attempt to convey the feel of a dark and smoky underground late-night jazz-club. The piano music is reminiscent of old American saloon songs, similar to the style of Tom Waits on his first

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<sup>23</sup> Tracks 21 – 23.

album, “Closing Time”, specifically the song ‘Ice Cream Man’. The bass line is based on the style evoked by traditional mid-century Jazz club musicians. The drums call to mind the persistent indie-rock style of Meg White, of the White Stripes. Vocally and lyrically, my focus is on clarity and comprehensiveness. My lyrical style varies from song to song, but central to each is a complete story, or idea. As a lyricist, my aim is to tell a story that people are able to relate to on a personal level.

### **Tacoma**

Can’t stop me now, can’t stop me...  
 Even though your tic-tac-toe strategy  
 Has turned into a fine-tuned scorched-earth policy

You can be quite sure I’ll take you right down with me...

Cause I just signed out of the cold  
 And out of this hole  
 And out of Tacoma  
 And you can’t stop me now, can’t stop me...

Cause I just signed out of the cold  
 And out of this hole  
 And out of Tacoma  
 And there seem to be much fewer clouds today

Who needs you anyway?  
 You’re just a pain  
 You’re all I see  
 And you’re in my way.

I drove miles and miles and miles away  
 I’m not coming home to you today  
 I drove miles and miles and miles away  
 I’m not coming home to you again.

In ‘Tacoma’ there is a dichotomy between the lyrics and music. The lyrics are biting and confrontational, while the music generates a cool, lackadaisical, although potentially exhausted feel. There is much room in the lyrics of ‘Tacoma’ for interpretative deciphering, so it is possible for the listener to take a variety of meaning from this song.

Both ‘Tacoma’ and ‘When’s it Gonna Rain?’ were recorded using Garage Band 3. The overall aesthetic of spirituality is illuminated in ‘When’s it Gonna Rain?’ by eschewing the use of traditional instruments, apart from piano and voice, in production. In addition to the piano and vocal tracks on ‘When’s it Gonna Rain?’, the third and final track is of filtered piano chords. That there are only three tracks in the final production is a testament to the inherent simplicity in this particular song. The track of filtered piano chords has been included to accentuate an ethereal landscape, and create the sense that this material is being conveyed through a veil from some other reality. To accompany this theme, the qualities inherent in the piano and vocals are also enhanced with heavy echo and reverb.

### **When’s it Gonna Rain**

When’s it gonna rain  
 When’s it finally gonna break today?  
 When’s it gonna rain  
 When’s it finally gonna break tonight?

My misgivings about life,  
 Making art and paying rent  
 Played me right into the part  
 Where I was getting spent all day.

I’m a note without a sound  
 A wind without a sail  
 I’m a mermaid on the ground  
 And someone’s got my tail

Hey you I’m not food.

Tell me when’s it gonna rain,  
 When’s it finally gonna break?  
 When’s it gonna rain,  
 When’s it finally gonna break over me.

Unlike ‘Tacoma’ and ‘Oblivious’, the production in ‘When’s it Gonna Rain?’ retains a measure of simplicity – after all, only three tracks of music make up the production – because this song is simple and straightforward. On a compositional scale, it is a small piece of work made up of three two-chord verses, and even the brief piano solo is composed of miniscule

half steps. Though simple by nature, its lyrical message is clear in that the subject is waiting for something to big and life changing to happen. This is a concept that resonates within me, and others in my generation. Because the simplicity is consistent throughout, and I have not tried to make ‘When’s it Gonna Rain’ a boisterous, overly produced pop-song, I believe it is this honesty that has come across here as the most important compositional element.

### **Oblivious**

It sucks to be oblivious  
 And I don’t want to read your lips  
 They’re spewing out all this shit about  
 “It’s not my fault. I’m not responsible. It’s how you feel, it’s not me.”

Well listen up, guess what  
 I’m holding you accountable  
 For what it is you’re not saying to me, to yourself.

I’m sick and tired these days  
 W’s enough for me  
 When I have to filter the lies from in my own home.  
 You’re sucking my energy.  
 Come on this just isn’t the way it should be between us.

Just stop denying you’re sad here.  
 Would you please stop denying your feelings...  
 We’d all be in much better shape; the monsters wouldn’t penetrate.  
 At least it wouldn’t be so easy for them to get us.

I know you’re not oblivious  
 You’re tired and you can’t stand this  
 Just as much as me.

The most heavily produced of the three songs, the production work on ‘Oblivious’ is influenced by bands like Portishead and Concrete Blonde. Lyrically, once again I am confrontational, having invoked my inner Courtney Love. ‘Oblivious’ was recorded entirely on Logic 7. The down-tempo beat in the introduction creates an initial feeling of doom and gloom that is only increased by the arrivals of a cello melody that has been flipped to play in reverse. Eerie radio waves and ghostly echoes also contribute to this apocalyptic scene.

Verse by verse, there is a dynamic crescendo as ‘Oblivious’ progresses, which mirrors the building lyrical frustration until, at the chorus, all sounds drop out and what is left is a lyrical plea for understanding - supported only by piano, guitar, and drums. When the last verse begins, the tempo of the song has slowed considerably. Lyrically, this verse is more understanding, although musically it leads the listener to believe the arguments made in the first verses have not entirely been resolved as of yet.

My list of influences as a songwriter is long and varied. There are specific reasons behind why certain artists appeal to me more than others. I admire the production style of Butch Vig (Nirvana, Smashing Pumpkins, Garbage), Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois (U2, Talking Heads, Roxy Music), as well as artists who produce their own music: Mark Mothersbaugh, Idan Raichel, Penguin Café Orchestra, Four Tet, Múm, Sigur Ros, Godspeed You Black Emperor, Imogen Heap, Tori Amos, Poe, and as I’ve previously mentioned, Tom Waits. When it comes to songwriting itself, I could list a thousand influences; those who stand out above others include – but are not limited to – Nina Simone, Nick Cave, Natalie Merchant, PJ Harvey, Johnette Napolitano, Elliot Smith, Ani DiFranco, Jim Morrison, and Martha Wainwright. The commonality between these writers is that they are all beautiful storytellers, and they have been known to incorporate humor into their lyrics.

This selection of music is being submitted as a folio that represents my personal standpoint as a composer. Musically, I am captivated by the creation and production of all three genres discussed. This project has afforded me an opportunity to develop my skills as a composer and producer of each of these genres. Looking back to identify the common thread of this composition portfolio, I can say that the basis for every piece of music is my personal aesthetic: the combination of materiality and spirituality. As a percussionist, I always return to a sensual interpretation of sounds. Regardless of the genre, when I compose, there is an element of materiality present in the music. All my compositions begin with a rhythm or



pulse as a basis for the rest of the music from which to grow and develop. The aesthetic of spirituality is found within my own particular style of composing, and stems my extra-musical interests, including yoga and meditation. It is clear in my electro-acoustic and instrumental compositions that meditation and spirituality are influential to my compositional process, and although it may not be as apparent, the songs are also influenced by a spiritual aesthetic. Songwriting is the mode of expression I employ in order to empty my mind of unnecessary clutter, so that I am able to concentrate on the importance of the here and now.

## Performance

Though the music folio is an important contributing factor to *Forms of Luminosity*, the element that determines the success of the experiment as a whole is the public performance. I must elucidate that the aesthetic for the portfolio of music and the aesthetic for the performance are completely different. In my design for the performance, the aesthetic became *disposability*. Whereas the portfolio is representative of my principles as a composer, the performance is where I, as a composer, step out of the equation in order to demonstrate that music, like any commodity these days, is disposable. The point I am trying to make is that no matter how much time, effort, and love you put into your art, once it is in the hands of the public, it is no longer yours to protect. This project emphasizes my theory that these days, Western youth culture tend to treat commercial (material) goods as disposable objects.

In theory, you could say that a considerable amount of time was spent building a substantial musical folio only to throw it away. It is possible, but the choice was made consciously, as this is an expression of our culture that I believe needs articulation. Of course it would have been easier to organize a concert in which the pieces were performed for a live audience. Such a traditional performance of this work would not address the question of how such a concert – where the style of performance is predictable and endlessly done before – could contribute to the developing aspects of music today. To answer this question, all the compositions became part of a singular event centered around a listener's experience of the collection of music.

This performance puts a listener on display in front of an audience. Experiencing music that has been pre-recorded and manipulated through an iPod begs the question: Is pre-existing music engaging and relevant to an audience? This question, as well as elements of the

performance which proved to be more or less successful will be now be addressed. Also addressed here will be how this experiment is an exemplification of the consumerist nature of our culture as it relates to a personal listening experience through the use of iPods and other purchasable commodities.

*Forms of Luminosity* is an interrogation of how we listen. Listening is the fundamental sense we associate with music. In *Forms of Luminosity*, the audience observes a performer listening to music through headphones and is able to share in this private experience because they are surrounded by a quad configuration of speakers that emits the same music on a grander scale during the performance.

The performance begins as an example of how the iPod has helped to shape the private listening experience for youth culture today, and develops into an individual listening experience for each individual audience member. Lévi-Strauss explains that this is possible through systematic and statistical deduction.

The choice of one solution involves a modification of the result to which another solution would have led, and the observer is (in effect) presented with the general picture of these permutations at the same time as the particular solution offered. He is thereby transformed into an active participant without even being aware of it.<sup>24</sup>

As the audience members engage with the musical decisions being made onstage, they instinctively interpret the performer's own choices while developing opinions about what they would do if they were in charge of the music.<sup>25</sup> In this way, *Forms of Luminosity* adheres to Nattiez's aesthetic tripartition of musical activity: the 'listener's response,'<sup>26</sup> as the experiment is based on the music that is heard and subsequently interpreted by said listener. Because the performer is responsible for making decisions about when and how music is to be

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<sup>24</sup> Lévi-Strauss, p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> Personal communication with audience members after performance on 4 September 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Naomi Cumming, 'Semiotics,' *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (7 November 2006).

played during the performance, the pre-recorded music is removed from its preserved context and given new life in the present moment. In the beginning, the audience expects nothing, because they have not received any information about what they are about to see. Shortly into the performance the personal decisions made by the performer begin to affect the audience's experience of the music, putting the audience - consciously or not - in a position of agreeing or disagreeing with the performer's choices. Through this involved attachment, the observer becomes an active and engaged participant in the performance.

Because of my direct involvement in the experiment, I assumed I would be exempt from reacting to the decisions made during the performance. However, as an audience member, I found myself getting agitated with the choices the performer was making since I did not have any say in what the performer was doing onstage. I personally wished to hear more of the electro-acoustic pieces, and felt that certain tracks were repeated frequently, leaving others completely neglected. Even though it had been agreed beforehand that the performer had *carte blanche* as to how she played the music during the performance, allowing her to repeat a single track for the full hour if she so desired, the decisions she made in the performance gave me the impression of someone not having much music to choose from. Perhaps my feeling so was because I knew the extent of the music that she had available to her and was aware of what was not being played.

After the performance, I spoke with other audience members about their own experiences, and they confessed to finding it frustrating when a track would get cut off just as they were beginning to follow the music.<sup>27</sup> These reactions lead me to believe that since I and other audience members had been engaged enough with the performance to be affected by the performer's musical decisions, this aspect of the experiment was successful. This result suggests that one way of making pre-existing music relevant to a live audience is to re-mix

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<sup>27</sup> Personal communication with audience members after performance on 4 September 2007.

the musical material on the spot, although it is not a new idea in musical culture. By altering pre-existing notions of how recorded music should be presented through unexpected changes, the pre-recorded music becomes live in the present situation. Thus, *Forms of Luminosity* successfully demonstrates that even if a performance consists entirely of pre-recorded music, it can be made relevant to the present situation.

Unfortunately, with this type of socio-cultural experiment, it is difficult to conclude anything from one performance, as there is an infinite range of possible results. For example, a performer could choose to listen to one song on repeat for the entire performance. All pieces could be listened to in alphabetical order. Only the songs could be played, and the performer could sing and dance along with them. The performer could be painting while listening to the music (or working, exercising, writing, drawing, eating, sleeping...). The performance could take place outside, in the center of a city, in the middle of a field, on a raft in a pool, in the middle of the night, continuously for a week... it all depends on how the performer feels, what s/he does when listening to music in that state, and whether it will be translated in the same way when experienced in front of an audience.

As I hope I have made clear, it is difficult, if not completely impossible, to interpret the results of this performance of *Forms of Luminosity* as a benchmark for how the performance might work in the future. What I can offer instead is an analysis of this performance, and some insight as to what I would do differently for future performances. As is often the case with the first trial of an experiment, unsuccessful aspects emerged that would likely be changed. To start, by staging the experiment, a true performance-art event, in the formal setting of a University Concert Hall, I created unnecessary ambiguity. Because the hall was empty of chairs, and performances in the Concert Hall are associated with ordered rows of seats, the audience in attendance for *Forms of Luminosity* was initially unsure of how best to behave, as they did not know what was required of them.

In retrospect, I would have offered program notes to accompany the performance. Thankfully, even without program notes, after the first few awkward minutes people began making themselves more comfortable by sitting on the floor, though at the time, this looked to be more reactionary than intentional. Also, because the performance showcased a private listening experience in which time passed organically without a formal beginning, middle, or end, a number of people in the audience were fidgeting and generally seemed uneasy during the event, others simply fell asleep.<sup>28</sup> The lack of any dialogue could also have been an additional factor to the air of confusion that hung over the performance that day. These elements contributed to a feeling of tension between the audience and performer that was left unresolved throughout the performance. If performed again, the following program notes (which include a description of the experiment and instructions on audience behavior during the performance) would be included in order to create a more understanding, responsive, and less inhibited audience.

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<sup>28</sup> Personal communication with audience members after performance on 4 September 2007.

# Forms of Luminosity

## Attendance Instructions / Program Notes

You are invited to witness a private listening experience.

You are welcome to move around the venue at your leisure.

You may stand or sit, depending on what is comfortable for you at the time.

You are free to come and go as you please.

The performer may or may not choose to acknowledge the audience.

The performer has control over what music is played when, and for how long.

The performer will remain onstage for as long as s/he wants.

The performance concludes when the performer has left the stage.

In order to make this performance personal and realistic, the performer brought a selection of materials that she might normally be surrounded with at home during a private listening experience. Ashley Smith Hammond, present at the performance, reflected:

The *mis en scene* introduced the question of consumption quite subtly, consumption of objects (phone, iPod, glass of wine), consumption of ideas and social codes (magazine), and crucially consumption of music.<sup>29</sup>

As presented in the accompanying DVD, this performer's private listening experience was accentuated by the addition of the magazines, the mobile phone, and the glass of wine. Each of these objects punctuated external aspects of her chosen identity. How she engaged with these objects (symbols) while simultaneously surrounded by her choice of music represents one of the fundamental processes of identity development in youth culture today. Like this performer, people are themselves surrounded by material possessions during their own private listening experiences, as well as most other times; so much so in fact that I wonder, like Hélène Cixous, 'What are we being allowed to see of this person that isn't a construct of the environment / a product from / of the society which surrounds and permeates her existence?'<sup>30</sup>

Amy Parker, a member of the audience, agreed that the performance articulated

a particularly disturbing effect of a so-called 'disposable' culture, in that, the audience became aware of how solipsistic consumers can become. The woman on the sofa seemed isolated, bored and unable to find the thing she was looking for - hence the multiple track changing and her restlessness [...] it was ambiguous as to whether or not the music was relieving her boredom or simply adding to it. This was a good indication of how confusing consumer choice and personal identity have become in contemporary culture.<sup>31</sup>

The materialism of our culture has created a generalized identity for youth culture based in a consumerist foundation. We brand ourselves through the products we choose to surround

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<sup>29</sup> Written communication with Ashley Smith Hammond from 3 November 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Cixous, p. 110.

<sup>31</sup> Written communication with Amy Parker from 26 November 2007.



ourselves with. This type of product-based identity is as dispensable as the possessions themselves; and yet, with more young people earning disposable incomes, personal commodities currently function as identity signifiers. In today's culture a full bottle of wine, an unread magazine, and an iPod hold tremendous value as *possibilities* for defining one's identity in the immediate future. However, once these items are made use of, the consumer is left to search for something more to fill the void. The experiment exemplifies that when personal commodities are treated as a substitute for true identity development, the consumer inevitably becomes overwhelmed with *ennui*. If society cannot see anything but that which is a 'construct of the environment,' it is because it is consumed by choice and is no longer capable of making decisions based on true desire. This experiment has taught me that a level of consumerism that creates a product-based identity is an unreasonable expression of character.

More important than the questioning of consumer culture, *Forms of Luminosity* illustrates the necessity of private time for identity development. In order to develop any type of personal identity, it is necessary to have some form of private time during which one is free to express oneself comfortably and without perceived judgment. The private listening experience has been shown to be an important factor to identity development since the 1950s. Since that time youth culture has tended to adapt their style, as part of identity development, to the aesthetic expression of public figures they admire and look up to. To express one's identity by borrowing characteristics of popular public figures is normal. However, to rely on purchasable commodities as an expression of character is no guarantee of happiness.

The only forms of luminosity in the performance of *Forms of Luminosity* are the material objects surrounding the performer. The audience observed that although the magazines and wine occupied her hands, they only provided a distraction with which she could pass the time. Her personal listening experience was agitated and interrupted even

amongst the moments where the performer found solace in her musical choices. The moments of solace are representative of the positive private listening experience described by Antoine Hennion in his essay on music lovers<sup>32</sup>, and *Forms of Luminosity* might have been more successful as an experiment if the performer had been able to generate more of those moments. However, it is understandable that the same level of comfort attained in a private listening experience may not be found in the public exhibition of a private listening experience. Perhaps in future performances, if the performer was more involved with the musical selection, he or she would be able to create a genuine feeling of comfort that is found in this 'hidden' and 'informal' leisure activity.

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<sup>32</sup> Antoine Hennion, 'Music Lovers: Taste as Performance,' 2001.

## Conclusion

After extensive research and writing, it is clear that *Forms of Luminosity* is the synthesis of two projects being submitted as one. The first is the collection of twenty-three compositions comprising a folio of work that represents my personal standpoint as a composer. The aesthetic values being represented by this collection are ones of materiality and spirituality: materiality due to its relationship to my percussionist background, and as it relates to the process of incorporating bricolage into my compositional practice; spirituality due to the meditative structural content of my compositions. The second part of *Forms of Luminosity* is the performance based on my interpretation of a certain private activity that is believed to contribute to individual identity development. The aesthetic value being represented in this section is that of disposability as it is related to a consumptive, capitalist culture.

It may be thought that the aesthetics that make up this project as a whole could not be more different. However, having an artistic belief in the indeterminacy of all things, drives me to approach each project as being what is thought of as “the most significant one ever,” whilst in the midst of creating it. Said law of indeterminacy forces acceptance of the fact that creation is the only part of the process that could truly mine alone; once the piece is finished and shared, it is up for public scrutiny. As a consumer, it is understood that certain commodities are appreciated more so - and for longer - than others, musical creations included. Yet though there exist fundamental aesthetic differences between the two separate parts of the project, they are both immersed with bricolage and standpoint theory. Thus they both relate to the whole’s core idea of identity development and consumerism in an individual’s modern musical experience.

Regarding the underlying aesthetics of the folio of music, by incorporating bricolage into my compositional practice, I developed a perspective based on materiality. The industrial sound sources used as the foundation for my electro-acoustic pieces were chosen specifically for their sonic materiality. The inherent materiality to these sounds was due to the fact that they were created by massive industrial structures, and it was this materiality that led to my decision to incorporate them in this project, as I heard within them the potential to create music based on my spiritual aesthetic. These sounds made by the Falkirk Wheel, Edinburgh's Woolen Mill, and the Aberdeen ice-cube factory evoked an ethereal spaciousness based on repetition, productivity, and time. In the studio, I worked to accentuate this aspect of the sounds in many different ways: sometimes obscuring the original sound entirely, and other times endeavoring to preserve the spirituality of the natural sound.

My aesthetic approach during the compositional process of the instrumental pieces was, again, materiality, as is apparent through the use of percussive instruments. In *Time Management*, my investigation concerned the expression of a large-scale rhythmic and earthy pulse. I was in search of a sound representative of a life force that would seem, at times, controllable, and other times, would lose control entirely. Triangles expressed both material and spiritual aesthetics, and as I became more familiar with the lucid relationship triangles share with time, their malleability became more apparent: triangles keep to rigid rhythms while resonating through the beats.

Materiality existed in the vibraphone and marimba pieces conceptually, and through the choice of instrument. *Windchime Haiku* was an attempt to write the music of wind chimes. Compositionally developed by structuring the piece to resemble a haiku, with this piece I was in search of a poetic and improvisational feel. The intention was for *Windchime Haiku* to be a meditative and restful piece of music that is easy for a listener to follow, and easier still to get lost in. These concepts of restfulness and improvisation returned when writing *Harmonic*

*Meditation*, as did the idea of expansive harmonics to balance the aesthetics; the spaciousness of which avails the opportunity for the listener to float between the higher and lower registers of melody at their discretion. In *Philosophy*, I employed the materiality of the marimba – through use of dynamics and rolls – more clearly than with the vibraphone. This piece is another example of my spiritually aesthetic compositional style to write meditative, conceptual journeys.

Re-mixing the instrumental contemporary art pieces after they had been recorded directly from notation in order to work with the same materials in different ways created another layer of materiality to the expression of this music's character. I re-appropriated all of this music in order to build the following sonic landscapes: *Time Layers*, *Windchime Haiku*<sup>2</sup>, *Haiku Overtime*, *Harmonic Improvisation*, and *Simple Harmonic Philosophy*. These re-mixed pieces of previously recorded instrumental music are reflections of my spiritual aesthetic. As the music no longer comes from the performer's interpretation of the notes, or a live instrument for that matter, it is treated as pure sound. Composing with existing sounds is a different developmental process to working with a blank sonic canvas.

Where I was able to express the most sonorous music was in the songs, although an underlying characteristic of all my compositions is sonority. The production of 'Tacoma', 'When's it Gonna Rain?', and 'Oblivious' is an example of layering techniques similar to the process of bricolage. Songwriting is also the mode of expression in which I am able to address my spirituality.

This project has afforded me an opportunity to develop my skills as a composer and producer of each of these genres. Looking back to identify the common thread of this composition portfolio, I can say that the basis for every piece of music was my personal aesthetic: the combination of materiality and spirituality; and the goal for each piece was to be as sonorous as possible through a sensual interpretation of sounds. Regardless of the genre,

when composing, there is an element of materiality present in the music. All my compositions began with a rhythm or pulse from which the rest of the music could grow and develop. The aesthetic of spirituality is expressed in my electro-acoustic and instrumental pieces, and meditation and spirituality are influential as well in all processes of composition.

The research for the performance section of this project focused on the relationship between a person, his or her iPod, and the private listening experience thus created. *Forms of Luminosity*, the performance, brought an audience face to face with a commonly ‘hidden’ and ‘informal’ activity in order to convey that a private listening experience is a central component to identity development. Although the audience was presented with a thought-provoking performance that dealt with the intersection of the iPod with consumerism, control, isolationism, and identity, it was difficult for them to see past the juxtaposition of a moment of privacy with a public exhibition and garner the initially hoped for result. Having learnt from the audience members’ feedback of overwhelming confusion during the performance, in the future program notes would be given prior to the performance’s beginning to clarify any questions the audience might come to construe.

Even with the aforementioned confusion, the performance part of this project did attain a number of the desired goals. One such was showing that an iPod can be crucial in shaping a private listening experience to today’s culture even if it is the listening time, and not the product being listened, to that is the predominant factor in identity development. The performance was even more successful in generating additional questions. One example was an inquiry of how an interrogation of modern (Western) cultural practices - in this case a private listening experience – would contribute to the understanding of identity development in Western youth culture. Conclusions could only be attained after a more conclusive study of youth culture is conducted without limitations imposed by race, class, and gender. For

now, this and others will remain unanswered until further investigative field research can be performed.

What this experiment did exemplify was that when personal commodities are treated as a substitute for true identity development, the consumer inevitably becomes overwhelmed with *ennui*. Although there could have been many other contributing factors to why the performer's personal listening experience was agitated and interrupted, her attitude was generally uninterested, even amongst the moments where she found solace in her musical choices. The moments of solace are representative of the positive private listening experiences described by Antoine Hennion in his essay on music lovers<sup>33</sup>, and *Forms of Luminosity* might have been more successful as an experiment if the performer had been able to generate more of those moments. However, it is understandable that the same level of comfort attained in a private listening experience may not be found in the public exhibition of a private listening experience.

This experiment is a contribution to knowledge because of its inherent nature as an interdisciplinary piece of work. The combination of various genres of music with technical engineering and performance art is a contemporary phenomenon, and is not often represented in our academic system. Using these elements in conjunction with a performance that addresses sociological and cultural issues, this experiment addresses the consumerism and consumption of Western youth culture as it relates to identity development in a manner that will evolve to suit the individual and the times. iPods may not always be the most recognizable products in the market of portable listening devices, but they can be substituted for another when the time comes.

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<sup>33</sup> Antoine Hennion, 'Music Lovers: Taste as Performance,' 2001.

It is in the questioning of what defines individuality, the theory behind *Forms of Luminosity*, where the potential to answer questions about the significance of private listening experiences is found. And private listening experiences are currently being addressed and created by composers, choreographers, and artists active in today's society. In one example, Merce Cunningham has recently choreographed a performance of multiple iterations where iPods are distributed to the audience, giving them the freedom and allowance to follow the movement onstage with their choice of a selection of music.<sup>34</sup> Like Cunningham and myself, artists everywhere are individually interpreting the phenomenon that is modern culture. Our various creations are a contribution to knowledge as with our individual projects, we offer a number of standpoints from which to experience our consuming and secluded world.

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<sup>34</sup> eyeSpace (2007). [http://www.merce.org/thecompany\\_r-eyespace\\_behrman.html](http://www.merce.org/thecompany_r-eyespace_behrman.html)



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