# The composer is present: a creative exploration of the role of the composer within the work

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Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
&
University of St Andrews

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I, Shona Mackay, do hereby certify that this submission, submitted for the degree of
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I was admitted as a part-time research student at the University of St Andrews and
the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in October 2010.

I received a studentship from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland for the duration of
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# Abstract

This thesis comprises eight new works written between 2011 and 2018 which incorporate music, video and performance. These works are the result of a practice-as-research creative exploration which problematizes the traditional role of the composer by making the composer present within the work and its performance in a number of non-musical ways.

The commentary begins with a discussion of the personal background which led to this period of practice-based research, including the influences of John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, Jennifer Walshe's *The New Discipline,* and the works of performance artists Carolee Schneemann, Adrian Howells and Marina Abramović. Each composition is then discussed in greater detail to highlight my creative process and reflective practice.

In order to foreground my journey through the research process, the works will be discussed in chronological order and are exhibited as a combination of musical scores, videos (including additional performance materials where applicable), and recordings which document their performance.

# Acknowledgements

# Contents

# Commentary

## 1. Introduction

This thesis comprises eight new works written between 2011 and 2018 alongside a critical commentary. These works are the result of a practice-as-research creative exploration which problematizes the traditional role of the composer through the use of music, performance, theatre and video. The eight works listed below are exhibited as a combination of musical scores and videos (including additional performance materials where necessary), alongside recordings which document their performance. The title of this thesis is a reference to Marina Abramović's work *The Artist is Present,* which was one of the initial starting points for my research.

**1. *Perception of Layers/Layers of Perception*** (2011), a video installation.

**2. *Intimacy*** (2013) for string quartet and composer.

**3. *Subtext*** (2014) for ensemble and composer-narrator.

**4. *Between the Lines*** (2014), a video work.

**5. *Cloud Hands*** (2016, rev. 2018), a video work for solo cello.

**6. *How to Undress in Front of Your Husband*** (2016) for ensemble and video.

**7. *Continuum*** (2017) for SSAATB choir and pre-recorded audio.

**8. *Creating Intimacy*** (2018), a one-to-one performance incorporating video and pre-recorded string quartet soundtrack.

My decision to explore and expand the boundaries of the composer's traditional role in classical music was influenced by a period of reflection on two works I wrote during my MMus studies in 2009, shortly before embarking on my PhD. They were both instrumental pieces inspired by personal experiences but there was something missing and at the time I couldn't quite put my finger on it. I later realised that I was happy with the musical and emotional content of the works but that the music on its own was not sufficient to fully convey what I wanted to say about the personal subject matter. I had managed to convey ideas of emotion but there was no tangible sense of 'aboutness'. This made me consider what a composition practice which would allow me to more fully express meaning through my work might look like, whilst also taking into account the ownership of personal narrative in a performance-based setting.

In the period of practice-based research which followed I focused on two main areas:

1. An exploration of the composer as non-musical performer, and
2. A more explicit, tangible use of personal subject matter as creative material.

Many of the works within this folio explore the use of non-musical media alongside composition as a tool to realise these ideas more effectively. In the following sections I will investigate how each of these strands individually and collectively question and push the traditional boundaries of the composer's role.

## 1.1  Self as Subject

"Why is it so important to my own psyche that I compose music? ... The answer is always the same – self-expression; the basic need to make evident one's deepest feelings about life ... The reason for the compulsion to renewed creativity, it seems to me, is that each added work brings with it an element of self-discovery. I must create in order to know myself, and since self-knowledge is a never-ending search, each new work is only a part-answer to the question "Who am I?" and brings with it the need to go on to other and different part-answers."

(Copland, 1952, pp. 40-41)

Copland's notion of composition as a form of self-expression and self-discovery, and the constant search for the 'I' within the work, resonates strongly with one of my primary motives for using personal subject matter as creative material. The subjects explored in each of the works in this folio are ones which, for my own personal reasons, I needed to interrogate more deeply at that particular time, however they also have a more universal significance, particularly the topics of gender, image and identity. As a reflective and reflexive practitioner, I find that working with experiences which have shaped my identity and sense of self helps me to better understand myself both as an artist and in terms of my personal position within a broader sociocultural context.

With this in mind, the compositions contained within this thesis are a series of part-answers to the question "Who am I?". These part-answers are presented in chronological order to both demonstrate my approaches to the exploration and

representation of self at those particular points along the research timeline, and to highlight the ways in which my practice has developed and evolved throughout the PhD process.

As a female artist I feel that it is particularly important to claim ownership of personal narrative and for women's voices and experiences to be heard and validated, especially in a male-dominated field such as composition. These are all key to the exploration of my presence and visibility within the work. The need for a deeper sense of agency and presence stems from feelings I have always had when handing a score over to an ensemble, musician or conductor; I suddenly feel cut off and removed from the final result and there is a sense of disconnection that doesn't sit well with me. Having also had previous experiences where my intentions in the compositional score were not fully realised in its performance (and naturally feeling disappointed by this), I sought ways to regain some sense of agency over my work, my personal narrative, and its performance, especially as I see each work as an extension of my self. My experimentation with a number of approaches to regain this personal agency can be seen throughout the works in this folio. For example, by creating and editing the majority of the non-musical elements myself, having a physical presence within a number of the performances, and employing partially- or fully-mediated elements within each work.[1]

This approach serves to create a deeper sense of connection to my work through the creation of, and my presence within, these other media, particularly in relation to making my presence visible/actual as opposed to through something I have made

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[1] When I am the subject of video material it is often more effective and efficient to ask someone else to operate the camera for me as opposed to doing this myself.

which is separate from me (i.e. solely a musical score). My personal connections to and roles within the works themselves will be discussed in more depth later.

## 1.2  Berger and Self-Surveillance

Having grown up experiencing the effects of sociocultural conditioning and pressures in terms of gendered stereotypes, body image and identity, coupled with an awareness of the wider sociocultural importance of challenging these stereotypes, women's image, identity and visibility are subjects I have been keen to explore in my work. I have done this both overtly, for example in *Perception of Layers/Layers of Perception* and *How to Undress in Front of Your Husband,* and in a more general sense through my visible presence within many of the works themselves. My own personal challenges and experiences in these areas are part of who I am, undoubtedly influencing my creative process, and as such I choose to further explore and expose this aspect of myself in my work. I do this both as a means of catharsis and self-understanding and to raise awareness of widespread gender-based obstacles experienced by many, many women.

John Berger's book *Ways of Seeing,* which I was first introduced to in my mid-20s, was highly influential on my approach to working with these topics.[2]  A follow-up to the eponymous 1972 four-part television series, it explored the history of Western art, encouraging the viewer to contemplate how they look at paintings, considering the cultural, technological and political influences which might be at play and

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[2] The book was a collaboration between John Berger, Sven Blomberg, Chris Fox, Michael Dibb, and Richard Hollis however it is commonly credited only to Berger and as such I will reference Berger's text or Berger's ideas.

further, how this might inform and impact on our understanding of ourselves within the world.

The second and third of Berger's essays focus on the portrayal of women in European art, predominantly the female nude, and are particularly relevant to contextualise my approach to the works contained in this thesis. These essays suggest that in Western art the naked female body serves purely to fulfil male sexual desire; the depiction of her facial expression and body position often shows that she is on display for an individual male viewer with no independent (sexual) desires of her own. Berger highlights modern culture's continuation of this practice by juxtaposing historic female nude paintings with photographs from "girlie magazines" (Berger's term for 20th Century pornography, e.g. *Playboy* magazine) and advertising materials. In both the historical and contemporary images, the women's body position and facial expression are incredibly similar.

These theories were not new at the time and the collaborators on *Ways of Seeing* did not claim to invent them, however Berger's book was my first experience of seeing these ideas expressed in such an honest, straightforward way, and also from a male perspective.[3]  It reminded me of how in my teenage and early adult years I was acutely aware of the sexualisation of the female body, nude or otherwise, and also the objectification of women but without fully understanding it.

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[3] "The male gaze" was later coined by film theorist Laura Mulvey in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975). She used the phrase to describe a sexualised way of looking at women in cinema whereby the heterosexual male viewer is empowered through this gaze and the woman thus objectified.

From that time, Berger's writing prompted me to look deeper and reflect on my own experiences through a different lens, taking the effects of social conditioning into consideration.

> "A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself … From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman… Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another."
>
> (Berger, 2008, p.40)

This was exactly how I felt growing up, if not consciously as a child then certainly from my mid-teens onwards; acutely aware of how I looked and acted, how others, particularly men, saw me and what they thought, and how this affected and continued to affect my own self-image. I have learned this behaviour of heightened self-surveillance (both mental and physical) over many years, adopting it as part of my psyche, yet despite my awareness of how detrimental it can be I feel unable to let go of it.

In this commentary I will look at how these ideas find their way into my work. For example, *Perception of Layers/Layers of Perception* explores the gaze most explicitly and simply and *How to Undress in Front of Your Husband* uses archive film material to critique notions of gender stereotypes and a patriarchal view of femininity. Other works, such as *Intimacy* and *Subtext*, explore these ideas on a

subtler level, affording me the opportunity to reclaim a sense of agency over my 'surveyed' self by choosing how I put myself on display within the work and for the audience.

## 1.3  Music Alone is Not Enough

Using music as a vehicle to express emotion and personal narrative is long-established in many genres, and words/lyrics are perhaps the most immediate way of conveying both emotion and meaning. However, I believe that purely instrumental music poses a bigger challenge as there is a distinct difference between expressing emotion and trying to convey a perceivable sense of meaning or 'aboutness'.

For this reason, much of my research has involved experimenting with the combination of music alongside non-musical media, including photography, video, text/spoken word and physical performance, using these as tools to more effectively express and convey personal subject matter. This stems from Chion's theory of "added value" (Chion, 1994) and performance art's potential to create narrative through the amalgamation of performance and visual material. Jennifer Walshe has coined this combination of composition with the extra-musical as *The New Discipline*, describing it as a way to:

"connect compositions which have a wide range of disparate interests but all share the common concern of being rooted in the physical, theatrical and visual, as well as musical; pieces which often invoke the extra-musical, which activate the non-cochlear. In performance, these are works in which the ear, the eye and the brain are expected to be active and engaged. Works in which we understand that there are people on the stage, and that these people are/have bodies."

(Walshe, 2016)

My approach to working with a number of these non-musical ideas has been influenced by artists/performers such as Marina Abramović, Adrian Howells, Carolee Schneemann and Cindy Sherman. Their aesthetics regarding an exploration of the self in performance, the performing self, intimacy, presence, their use of personal material at the heart of the work, and their approach to using their physical body as a canvas or tool to express personal ideas, all resonate strongly with what I aim to achieve in my own practice. A visual element is also key to my exploration of visibility/visible presence, the physical representation of personal narrative and my role as 'the observed'; these artists' individual disciplines often favour a visual approach either as the primary focus, for instance Sherman's self-portraiture which uses photography to critique gender and identity, or as a joint focus, as in Howells' intimate theatre practice where attention to visual detail was of equal importance to performance-based content.

Some key works which exemplify the aforementioned ideas include: *The Artist is Present* (2010), a durational performance in the atrium of MoMA, New York, where Abramović sat silently at a table opposite an empty chair for a total of 700 hours,

waiting for people to come and sit opposite her to engage in silent eye contact; Howells' *Foot Washing for the Sole* (2008), a one-to-one performance which involved Howells performing a ritual of washing, drying, massaging and kissing each participant's feet in an effort to explore "bodily confession" and to promote silent reflection and contemplation, for both Howells and the audience participant (Heddon and Howells, 2011); and Schneemann's video work *Fuses* (1964-67). *Fuses* saw Schneemann make video footage of her and her then-partner having sex to explore the *female* gaze in relation to sex and intimacy (as opposed to the normative 'male gaze' as discussed in Berger, 1972 and Mulvey, 1975), and to reclaim, through the use of her body as the subject, her ownership and autonomy over her body and its representation.

By employing a mixed-media approach in my own work, I have been able to explore different aspects of visibility and presence, for example in a mediated sense through the use of video or pre-recorded audio, or in a live and immediate way through my physical presence and performance within the work. I have also been able to investigate different ways of creating additional layers of meaning and 'aboutness' in the works in this thesis, particularly when exploring themes which are inherently more visual by nature - identity, self, visibility and 'the gaze'.

## 1.4  The Composer as Non-Musical Performer

There was a time in Western classical music when the roles of composer and performer were intertwined, with many composers performing their own works and/or conducting them, however, through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries these roles gradually became separate and the combined role of the

composer/performer is subsequently less common today. In my own work I wanted to further explore and push the boundaries of the composer's role in performance, choosing to focus on <u>non-musical</u> performance for three primary reasons. Firstly, the need to feel more deeply connected to my full creative process, particularly in relation to the representation of personal narrative; secondly, my wish to reclaim performance on my own terms by creating specific performance-based roles for myself which are pertinent to the subject matter being explored; and thirdly, a desire to bring an element of visibility into a role which is nowadays generally less so, particularly with regard to the visibility of *female* composers in what is still a male-dominated world.

By developing and performing non-musical roles in my work I feel more personally and physically connected to the work as a whole, especially in relation to the personal narrative contained therein. This is what I missed when writing purely note-based music. At the same time, I can set my own boundaries and maintain a sense of agency over my performance without being hindered by anxiety-related instrumental performance baggage from my past. Of course, this does not mean that the work is without these types of challenges, but they are *different* and I feel better equipped to manage them. For example, I still find it challenging to watch video footage of myself during the lengthy editing process (also a very solitary activity) and as such I need to ensure that I am mentally prepared for the task beforehand. This process of self-surveillance, alongside my aim to bring visibility to my role as the composer within the performance of the work, links with Berger's concept of the surveyor and the surveyed, and the ways in which I choose to 'edit' myself depending on how I wish to present my self within the work. In the subsequent sections focusing on the individual works, I will describe how the aforementioned elements manifest in each.

# 2. Discussion of Individual Works

## 2.1 *Perception of Layers/Layers of Perception*

The subjects of identity, self-image and gender are fertile ground for exploration for me as a female artist and this was how I chose to begin my PhD journey in 2010/11. Influenced by Mulvey's idea of "the male gaze", Berger's "surveyor and surveyed" and the work of artists Carolee Schneemann and Cindy Sherman, I set out to investigate my personal relationship with image, identity, femininity and 'conventional' idealised beauty. Given the inherently visual nature of these subjects, I chose to use video as the medium.

*Perception of Layers/Layers of Perception* is a silent visual installation which shows a single looped video, projected simultaneously on two screens on opposite walls of a black box space. Relating to Berger's duality above, the title of the work and its display on opposing screens signify the idea of a mirror, drawing attention to the main external conduit for *self*-surveillance. The unrelenting cyclical process of being simultaneously the surveyor and the surveyed is further highlighted through the continuous looping of the piece. In the video itself, the body (MY body) is seen as both subject and object, representing the site of the work and the site of the research.

My creative aims were threefold: firstly, to explore video as a tool for conveying personal narrative; secondly, to explore my (mediated) presence within the work; and finally, to feel a strong sense of agency in relation to the finished material and its presentation. *Perception of Layers/Layers of Perception* was my first video work

and also the first to explore the boundaries of my role as a composer; it played a key role in laying the foundations for my research and the work which followed.

I decided on a simple binary A-B structure for the video,[4] reinforced by the two opposing screens on which the work was displayed.[5]  My experience of working with visual media was limited so I worked with cinematographer John Young for this piece. From the start I had clear ideas of the images and shots that I wanted and fully directed the shoot and subsequent edit. This sense of agency, particularly over the editing process, symbolised my agency over my own surveyed body on-screen. I was putting myself on display to be surveyed and observed, but on my own terms.

> "Going far beyond highlighting a woman's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself. Playing on the tension between film as controlling the dimension of time (editing, narrative) and film as controlling the dimension of space (changes in distance, editing), cinematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire."
>
> (Mulvey, 1975, p. 17)

The visual material in the A section acts to disrupt Mulvey's theory of the male gaze and "measure of desire" by unpicking traditional stereotypes and desexualising the/my female body on screen. This is achieved by carrying out a number of actions, sometimes in a ritualistic way, using my own body as the canvas. Mascara and

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[4] The "A" section runs to 5'54, also referred to later as the "first half" of the video and the "B" section runs from 5'54 to the end, also referred to as the "second half".
[5] The binary format is also a reference to Berger's idea of the two selves.

lipstick are continually applied/reapplied in layers, smeared and smudged onto my skin after each application, distorting the idea of make-up as a means to make oneself more beautiful and attractive. I slowly bind my breasts with bandages to diminish this aspect of my femininity and use reversed footage of shaving my armpits and legs so that my body hair is 'reapplied'. All of these acts challenge and subvert the idea of the male gaze by presenting my body in direct opposition to a sexualised, hair-free and flawless one, conveying a self-constructed narrative through/with my own body.

In the B section the focus shifts to that of self-observation where I am seen looking at, altering and arranging photographs of myself. By cutting myself out of photographs and arranging these cut-outs in different ways to create a collage (see 7'34 to 8'04), I play with the notion of multiple ideas of self and how they might be represented. Later, through the use of a copy of *Vogue* fashion magazine, attention is drawn to the world of advertising as a vehicle for selling certain ideas and ideals about the 'perfect' lifestyle, image and identity. I used the magazine pages to create paper doll cut-outs – signifying clone mentality.

In the opening sequence I am seen writing the phrases "*Is this me?*", "*Who is me?*", "*I am me*" on a close-up photograph of my face. There is a subtraction involved in this act – a removal of the self from the self, a stepping back to the role of the observer, questioning my own identity. These phrases, and variations on them, appear again later in the work, reinforcing the cyclical nature of continuous observation - reanalysing and rethinking the self. Close-up shots, particularly in the first half of the video, are important in representing the idea of self-surveillance; a way of fragmenting my body (my*self*) into separate examinable parts as opposed to a unified

whole. These close-ups also highlight the intimacy contained in the proximity of the gaze and the vulnerability that this detailed scrutiny invites.

My approach to making video was guided by composition-based thinking and as such there are a number of fundamental elements in *Perception of Layers/Layers of Perception* which relate both to general musical concepts and my own approach to composition at that time. Before I began filming I created a storyboard as a guide, in the same way that I would sketch a general working plan for a piece of music. As mentioned previously, the work is in binary format and the main subjects (gender, identity, the female body/my body, the influence of the media) are broken down into smaller motifs (e.g. the application and smearing of make-up, armpit and leg shaving, breast-binding, written questions, photographic collages). These motifs are introduced and developed, repeated and/or fragmented, sometimes reappearing much later as punctuation.

One of my objectives was to create a sense of rhythm, structure, texture and pace throughout the work and this guided the filming and editing processes. During the editing process in particular I spent a lot of time considering the pacing of the visual material. For example, in the A section of the video the actions of applying mascara and lipstick, the razor's movement during the shaving sequences, and the fast-paced breathing movements of my abdomen during close-up torso shots all create separate visual rhythms and emphasise repetition.

Page 1 of 1

Storyboard for _Perception of Layers / Layers of Percep_ (page

Is it poss to make it look like camera is blinking?
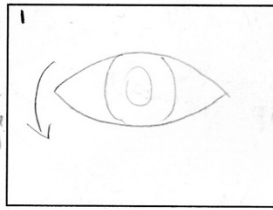
**1** slow-motion blinking (normal mascara, no smear)
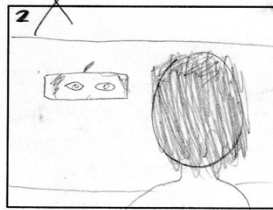
**2** Inside car, eyes in rear-view mirror, poss applying make-up / lipgloss
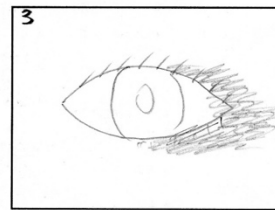
**3** putting on mascara e smearing (repeated) close-up - 1 eye only
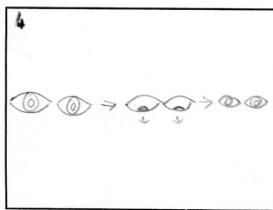
**4** slowly looking down / around then straight stare ahead (normal eyes, no smear)
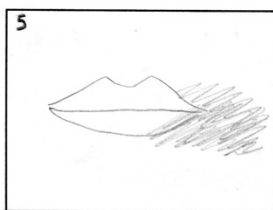
**5** putting on lipstick e smearing (repeated) close-up - lips only
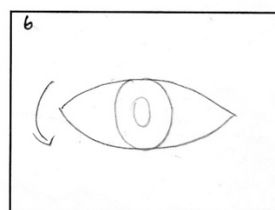
**6** slow-motion blinking (same as opening shot)
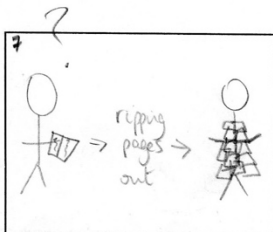
**7** looking through fashion mag ripping out pages e applying to body to make dress
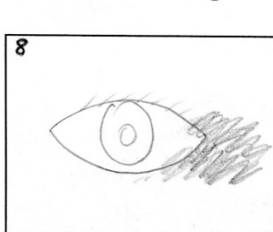
**8** still shot of smeared mascara
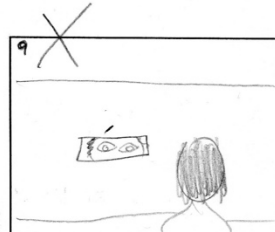
**9** As shot 2, inside car with rear-view mirror, focus on eyes

Where? Poster? Blackboard On self? On mirror
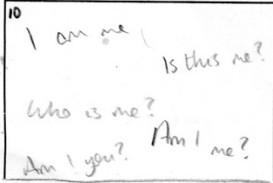
**10** I am me / Is this me? / Who is me? / Am I you? Am I me?
Writing out of phrases
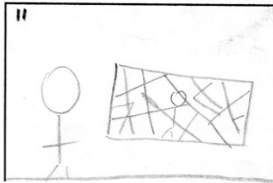
**11** Creation of self-collage
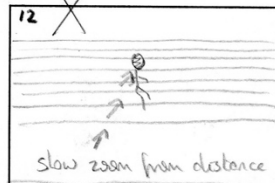
**12** slow zoom from distance steps (near Poike?), camera slowly closer, head down til end, lift reveal white face mask
poss. magg

http://m113mc.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/storyboard_template.jpg   25/01/2011

*Figure 1: The first page from a preliminary storyboard sketch, showing many ideas which didn't make the final work.*

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Storyboard 2 - rewritten    March 1st

O/exp still with camera 'blinking' → Writing on o/exp photo → Mascara smear → eyes clean, looking around

→ still smeared eye / lips being smeared → writing on body 'Is this me?' → shave arm / shave leg | bird →

writing on body 'Am I you?' → either still of clean eye or hair fills screen → from distance - close of hands making collage → close up of hands (same)

→ over shoulder bed collage e looking up → writing on cardboard (floor level?) → couple of shots of moving mirror pics into collage →

birds eye cardboard → (or still of mask on??) KG collage (close up of cutting then over shoulder of comp cutting) → either 'close, out of focus to blank white', still of smeared eye, or 'hair fills screen' →

1st doll stage - looking through mag, tear out page, cut into dolls (don't show final dolls?) → 2nd doll set but don't show → dolls at end (cutaway to close of cutting KG pic) then back close up of scraps dropping →

close of cutting, sat on floor → 3rd doll set → scraps dropping →

back to 3rd set → dolls on wall? → eyes looking around →

smeared eye still → end?? reverse of writing on o/exp photo?

*Figure 2: A reworked, written plan for 'Perception of Layers/Layers of Perception'.*

Where the screen divides into sections there are two instances where I juxtaposed faster and slower material to create texture and pace. The first, seen from 2'41, displays the slowly blinking/staring eye opposite and above the faster-paced footage of applying and smearing lipstick (see Figure 3). The second, from 4'40, places the relatively slow-paced breast binding sequence alongside the hurried movements of shaving (see Figure 4). In the photo collage sequences in the B section of the video there is also an unashamed nod to my composition-based approach, whereby photographs (the material) are arranged, rearranged, layered, shaped and structured in several different ways.

I feel that my initial aims for this piece were achieved and these preliminary ideas are visibly demonstrable in the majority of the works which followed. The process of making *Perception of Layers/Layers of Perceptions* was highly influential and I found video to be a valuable tool for conveying personal narrative, consequently integrating a visual element into my creative practice. I learned a lot from working with John Young, particularly in terms of video editing, and I now edit all video material myself. By taking responsibility for the non-musical elements of my work, I satisfy my desire for a holistic approach to my creative practice. This initial investigation of my presence in the work prompted a deeper exploration of the role of the composer as non-musical performer in later compositions, including the subsequent work, *Intimacy*.
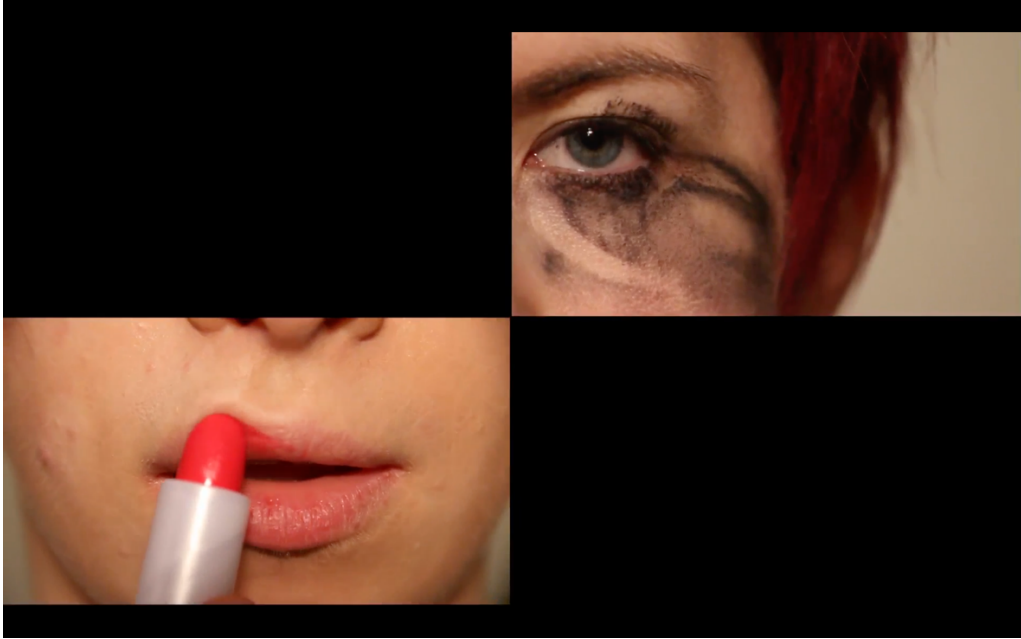
*Figure 3: Video still showing mascara/lipstick smearing section (taken at 2'45).*
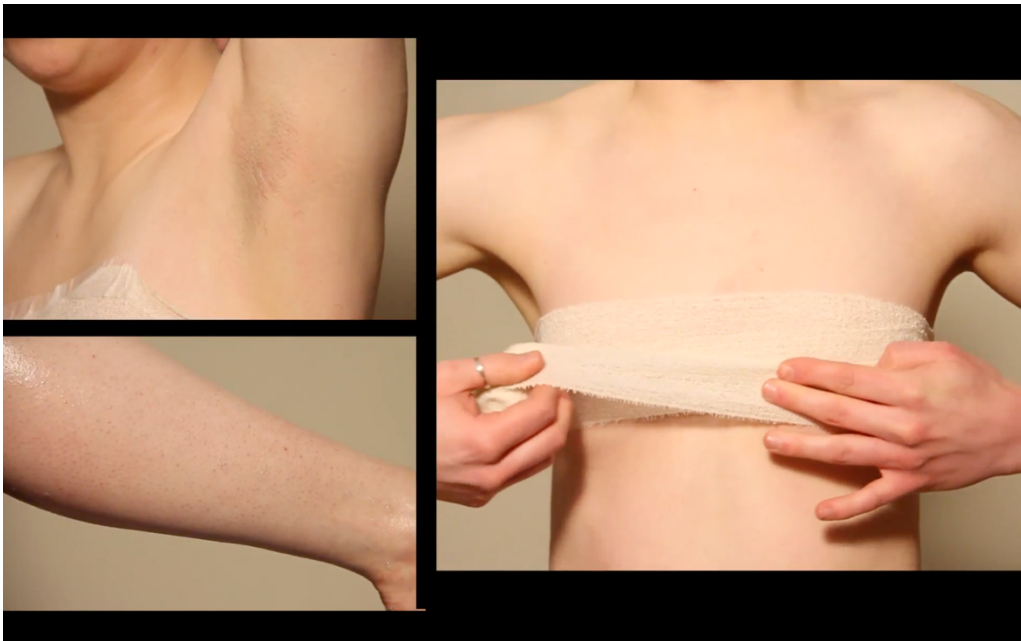


*Figure 4: Video still showing breast binding/shaving section (taken at 4'43).*

## 2.2 *Intimacy*

As a composer, I've always had a somewhat romanticised view of string quartets. I find there is something immensely satisfying about watching four musicians who are completely in sync with each other, with no need for a conductor, communicating through their body language and eye contact, deeply connected on what appears to be more than simply a musical level. There is a choreography to their movements which, of course, can also be seen in an orchestra, however a string quartet is a more innately intimate ensemble and I find this element intriguing. I realise that in a broad sense there are other small ensembles (including flute trios, wind quartets, brass quintets etc.) who could also lay claim to the qualities described above, but the *sound* of a string quartet, combined with its intimate nature, has a greater emotional effect on me.

For these reasons, the string quartet was a perfect vehicle for exploring ideas of intimacy, a subject which I had touched on visually as part of *Perception of Layers/Layers of Perception,* but had not tackled sonically. In hindsight, trying to tackle such a broad subject in *Intimacy* was challenging and somewhat naïve, however it was important for me to attempt to do so at the time. To explain why, I will discuss a little about the background to the piece.

In the autumn of 2011 I decided to take some time away from my work and studies, and for part of that time, from Scotland. *Intimacy*, for string quartet and composer, was the first work I wrote following my return a year later. Due to this break, the quartet started out as a way to slowly exercise my compositional muscles; I wrote intuitively, without initially having any specific subject matter or research theme in

mind. As I gradually began to tune into my self within my writing, I started to explore the idea of intimacy within the quartet itself, looking for ways to create musical relationships and dialogues between the players and exploring different ways of creating synchronicity and divergence. As I went deeper into the writing process, I could see that my own experience of and attitude towards intimacy was key to this work and started more consciously to investigate the combination of these two ideas.

On a personal level, I had been struggling with the ideas and realities of intimacy, both during my leave of absence and also as I was writing the work. I felt an almost constant internal conflict between a deep need to create and experience meaningful connections in my life and a wish to distance myself from intimacy as much as I could, partly as a means of self-protection. Considering Copland's thoughts on composition as a quest for self-knowledge and discovery (as previously discussed on page 9), I hoped that by investigating these ideas through my creative process I might gain a better sense of self-awareness and understanding in relation to the subject. Like many of the works which followed, the composition process invited (and required) taxing periods of self-analysis and reflection, however my deeper understanding of the true nature of this work came much later, being fully realised in *Creating Intimacy,* which was completed in 2018. This work will be discussed in greater detail later in this commentary.

Through *Intimacy,* I explored my dichotomous feelings about the subject both by means of the musical material and my performance within the work. Communication, connection and tension were the main themes explored in the compositional process itself, with the elements of vulnerability, presence, and to

some degree tension, investigated through my presence within the work. My performative role is passive and involves me sitting on-stage in the middle of the quartet as they perform the score, making eye contact with members of the audience, one at a time, holding each gaze for 10-15 seconds before choosing someone else.[6] At this early stage of my research, I wanted to experiment with the most basic elements of intimate performance – eye contact and presence – but without the risk of a truly intimate performance in the sense of the theatrical genre. (See discussion in the chapter on *Creating Intimacy).*

To all intents and purposes I am there as part of the ensemble – we walk on stage together, take our places in the usual manner, are seated in a traditional layout (with me in the centre of the ensemble) and each have a score and music stand. However, unlike the quartet, my role is silent and I have no musical instrument. As the 'mute composer', I highlight my reliance on the quartet to reliably perform and convey my emotions/feelings through the score, whilst simultaneously trying to be as physically close to that experience as possible, as opposed to sitting in the audience, somewhat removed. There is an inherent awkwardness in my presence (particularly from the audience's perspective) as I am clearly not part of the quartet in a musical sense and due to my sustained eye contact with individual audience members. There is also a disparity in terms of perceived effort, in that I appear as a passive member of the ensemble whilst the quartet actively perform almost thirty minutes of continuous music.

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[6] This eye contact is intended as a gentle, silent acknowledgement of each audience member - not unnerving or intimidating in any way, i.e. I was looking, not staring.

The work is written as one movement and within this structure there are eight smaller sub-sections. Each has a contrasting mood and feel to that of its neighbour, often switching between gentle, sonorous, harmonic passages and angular, harsh, discordant material.

| Section | Bar numbers | Expression/Tempo marking |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 - 94 | Tentative ♩ = 60 |
| 2 | 95 - 133 | Tender, sweet ♩ = c. 48 |
| 3 | 134 - 324 | Light, lively ♩. = 100 |
| 4 | 325 - 378 | Dark, sombre ♩ = 48 |
| 5 | 379 - 486 | Light but with a little more intensity ♩. = 100 |
| 6 | 487 - 523 | Tender, sweet ♩ = c. 48 |
| 7 | 524 - 565 | Agitated ♩ = 100 (♩. = ♩) |
| 8 | 566 - end | Meno Mosso ♩ = 48 |

The music in sections 1, 5 and 7 is written in such a way as to create an underlying feeling of tension and unease, employing augmented and diminished intervals/chords, unresolved dissonances, asynchronous rhythms, sudden shifts in and extremes of dynamics and articulation (for example, moving very abruptly back and forth between *arco* and *pizzicato*), and individual lines which attempt to alienate the performers from one another as opposed to bringing them together as an ensemble (particularly noticeable in sections 1 and 7). I have included section 3 as one of the contrasting sections as although it is stylistically more congruent than the other more angular sections, it differs in style and mood to sections 2 and 4, being more playful, light-hearted and scherzo-like.

In sections 2, 4, 6 and 8, the pulse and rhythmic pace is slower, using lyrical material which is mostly built on smooth, melodic lines and conversation-like duets between

two instruments, often making use of open strings and double stopping to create rich sonorities. However, these sections are always abruptly interrupted by the contrasting material in sections 3, 5 and 7, with diametrically opposite effects. The sudden, often unprepared shifts add a greater degree of tension, further highlighting a sense of dichotomy.

One of the compositional tools I employed in this work was altered repetition: firstly, to create a sense of recognition and familiarity with material heard earlier in the work; and secondly to create tension and anticipation by later repeating previously heard excerpts but cutting them short to leave them unfinished and inconclusive. For example, excerpts from section 2 are repeated in section 6, but suddenly interrupted by the angular material of section 7 (which is actually a repetition of some of the material initially heard in section 1) before they can reach any form of conclusion.

Mirroring some of these compositional elements in the score, my physical on-stage presence also introduces the element of anticipation. It is more than likely that the audience, seeing an extra person on stage, will assume that something more is going to happen, perhaps asking themselves *"What is she going to do?", "Is she going to do anything?", "Why is she sitting there like that?"*. The anticipation is never fulfilled. There is no 'climax' to my presence; my role does not change or progress like the music and instead I remain impassive.

*Intimacy* continued my initial investigation of my physical presence within my work, finding ways to take ownership of my narrative whilst creating a musical representation of my emotions as opposed to conveying a clear message or 'aboutness' to the audience. After the performance of this piece I had to ask myself

who the 'aboutness' was really for. Was it enough for *me* to feel that additional layer of meaning or did I actually want to do more to try and convey that meaning more explicitly to the audience in future works? *Intimacy* also expanded on my initial investigation into the vulnerability involved in being the subject and object of the work, this time considering my presence in a live setting with all of the risks and vulnerabilities that live performance brings. This preliminary investigation of live presence informed subsequent explorations in *Subtext,* the first version of *Between the Lines,* and *Creating Intimacy,* the final work in this folio.

## 2.3 *Subtext*

In 2013 I embarked on a collaborative project with an ex-partner to compose a work using our relationship as its subject matter. This project fell through a few months into the process but having spent time developing the initial idea I decided to use some of the concepts and materials to create a new work, *Subtext*, as a personal response to the situation. *Subtext,* for composer-narrator (where I am the narrator) and ensemble, uses music, narrative and spoken word to explore themes of relationships and expectations of others, including those which are unmet and unfulfilled.

My script in *Subtext* is a combination of my own writing (a fusion of text intended for the original work and prose written specifically for *Subtext*) and short excerpts from authors and/or books which had significant connections to my ex-partner and our relationship, including Haruki Murakami, Ani diFranco, Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*. The passages selected from these books all relate to themes explored in *Subtext* and each passage also contains its own literal subtext.

This piece expanded on my non-musical involvement in two previous works, *Perceptions of Layers/Layers of Perceptions* and *Intimacy,* both of which were immersive and embodied but silent roles. For *Subtext*, in addition to my role as the composer I became the scriptwriter and on-stage narrator, literally giving myself a voice within the work and facilitating a sense of agency over this aspect of the/my performance. These were roles I explored further by way of a fictitious character and storyline in *Between the Lines,* a collaborative work made during the last few months

of working on *Subtext*. Both pieces were completed at approximately the same time (March 2014) with the first performance of *Between the Lines* taking place in April before *Subtext'*s premiere in May of the same year.

Alongside the ensemble, the original, abandoned work was to have had both myself and my ex-partner as performers on stage; *Subtext* subsequently had only myself. In the first performance I sat downstage right at a writing desk with the ensemble centre-stage behind me. My performance was purposefully introspective and I chose not to address the audience directly. Reading aloud from books and notepads at my desk, lit by a desktop reading lamp, I wanted the audience to feel that they were witness to something personal and private.

Unlike my presence within the quartet in *Intimacy,* in *Subtext* I positioned myself as clearly separated from the ensemble, creating a different sense of otherness, both for me as a performer and also visibly to the audience. This form of division or separation might be interpreted differently in, for instance, a concerto where the soloist is separated from the orchestra but maintains a musical dialogue and connection with the other musicians. In *Subtext,* the idea of otherness is furthered by the fact that I have an entirely separate non-musical role as solo narrator (of my own experience). Divided from the ensemble in this way, my on-stage presence coupled with the subject matter and delivery of personal texts added an extra layer of vulnerability to my presence within the work.

Many of the passages in the score are similar to what Chion describes as "empathetic" in terms of film music (1994, p.8). Written to musically portray ideas contained within the spoken text, they add an element of self-expression, however

the true sense of 'aboutness' can only be conveyed through the combination of all of the elements within the work: music, the aforementioned staging and delivery, and the use of text.

My introspective performance approach is mirrored in the opening section: a solo pianissimo pedal C followed by individual pizzicato notes separated by silence. Everything is slow and measured to create a sense of space, both in terms of the instrumentation, the limitation of only 5 pitches, and the use of silence.

> "Wherever it starts or ends, there is a centre. A calm, quiet place of understanding. Sometimes we stay close to it, and sometimes we drift so far and so fast that we forget it exists at all. But regardless of proximity, we are always dancing around it."
>
> (Mackay, *Subtext,* 2014)

I wrote this text for the beginning of *Subtext* and then drew on it to inform the music contained in the first section of the work. The pedal C heard from the beginning through to letter F correlates to the (tonal) centre described above and the D, E flat and F, gradually introduced in sequence, "dance around it". At first the D and E flat are sporadic, heard only as individual pitches, but from bar 49 (marimba) more rhythmic/melodic gestures using all four notes (C, D, E flat and F) gradually creep in, later joined by the violin and viola. These initial short motifs serve as an introduction to what will come at letter F; the build-up is gradual, steady and measured, suddenly becoming much more intense and aggressive before letter F itself where the tension is finally released.

The subsequent section from letter F is adapted from a passage intended for the abandoned work. Inspired by features found in rock and pop music, the music here is formed around a steady, syncopated riff with a 'groove' feel, simple 8-bar phrases and frequent use of repetition, creating a somewhat hypnotic, persistent effect. During this section quotes from Ani diFranco's song *Know Now Then*, which has a personal connection but is also a nod to the rock/pop music influence, are spoken over the music:

> "All along it was the wrong song and dance. I just stood there… helpless… Maybe we never were as close as we should have been, but I didn't know what I know now then."
>
> (DiFranco, 1999)

The steady groove continues until the next main text excerpt, from Murakami's novel *The Wind Up Bird Chronicle*, which focuses on miscommunication and lack of communication. Here the groove becomes gradually fragmented and disjointed (starting at letter J), faltering like a stuck record. The effect is intensified by the constant shift between 2/4 and 3/4 time signatures and the introduction of syncopation and cross-rhythms in the rest of the ensemble, particularly the 4:3 hemiola on the woodblock. All the while the riff struggles to maintain its original precise momentum but is audibly breaking down and falling apart – a metaphor in itself.

In the sudden dramatic silence immediately before letter P, the spoken text is pensive, concluding "… *do we really know anything important about anyone?*" and the mood returns to one of reflection and contemplation. Referencing the opening

text, *"Wherever it starts or ends, there is a centre"*, the work comes full circle and elements from the beginning of the work are revisited including the pedal C and the D, E flat and F "dancing around it" in the double bass, second cello and marimba. The flute, clarinet and horn create a secondary layer on top of this, quietly playing slow contrapuntal lines. Their material is melancholic, evocative and introspective.

I sit quietly at my desk as the final bars are played by the ensemble and the house lights slowly fade to black. The performance ends.

Following the premières of both this work and *Between the Lines* the previous month, I found that there were a few questions I had to ask myself regarding the direction my work would take from here. In terms of conveying an additional layer of meaning, I felt that the inclusion of a spoken narrative was useful, however it felt more so in *Between the Lines* than in *Subtext*. Although I had personal challenges with the performance of *Between the Lines* due to its fictional nature (which I will discuss in the next section), the spoken narrative did create a clear, albeit fictional, storyline. I felt that the narrative and meaning in *Subtext* was somewhat more ambiguous than I initially intended and as such, somewhat less successful on a personal level.[7] At this point I was also unsure if I wanted to stick with a fully mediated presentation of self (i.e. through video), or continue with both live and mediated versions. For all but the penultimate work, *Creating Intimacy,* I chose to continue to explore a fully mediated presence, enjoying the sense of agency that this afforded over my surveyed self.

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[7] At the time of writing the work I felt that revealing more personal details may have created a difficult situation, and as such I held back.

## 2.4  *Between the Lines*

*Between the Lines* is a collaborative work which combines music, spoken word and video, made with close friend and fellow composer, Thomas Butler. The piece was first performed in 2014 using pre-recorded video and audio, live cello and live spoken word and now exists solely as a video. The content is identical to the live version, only pre-recorded and edited to create a fully mediated audiovisual work.[8]  I perform as the narrator and on-screen character in both versions.

We had two principal aims in this work: firstly, to explore shared interests in creating narrative through the amalgamation of non-musical media and composition and secondly, to be fully collaborative, working together on all aspects of the creative process as far as was possible. Tom and I had both previously adopted mixed-media practices in our individual creative processes but this was our first time collaborating together. The roles of composer and scriptwriter were shared by co-creating the music and text through a process of passing excerpts and ideas back and forth, editing each other's work until a mutual outcome was reached. We also worked together in a similar way to plan a corresponding visual sequence, with Tom as the photographer and myself as the subject. Due to time constraints in the latter stages of the project, Tom carried out the final editing process on his own however, since we had previously discussed this in-depth, this too felt more like a joint process.

*Between the Lines* primarily explores the subjects of self and identity through a fictitious storyline involving a character who is torn between two perceptions of

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[8] The video version is not a recording of the live performance to serve as documentation but a separate standalone work.

herself. She struggles with personal challenges and memories from her past and remains stuck in cyclical, self-destructive behaviour patterns. Only the voice of the narrator is heard in the work; the on-screen character is silent throughout. In the original live performance, I was visible on-stage as the narrator, however in the subsequent mediated version the narrator is unseen.

Regarding the subject of identity, Tom and I set out to create ambiguity around the "I" and "she/her" personas contained within the work, as evidenced in this excerpt from the beginning of the script:

> "I hadn't slept well. I'd had another dream about her. It happens less often now but I still feel anxious each night before I go to bed. I never know what triggers her arrival … I blame her for my lack of willpower. I blame her for lots of other things too: my lack of productivity, my financial insecurity, the fact I can no longer form significant attachments and my increasing impatience at everyone around me."
>
> (Butler and Mackay, *Between the Lines,* 2014)

At the beginning of the work there is an implication that two separate characters are involved – the "I" who appears to be narrating her daily routine/thoughts and the "she/her" who is imagined and unseen. The 'reveal' that the "I" and "she" are the same person (the on-screen character) happens midway through the piece when the video loops back to footage similar to that seen in the opening sequence. However, this time instead of seeing the character getting out of bed (as at the beginning), we now view the character 'seeing herself' in her bed (see Figure 5).

*Figure 5: Video still showing the character seeing herself in her own bed (at 5'07).*

From this point onwards the character regularly appears twice on screen simultaneously through the use of layered images, perpetuating the idea of a double sense of self/identity and introducing the idea of self-awareness and self-surveillance (see Figure 6). The invisibility of the narrator in the mediated video version also raises some important questions: Who is speaking and who is performing? Whose story is being told? Which of the character's selves is being performed?

These questions can also be considered to an extent in terms of the first (live) performance of the work which raised a number of personal issues for me. It took place in April 2014 as part of a concert of new mixed-media and experimental music works in the small, intimate performance venue above The Old Hairdressers bar in Glasgow. The setting was fairly informal with a bar in the corner of the room and a performance area which the audience stood around in a semi-circle. Each work was introduced by title, composer(s) and performer(s) and there were no programme notes accompanying any of the works.
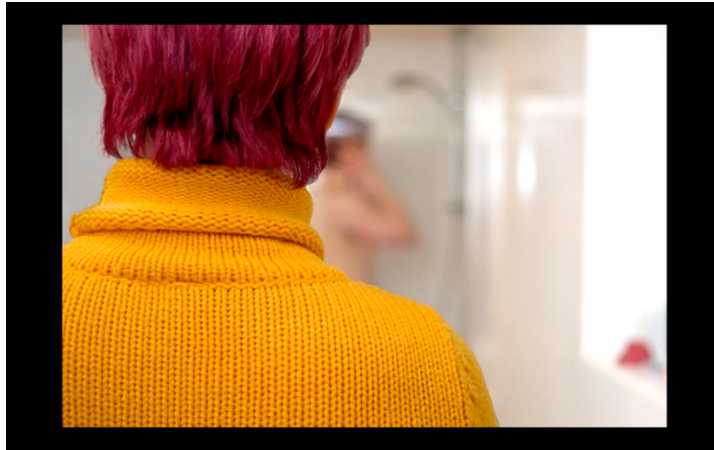
*Figure 6: Video stills showing the character appearing twice on screen simultaneously – at 7'18 (top) and 8'49 (bottom).*

During our performance I sat at a small desk 'stage left', lit by a reading lamp, with a small notebook and a glass of red wine to hand.[9]  My script was written in this notebook and I read my lines from it as though reading from a personal diary – an approach I also took in *Subtext* which I had started writing a few months prior to this piece. Laura Sergeant, our cellist, sat opposite me 'stage right', and the video was projected onto a large screen situated behind us. During the performance everything went entirely as planned and immediately afterwards, I felt that it had been successful.

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[9] The red wine is a direct reference to the text spoken at the beginning of the work: "A glass of wine used to help me relax. Now it takes at least three" and again at the end: "A glass of wine used to help me relax; now it takes at least three. I need this drink because in the morning the air will be knocked from my lungs. Day One." (Butler and Mackay, *Between the Lines,* 2014).

Unfortunately, I was quite naïve to think that the audience would automatically understand this piece as a work of fiction and was completely unprepared for some comments I received after the performance. I remember two in particular saying how brave it was to discuss something so personal in front of an audience, also making enquiries about my mental health. They were only two individual comments but it made me wonder how many other people had thought the same thing without saying.[10]  I felt judged and vulnerable because, although the whole work was a collaborative effort, Tom's roles were less visible, less immediate, and therefore less open to direct critique.

This post-performance experience prompted some deeper personal reflection, particularly in relation to Berger's theory of "the surveyor and the surveyed". I considered how we had used my flat as the location for all of the photographs, that I had worn my own clothes, was surrounded by all of my personal belongings, but playing the character of someone else. Part of me wonders if, since being myself in my work is such a fundamental aspect of my creative practice, one that feels like second nature, that I could have blurred the lines between myself and my fictitious character in the live performance so much that it felt like she was an extension of myself, thus taking audience members' comments as a reflection on *my* self and not the *character's* self/story? It highlighted that I was still concerned with how people saw me and what they thought, particularly in relation to feeling deeply uncomfortable with being misperceived or misrepresented.

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[10] I actually had a third experience of this a few weeks after the concert when a fellow RCS student, unknown to me at the time, approached me in the gym to discuss the piece and enquire about the (narrative) content. He seemed fairly relieved when I assured him that the story was fictitious and that I was playing a character!

This period of reflection was partly responsible for the creation of a second fully mediated, video-only version, and also raised interesting questions about the broader sociocultural expectations and perceptions of a classical composer's role. When a composer's non-musical presence is part of the work, do the audience automatically assume that the composer will be portraying themselves and not a character?

To return to the practicalities of making the work, the visual aspect was made by editing and blending together a sequence of still photographs to make a video, similar to the process of making stop-motion animation. The pre-recorded audio track combines a number of individual elements: a cello part, diegetic sounds which correlate with images on-screen, and processed sounds which use the cello material and/or the diegetic recordings as their source. The solo cello's melodic lines are predominantly calm, lyrical and melancholic, with the occasional hint of underlying tension, bearing similarities to the mood of the spoken text. Towards the end of the work, two cello recordings are layered to create the effect of the cello performing a duet with itself - a final musical reference to the idea of the two selves being portrayed in the piece. Most of the background sounds are used to convey a sense of movement, an extra layer that does not exist in the images themselves: the sound of running water (bathroom tap/shower), teeth being brushed and later the sounds of passing traffic as the character looks out of the window.

We approached the creation of a consistent sound world by making explicit connections between the three sources of sonic material, primarily focusing on pitch and texture. The environmental recordings were manipulated to create more 'musical' material, for example the unprocessed sound of running water in the shower was combined with tuned pitches (created by digitally manipulating the

original recorded sounds) to form chords and create a harmonic texture. A similar approach was taken to the recordings of traffic noise, generating more definitive pitches through digitally manipulating the source recording. This new pitch-oriented material could then be used alongside the cello figures to form a homogenous soundscape. Examples of this are heard where harmonic and melodic intervallic relationships are created by combining cello harmonics with the processed running water chords (1'15 to 2'34 and 5'12 to 5'55) and also by blending the sound of the solo cello into the recording of moving traffic and vice versa (4'06 to 5'05).

I feel that the fully mediated version better represents the overall ideas contained within the work, particularly the lack of a visible narrator which raises further questions about character, identity and the self whose story is being narrated. In terms of research, performing the work live was a valuable experiment to test out some of our ideas.

## 2.5  *How to Undress in Front of Your Husband*

After making *Perception of Layers/Layers of Perception,* my initial work about gender, identity and image, I knew there was more I needed to explore and my next work based on these themes, *How to Undress in Front of Your Husband,* was almost four years in the making.

I wanted to create a piece which considered the longstanding sociocultural pressures placed on women to conform to certain 'ideals' to look, feel, be, or act a certain way, and the resulting impact that this has on self-esteem and body image. To varying degrees, this is something that has had an impact on me since my teenage years and is a challenge I still face today in my mid-30s. When I was a teenager in the late 90s/early noughties the messages were delivered predominantly through advertising. Magazines showing 'perfect' airbrushed celebrities and anorexic models were the norm. Today, advertising continues to be a significant channel for selling women an unrealistic lifestyle but the internet and social media are more recent instigators, especially thanks to the selfie phenomenon. There are even countless phone apps which allow you to modify your selfies (or any photo, I suppose) to make you look taller, skinnier, give yourself flawless skin, alter the contours of your face, whiten your teeth and much more.

In 2015 I discovered an artistic project which highlighted just how problematic image-based low self-esteem continues to be, particularly for young girls. Louise Orwin's performance project *Pretty Ugly*, which began in early 2012, drew on a worrying YouTube phenomenon which sees girls as young as eight posting videos of

themselves on YouTube asking their viewing audience to rate them as "pretty or ugly" in the comments section underneath. (Orwin, n.d.)

It shocked and upset me that they not only considered themselves to be ugly but that they were asking strangers to confirm their fears. Part of Orwin's project saw her interviewing teenage girls about their experiences with social media, including some who had made these videos:

> "In many of the interviews I found the girls answering that they knew they shouldnt [sic] see looking good as an important part of their lives, but that it was almost necessary: 'to get higher socially', 'to talk to boys', 'to feel good'. Alarmingly, despite this niggling awareness, I found that many of the girls didn't identify with the concept of feminism either."
>
> <div align="right">(ibid)</div>

This mentality is not limited to the current generation and I wanted to address not only the detrimental effect of image-biased sociocultural pressures, but also the fact that this has been happening for a long time. The resulting work, *How to Undress in Front of Your Husband,* is a partly provocative, partly cathartic, personal response to this subject, for video, pre-recorded audio and 14-piece ensemble.

The work begins with a short video (in place of a traditional programme note). Filmed in my bathroom, whilst standing at the sink looking into the mirror, I introduce myself and discuss the work and its themes. As I do so, I apply blusher and lipstick and curl my eyelashes, interspersing this footage with short video clips from the main body of the work, referencing some of the material which will follow (see

Figure 7). This introductory video is filmed in a style which resembles some of the adverts and marketing videos which appear later, and is intended to be humorous, poking fun at the expectations described.[11]  However, alongside the humour there is also an awareness that in this instance, applying make up and 'beautifying' oneself remains a sociocultural expectation, and one that I adhere to on a daily basis.



*Figure 7: Video stills of me applying lipstick in the video introduction (top) juxtaposed with two similar images taken from the main body of the work (bottom).*

[11] For instance, I am seen applying lipstick immediately after discussing 'educational' videos designed to help women get a man's attention.

To highlight the similarities between the sociocultural pressures on women almost eighty years ago and those still experienced today, the main body of the work uses archive video material from films made between the 1930s and 1950s, many of which were aimed specifically at women for educational purposes. These films predominantly focus on themes of beauty, body image, domestic work and social etiquette with titles including *Are You Popular?* (1947), *How to Be Well Groomed* (1949) and *The Way to Beauty* (1959). The majority of the 'sage advice' contained within these films is delivered by an eloquent male voiceover – the ultimate stereotypical authority figure perhaps? – and essentially these films were how-to guides demonstrating *expected* feminine behaviour.

Like *Perception of Layers/Layers of Perception,* this work features a clear visual narrative which can be divided into four main sections, each exploring a specific subject: the videos in section 1 focus on dressing/clothing; section 2 is based on hair and make-up; section 3 explores weight loss; and section 4 looks at beauty treatments and therapies.



*Figure 8: A video still from the opening of my video for 'How to Undress in Front of Your Husband', showing footage taken from an original film titled 'How to Undress' by Dwain Esper (1937).*

> **Voiceover:** *"Down through the ages women have paid meticulous attention to the matter of dressing. They have consumed hours and hours in getting just the precise effect desired... You know the average woman will use every bit of feminine trickery at her command to sell herself to the man she loves."*
>
> (narrator in *How to Undress*, 1937)

Spoken by an invisible male narrator with a 1930s transatlantic accent, these are the opening lines of my work. Made in 1937, this particular film is very much tongue-in-cheek and, although not politically correct by today's standards, it reflects the attitudes of the time. Knowing that much of the following material and subject matter (in my own piece) was more challenging, I chose to use this video/voiceover to open the work in a light-hearted way. Although the video is somewhat playful, my accompanying music contradicts it. There is a sense of foreboding as slowly rising (both in pitch and dynamic level) lower strings underpin sporadic entries in the rest of the ensemble, including snap pizzicati and ricochet bowing in the upper strings. This feeling of unease continues with the gradually increasing general dynamic level, reaching *fff* at figure B. Here, the video editing reflects this harsh climax, cutting quickly back and forth between shorter bursts of previously seen material (most clips at a faster speed than the original).

The creation of tension and conflict through the marriage of music and video is a core aspect of this work and it is important to note that the video would be read very differently if viewed without my accompanying score. Chion describes this in terms of added value's reciprocal nature:

"Sound shows us the image differently than what the image shows alone, and the image likewise makes us hear sound differently than if the sound were ringing out in the dark."

(Chion, 1994, p.21)

The audio and video materials often intentionally contradict one another and the music serves as a tool to highlight undercurrents which are not seen in the visual material. Predominantly dark, ominous, frantic, grotesque and generally loud, the music conflicts with the (seemingly) happy, smiling women on screen, mirroring the assumed unseen frustration, anger, anxiety and powerlessness underneath the happy façade. To further highlight this contrast, the visual material generally has a slower, more relaxed pace than the music. These dichotomies also serve as a representation of my frustration at the similar pressures that women still feel today, coupled with my on/off, love/hate relationship with my own partial conformity/complicity.

Similar to *Perception of Layers/Layers of Perception,* my preliminary focus in *How to Undress in Front of Your Husband* was the creation of a strong visual narrative and so I edited the video first (using the existing archive footage). I then used the video's structure and storyline as the basis for the music and once I had begun writing the score, allowed for some flexibility within my original video structure. It was important for me that the video and music were equally weighted in terms of their significance within the work; there were times when musical ideas needed to be developed further which in turn influenced the visual material, and vice versa. For example, after the corset-fitting scene at around 4'30, the quick chromatic scalic passages influenced my video editing. Initially static shots were changed to short

bursts between black screens - the pacing rhythmic, synchronised with the musical material to create and underline tension.

Aside from exploring the wide-ranging sociocultural pressures faced by women, I also wanted to highlight the *incessancy* of these pressures, and the continuous effort required to meet certain expectations (even if those are one's own). This can be felt most strongly in the sections on hair/make-up and exercising, where seemingly 'relaxed' visual material (both in terms of content and pace) is juxtaposed with short, repeated motifs and persistent rhythmic figures moving in contrary motion.

For example, from letter G (video: "Beautifying! Where to put the accent!") the visual pacing is slow and the actions of the women on screen applying their make-up and doing their hair are accurate and precise whilst the music is formed of frantic, loud, chromatic, asynchronous sextuplets. This contradiction in itself creates tension but builds to a climax (which is interrupted at letter H), stylistically matched by the visuals which are now displayed in shorter bursts, creating a quicker visual pace.

A similar tool can be seen at letter I (video: "Battle of the Bulges!") where the music emphasises the constant effort required in the pursuit of a perfect body: the actions/movements of women exercising on-screen are steady and measured, accompanied by music consisting of rhythmic, precise, obsessive semiquaver figures (see Figure 9).

*Figure 9: Video still from the "Battle of the Bulges!" section showing women exercising at a beauty farm.*



*Figure 10: Video stills showing a treatment involving a stretching table.*

*Figure 11: Video still showing a beauty treatment involving caged structures with rollers which quickly move up and down different parts of the body.*

Although the title of the work, the opening voiceover/visuals, and a couple of brief moments throughout are somewhat light-hearted, I wanted to ensure that the final section left the audience in no doubt about the seriousness of the subject matter. Here the video shows potentially hazardous beauty treatments which are made to look innocuous by the smiling models. Treatments include face masks which deliver an electrical current (and sometimes radiation) to the facial area, a stretching table (which the on-screen model seems very pleased about – see Figure 10), and caged contraptions with dangerous-looking rollers attached (see Figure 11). I chose to use these images here because, due to the extreme nature of some of these treatments, I initially found this footage to be the most unsettling and was reminded that dangerous 'beauty treatments' are still prevalent.

From letter O, my accompanying music is understated, sombre and subdued, as one-by-one each instrument begins a series of staggered entries, playing long, sustained notes which allow the video to take precedence. The intensity gradually increases as more members of the ensemble join, with the dynamic level also rising slowly, matching the increasing intensity of the video editing. Rather than creating a much-needed climax or release from this tension, the music stops very abruptly as the screen goes black mid-clip, and the performance ends.

*How to Undress in Front of Your Husband* reinforced the importance of video for me as a tool to create narrative and convey meaning - ideas which I investigated further in *Cloud Hands* and *Creating Intimacy*. Although I feature in the introductory video for *How to Undress in Front of Your Husband*, making this work also showed me that my involvement and presence did not always have to be live or for the duration of the work. In the two works which followed, *Cloud Hands* and *Continuum,* I further considered how to create work which explored my physical self *in absentia.*

## 2.6  *Cloud Hands*

*Cloud Hands* is a video work for solo cello which was first written for Jennifer Langridge as part of Psappha Ensemble's *Composing for Cello* scheme in late 2015/early 2016. The piece was recorded and filmed privately in St Michael's Ancoats, Manchester, and the initial version of the work was edited together using the best audio takes from the entire recording session. (A live performance was not a condition of Psappha's scheme). In 2018 I decided to re-record the work with cellist Emily De Simone, undertaking the editing process myself in order to have more creative input and agency over the final piece, particularly in relation to the visual element.

Shortly before accepting my place on Psappha's scheme I had revisited my Tai Chi practice after a long hiatus. I used this as a stimulus for the piece and the title, *Cloud Hands,* refers to a sequence of movements in the Tai Chi form. Initially an ancient Chinese martial art, Tai Chi was later adapted into a sequence of movements (the 'form') primarily used for health and wellbeing purposes, particularly relaxation, with the practice encouraging physical, mental and spiritual focus. My primary focus in learning and practising Tai Chi was always on the potential health benefits as opposed to a martial arts application.

In *Cloud Hands,* I drew on my experiences of Tai Chi and meditative practice as a means of exploring my physical self *in absentia* - the sensations of my mind and body embodied in the musical material. My aim was to explore in music the many qualities and sensations felt: calm, meditative feelings traditionally associated with practising Tai Chi; the buoyancy of the breath and gentle flow of movements; the

unsettled, distracted mind; impatience; striving for perfection. For me to become the observer of my own physical body and mental thoughts the process had to be introspective, involving purposeful self-awareness and reflection before, during and after Tai Chi and meditation sessions. To uphold the purpose of these practices I reserved the more analytical thinking for after the sessions and focused on awareness without attachment during the exercises themselves.

The work is built on two types of material, referencing the Chinese principles of Yin and Yang - two opposing yet complementary elements which combine to form (and inform) a whole. *Cloud Hands* focuses on the polarity between feeling calm and focused (Yang) and distracted and anxious (Yin).

The beginning of the work is derived from Yang qualities. Quiet, pizzicato chords set the initial tone with further resonance (space) created by the use of open strings, *laissez vibrer* markings and moments of silence. The general rhythmic pacing is slow and measured and the music (and performer) has space to breathe and settle. Here, my video editing reflects the musical material, particularly in relation to incorporating moments of visual silence to enhance the meditative nature of the opening. This Yang-inspired musical material makes up around a third of the piece before the contrasting Yin material is gradually introduced through angular, fast-paced semiquaver and demisemiquaver runs, accents, staccatos and *forte* and *fortissimo* dynamic markings. At first this new material is intermittent, appearing in brief bursts between the material continued from the first section.

In the *Agitato* section (from bar 50), the essence of calm is almost entirely lost and the angular Yin-based material gains prominence, taking control. There are a

number of occasions throughout this section where my video editing enhances the feelings of distraction and unease by suddenly cutting quickly between different angles/shots to disrupt any sense of line or flow. To simultaneously make reference to the mind-body connection and amplify the representation of agitation and unease, I wrote passages which would prove challenging and physically awkward (but not impossible) for the cellist to perform at the required tempo. This can be seen in many of the demisemiquaver staccato passages in the score, but is perhaps most prominent in bars 69-71 due to the high register, sudden leaps, bowing patterns and quickly shifting hand positions required (whilst maintaining the set tempo). The same is true for bars 78-81 where there are large leaps, shifting between pizzicato and arco and also between dynamic levels, before an accelerating semiquaver triplet run (also containing a number of large leaps) which crescendos to *fortissimo*.

My video editing, particularly in the *Agitato* section, highlights the physicality involved in the execution of the work whilst also affording the viewer a more intimate view of the performer, giving them access to finer details that may not be visible or apparent to an audience in a concert setting. Through the use of cuts and close ups I can direct the viewer's attention towards specific elements, for example the vibration of the strings, the movement of the left hand on the fingerboard, the subtle micro-movements as the performer finds the correct finger position, the friction of the bow as it is pulled across the strings and the performer's facial expressions. By juxtaposing slower-paced Yang-inspired editing (particularly noticeable in the opening and closing sections of the work) with the more agitated, frantic Yin-style editing of the middle *Agitato* section, the sense of tension and release is enhanced.

My decision to make my own version of *Cloud Hands* was driven by a desire to have more creative agency and input over the entire creative process (as opposed to solely the written score) in order that I might represent my ideas as fully as possible, especially in relation to exploring my self *in absentia*. In making this video, I found it helpful to draw on my approaches to video editing in previous works, particularly when considering the more intimate view of the performer that this work affords, and the impact that the combination of visual and aural stimuli can have on the viewer/listener.

## 2.7 *Continuum*

In 2016 I was 'adopted' by the Glasgow School of Art Choir[12] as part of Making Music's UK-wide *Adopt a Composer* scheme which pairs composers with amateur music groups for a period of nine months. The aim is for the composer and ensemble to spend time working with and getting to know each other in order for the composer to create a new work written specifically for the group.[13]

I have always felt a strong connection to singing, with childhood memories of singing along to my Mum's Country & Western and Elvis albums in the car, being a member of choirs as a teenager and in my 20s, and taking vocal lessons as part of my undergraduate studies. In addition to feeling an emotional/nostalgic connection to singing, I also remember feeling more *physically* connected to my body as my body *was* my instrument - more connected and present than I ever felt with any other instrument that I played.

These memories of the physical connection and presence induced by singing, coupled with the opportunity to work with a choir, prompted me to expand on themes I had first explored in *Cloud Hands. Continuum,* for SSAATB choir and pre-recorded audio, further considers ideas of physical and psychological presence and absence, including my own tendency to ruminate on the past.

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[12] The GSA Choir is an open-to-all, non-auditioned amateur ensemble whose membership primarily consists of past and present staff and students of the Glasgow School of Art. When I worked with them there were approximately ninety members.
[13] During preliminary discussions with the conductor, he asked that I write something that could be performed again by other choirs, as opposed to using subject matter that might tie the piece solely to them.

Giving a certain amount of consideration to past experiences is useful but too much can lead to an inability to live in and fully enjoy the present moment. I constantly strive for a greater degree of presence in my day to day life yet my analytical mind simultaneously craves a deeper reflection on the past. The past shapes our sense of the present, affecting who we are today, and a layer of this work also considers the idea of a timeline connecting the two.

*Continuum's* pre-recorded audio part contains excerpts from the 1976 documentary *Grey Gardens* - a fascinating, although somewhat voyeuristic, portrayal of the lives of Edie Bouvier Beale (Little Edie) and her mother, Edith, two eccentric and reclusive relatives of Jackie Kennedy Onassis who lived in a crumbling mansion in East Hampton, Long Island. I have always associated this documentary with Glasgow School of Art after discovering the film many years ago via a group of its students who were somewhat obsessed by it. In the initial stages of my pairing with the choir, in a completely unrelated context, I happened to overhear a few people discussing *Grey Gardens* at a rehearsal and was reminded of one particular quote from the film which has stuck with me since I first heard it:

> "It's very difficult to keep the line between the past and the present...
> D'you know what I mean? It's awfully difficult."
>
> (Little Edie, *Grey Gardens,* 1976)

Given the themes I wanted to explore in this work, I decided that the quote was particularly apt; I extracted the audio directly from the film, along with a number of other excerpts, to create a pre-recorded audio part which sits alongside the choir's material in the middle part of the work.

*Continuum* is written in three distinct sections, commencing with the choir standing behind the audience at the back of the performance space.[14] The singers then perform semi-choreographed movement whilst slowly singing a descending scale five times (see performance notes in the score).

There are three main reasons behind this opening idea. Firstly, each singer is encouraged to create their own journey, responding, within a set of rules, to other singers around them and to their own instinct of what feels right for them in that moment; secondly, the choreographed movement requires the singers to become aware of their own presence within the performance space; and thirdly, the idea of a (time)line is explored through the visual and aural heterophony created by each individual singer's ability to choose their own singing/walking pace, alongside their linear progression from the rear to the front of the venue.

With the choir together on stage holding a unison 'D', their volume drops suddenly from *fortissimo* to *piano* and Little Edie's voice is heard for the first time. This is also the first time that words are used in the work, beginning the transition into the middle section. Here, the choral material is made up of 2 musical ideas. The first is a continuous line of staccato quavers in alternating time signatures, often changing every bar, which creates a sense of urgency and constant forward motion. These continuous quavers appear in at least two of the vocal parts at any one time.[15] The second idea comprises shorter bursts of accented, staccato quavers, sometimes

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[14] To ensure the work was accessible for all of the singers, some members of the choir remained on stage in the first performance.
[15] From here until the end of the work, the choir are split SSAATB.

punctuating and adding further texture and harmony, sometimes drawing the listener's attention to brief, angular, melodic fragments.

Whilst words are heard in the pre-recorded audio part, the sung material continues to be formed of non-lexical vocables, such as 'ah' and 'ee-ah'. When sung with the accented and staccato articulation described above, these vocables create a hypnotic, relentless, percussive effect.[16]  The material also requires the singers to more consciously employ their diaphragms for support and projection, therefore heightening the potential for a connection with and awareness of the physical sensations produced in their core.[17]

The pre-recorded audio continues throughout this middle section, mainly focusing on Little Edie's words but including a short excerpt of her mother, Edith, speaking. The spoken material is heard in its original format but also manipulated (using techniques including splicing, delay, reverb and layering) to create an additional layer which is fragmented, rhythmic and draws attention to the words (which in turn assists in the creation of the overall narrative). The themes of past and present/presence and absence, are thus further explored not only through the spoken text but also through the juxtaposition of the very immediate, live vocables of the choir with the disembodied, fragmented voices.

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[16] These vocables are similar in style to those contained in Laurie Anderson's *O Superman* (1982). I greatly admire her non-traditional use of the voice and her connection with both music and art.
[17] This is similar to a concept I used in *Cloud Hands* which contains a number of passages focusing on the physicality involved in producing them. I was reassured that my approach had been successful when many of the singers commented on a new awareness of their core muscles during rehearsals.

Both the choral material and the 'tape' part increase in intensity towards the end of this section and the choir's *fortissimo,* driving, marcato quavers end abruptly to reveal textural layers of whispering voices in the pre-recorded audio (the text is intentionally incoherent). Here, the whispering voices form the transition into a gentle chorale, with Little Edie's words providing the text for the choir. In this final section, previously-explored ideas including texture, rhythm, line, fragmentation, heterophony, polyphony, vowel sounds and text, are combined to create a reflective meditation on presence.

*Continuum* afforded me the opportunity to expand on the use and role of the voice, moving beyond the use of speech in previous works to explore the more traditional idea of creating structure through song/singing. I found a great deal of satisfaction from combining live voices with pre-recorded audio, considering how they could contrast with and complement each other to create something greater than either force on its own and further highlighting the ideas of presence and absence.

Due to the nature of this project, I wanted the main focus to be on the GSA Choir and as such I chose to make my presence within *Continuum* much subtler than in other works. In fact, my non-musical role within the work is probably imperceptible to everyone but me as my voice is hidden within the layers of whispering in the pre-recorded audio part before the final section of the piece. In the subsequent work, *Creating Intimacy,* I returned to a much more immediate, visible, fully embodied presence within the work.

### 2.8 *Creating Intimacy*

*Creating Intimacy*, a one-to-one performance which includes pre-recorded audio and video, is the final work of my thesis and the culmination of all of my research to date. The first performance took place over a three-day period in November 2018 in the Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow. Due to the unconventional nature and lack of a score for *Creating Intimacy*, I would recommend the reader watches the audiovisual documentation before continuing to read about the work.

From the time I was first introduced to the works of Marina Abramović and Adrian Howells in the early stages of my PhD, I became interested in how I could incorporate themes of intimacy and presence within my work. Of all their artistic output, I am most drawn to works in which they themselves perform and where there is an invitation and opportunity for the audience members/participants and the artist to connect on a deeper level.

> "An intimate interaction is distinguished from other kinds of interactions by three necessary and sufficient conditions: self-revealing behaviour, positive involvement with the other, and shared understandings. Self-revealing behaviors are those that reveal personal, private aspects of the self to another, or invite another into a zone of privacy."
>
> (Barton, 2009, p.578)

I had explored ideas of presence and sharing (of personal subject matter) with the audience in previous works, however the element of sharing was always from a distance, separated either by a screen (in works which include video) or by the

invisible barrier between audience and composer/performer(s). There was also no real element of reciprocity - everything was one-way, coming only from me, and I was keen to address these aspects alongside my original aims of conveying 'aboutness' and exploring non-musical performance-based roles for myself.

One of the initial starting points for *Creating Intimacy* came approximately two years after writing my string quartet, *Intimacy*. I realised I wanted to make a new work which utilised some of *Intimacy's* original material in a different way, seeking to explore alternative modes of presenting the musical material in a format which would also challenge the traditional 'audience sitting in front of performers on stage' model.

Before deciding on a one-to-one format I considered a number of other options: a listening experience in the round, where the (pre-recorded) sounds of the quartet would play through eight speakers surrounding the audience; a live performance in a similar style with the quartet placed around the outside of the audience seating area; and a gallery-based installation with different booths/listening stations, each containing its own audiovisual material. However, it was clear that none of these formats could satisfy all of my creative aims for this new work and that only a one-to-one performance would allow me to create a fully immersive experience (for both myself and the audience), and the opportunity to share and connect directly with each audience member on an individual basis.

As can be seen in the accompanying video documentation, *Creating Intimacy* is experienced as one continuous 'movement' but for ease of discussion the performance can be divided into four sections (see Appendix 1).

From the very first stages of devising this work, I was acutely aware of the importance of making each participant feel welcome, comfortable and relaxed throughout the performance; the initial moments of the participant entering the space were crucial in getting this right and alongside creating a welcoming 'living room' environment, I used carefully considered gestures from my initial greeting, to taking and hanging up their coat (where applicable), offering herbal tea and inviting them to make themselves at home. Throughout the performance I also created a number of opportunities for conversation, where the participant and I could share more about ourselves, encouraging a deeper sense of connection (see Figure 12).

In addition, each gesture and interaction between the participant and myself was carefully considered in order to move gradually from complete distance (i.e. the participant initially being introduced to only my voice) to being physically closer (standing opposite one another to breathe together (see Figure 13), me sitting on the coffee table diagonally opposite them), and finally, closer still, sitting next to each other on the couch. My aim in very gradually building and deepening a sense of connection throughout the work, taking every aspect of the preceding performance into account, was to create a greater potential for intimacy in the final section. Participants suggested many different gestures at this point including sitting in silence, talking, holding hands side-by-side, looking into each other's eyes, slow dancing and hugging (see Figure 14).

*Figure 12: Photograph showing the memory box display/discussion.*



*Figure 13: Photograph showing the guided breathing exercise.*



*Figure 14: Photograph showing an example of a shared gesture of connection between a participant and me in the final section of 'Creating Intimacy'.*

All of the audio in *Creating Intimacy* was recorded by the Brodick Quartet and derived from the original score for *Intimacy*. The idea to create a movement for headphone listening (see Appendix 1, section 3) came from initial research into intimate performance when I discovered a phenomenon called ASMR.[18] I had no intentions of recreating an authentic ASMR experience but instead wanted to explore some of the ideas behind this phenomenon by manipulating the audio during the editing process, playing with apparent, relative proximity and location of sound.[19] However, as only a small percentage of people are susceptible to ASMR triggers, this spatialization also functioned as a means of highlighting the detail and intimacies of sound, for example moving from close to distant, panning from left to right or making subtle changes that can be more easily perceived through headphones than through loudspeakers.

Over the course of three days I performed *Creating Intimacy* with over 30 individuals and it was an incredible experience, very different from anything I had done previously. I found it immensely satisfying to perform and felt that all of my creative aims (and all of Barton's conditions for an intimate interaction) were met, not only because of the content, but particularly because of the performance format. When I was designing this performance, I remembered reading about the attention to detail which Howells' paid to each element of his work, and the difference this

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[18] "Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR) is a previously unstudied sensory phenomenon, in which individuals experience a tingling, static-like sensation across the scalp, back of the neck and at times further areas in response to specific triggering audio and visual stimuli. This sensation is widely reported to be accompanied by feelings of relaxation and well-being." (Barratt and Davis, 2015)

[19] To facilitate this in the edit, all of the material was recorded from four different microphone positions: one on the bridge of each instrument, one relatively close to the quartet (55cm away), one at a medium distance (2m 30cm away – near stereo), and one distant (7m 20cm away).

made. With this in mind, I took great care to create a fully sensory experience, from the scent of the incense in the room, to the taste of the herbal tea, to the texture of the insulated ripple cups sourced specially for the show. Every detail of the performance was designed to create a unique, intimate experience for each person, and one that was full of care. I felt able to connect with each individual participant on a deeper level than any other environment would allow.

A few unexpected things happened as a result of *Creating Intimacy*. Before the performances, I had considered asking the box office for a list of participants and their time slots (perhaps as a form of reassurance) however in the end I didn't, and found that I enjoyed the anticipation and surprise each time I opened the door, not knowing who would be there. It also felt right that since I was placing the participant in an unknown situation (bearing in mind the anticipation this involves), that I should also experience that sense of anticipation of the unknown. Additionally, I had not anticipated how strange it would feel to be back in my own living room afterwards, with all of the performance 'props' back in situ. Each item felt like it was carrying a multitude of memories and stories from each performance and each participant, but particularly the couch. At the time of writing, I still feel odd about sitting on it – luckily I have another identical one.

There are two main changes I would make for future performances of *Creating Intimacy*. Firstly, I would ensure I factored in sufficient (i.e. longer) breaks each day to rest and reset between each block of performances. What I did at the CCA was not impossible, however each 30-minute performance required a great deal of energy and focused individual attention - without adequate breaks I sometimes felt slightly drained. Secondly, I would increase the timings of each performance slot to 45

minutes. I had not considered that some people might wish to engage in deeper/longer conversations with me so this extra time would allow this, and would also allow a little more breathing space between individual performance slots.

## 2.9  Final Thoughts

Using the tools of musical composition, video and theatrical performance, I set out to problematize the traditional role of the composer by making the composer present within the work and its performance in a number of non-musical ways. I considered my presence and visibility within each work from different perspectives, using Berger's concept of 'the surveyor and the surveyed' as a core element of my exploration. This included a fully-mediated video presence in *Perception of Layers/Layers of Perception, Between the Lines,* and the video introduction for *How to Undress in Front of Your Husband*; a live presence in *Intimacy, Subtext*, the first version of *Between the Lines,* and *Creating Intimacy*; and a musical interpretation of my physical body *in absentia* in *Cloud Hands* and *Continuum*.

The inclusion of non-musical elements (especially video) were key not only in highlighting a visible (often mediated) presence, but also in affording me the opportunity to undertake new roles, including that of producer, director, video editor and performer, from my perspective and understanding as a composer. Creating and undertaking these additional roles has helped to change my own relationship to being a composer, moving away from initial feelings of being disconnected and removed from a performance, to now feeling a much stronger sense of agency and connection to the entire creative process from beginning to end.

Each work in this folio considers presence, visibility, personal narrative and mixed-media from different angles and there is a clear trajectory from the first work to the last, illustrating how my approaches and ideas progressed and developed along this timeline. By drawing on my explorations of the aforementioned elements in the first

seven works, I distilled my findings to create *Creating Intimacy*, which most fully

represents my artistic aims and intentions at this point. Going forward, I feel that

there is much more to investigate in terms of the composer's role within one-to-one

performance and this is an area I plan to focus on in the next stages of my research.

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# Appendix 1: Description of key elements in *Creating Intimacy*

## Section 1 (introduction)

Before entering the performance space, the participant listens to a short audio clip which serves three purposes: to briefly introduce them to the performance; to introduce them to me (or my voice, in this case) before they meet me in person; and to invite them to partake in their first performative action in the work (removing their shoes and knocking on the door) which brings them into the performance space itself.

## Section 2 (breathing exercise and memory box conversation)

To create an intimate, relaxing, performance environment I partially recreated my own living room as the set, using all of my own furniture (sofa, cushions, coffee table, lamps, plants, rug, piano, music stand). After the initial introductions, a short, guided breathing exercise encourages a sense of relaxation and grounding into the present moment (for both the participant and myself) as we breathe together in time with the music. This is also the first non-verbal shared gesture of connection between us. I then begin a semi-scripted narration discussing my inspiration for the music, focusing on my personal box of memories (which is on the coffee table) and sharing the stories behind some of the items. My aim in discussing these mementoes was not only to share something personal from my own life with the participant, but to provide an opportunity for a shared dialogue where they could reciprocate by sharing their own memories and stories, encouraging a deeper sense of connection. In the majority of cases, that was what happened.

**Section 3 (video)**

As a large portion of the work focused on undivided one-to-one attention and the potential intimacy this can create, I included a contrasting audiovisual section to highlight the absence of this connection. In order to explore a visual representation of different aspects of intimacy, I made a video which features myself with my partner and the full contents of the aforementioned memory box. My idea behind the video was to share something of the personal with the audience (communicated in a non-verbal way) in conjunction with pre-recorded audio which was designed to be listened to through headphones (enhancing the solitary nature of this section). Before playing the video, I ask the participant's permission for me to place the headphones on for them, giving instructions on how they can be adjusted if necessary. I then start the video and move to the side of the room (to sit at a table to make something for the final section of the work), leaving the participant on their own.

**Section 4 (shared gesture of connection)**

When the video finishes I walk back over to the participant and carefully remove their headphones before sitting next to them on the sofa. I then draw attention to some of the images in the video in order to lead into a conversation about different gestures (both in general and for me, personally) used to connect with people, whether loved ones, friends or strangers. Following a discussion of different gestures of connection, I suggest that we share a mutually agreed upon gesture as we listen to the final section of music. At this point I hand control over to the participant, giving them the opportunity to suggest whatever they would be most comfortable with and always making sure they know that simply sitting together on the couch to listen is an option. At the very end of the performance, I give each participant a small origami

flying bird (which I made while they were watching the video) as a memento. With this parting gift, I thank them, show them to the door and the performance ends.

## Appendix 2: *Creating Intimacy* Observation Diary

A selection of personal observations made during and after performances of *Creating Intimacy:*

*"It's amazing how complete strangers have fully embraced and engaged in the work, feeling able to open up to me and willingly share aspects of their own personal life. Couldn't have asked for more."*

*"I'm so exhausted but also exhilarated. My brain just wants to process it all - it's hard to switch off and rest."*

*"Should I make it more clear that this is all my own furniture? It seemed so obvious that I hadn't considered some people might presume it's a fictional set. A few commented on how welcoming and homely it felt, then when I told them it was all from my own living room I could see it added an extra layer of meaning and feeling of connection to the whole experience, immediately making it even more intimate. Really interesting to see that moment of realisation. Think about this for future performances."*

*"When I do this again I need to take longer breaks between performance blocks. Two 1 hour breaks a day isn't enough. I hardly get time to eat properly let alone reset. SELF-CARE SHONA!"*

[The day after the final performances] *"I can't believe I can't remember two participants now. That's awful. I feel so guilty!"*

*"I'm really glad I didn't ask for a list of names to know who was coming to each slot. It's so exciting not knowing who is coming next and getting a lovely surprise each time I answer the door. Adds to the anticipation."*