

Research Space

Working paper

**Making music out of architecture and from-architecture-music-an
odyssey**

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The Final Proposal for PhD for First Review September 2019 by Grant Gover

General synopsis:

The working title of the research is **Making Music from Architecture**. In fact this has been changed slightly yet still reflects the overall initial aims inherent in the title.

To be included:

First attempt at addressing the questions as set out in the introduction (77k+ words approx.). The intention here was to undertake a comprehensive explication, if not outright proof, that music could be made from architecture, addressing this from various angles, of terminology, subject matter, semantics, semiotics, various means and over various musical styles relating to a broad historical sweep. There was also a driving influence of the aesthetic of Christopher Williams who promulgated a seeming chaotic approach to PhD writing. One manifestation of this was to believe that annotated bibliography could be left intact in line with the theory mentioned shortly and within a general context of philosophy and science. It was averred that the annotations could be viewed as secret information akin to that of dark matter and dark energy. However, this revolutionary approach became ditched along with other ideas and material in the revised second attempt. It seemed logical, tidier and of course less contentious.

Whereas, the research found that this was achievable: that it *was* viable to make music from architecture, in fact after some secondary doubts, which are probably inevitable in any wholesale research, it soon became apparent that it was widely accepted, almost axiomatically, that this proposition was true: music could be made from architecture. A comment from the lead tutor on a contemporary composition course in Oxford early in the new year of 2019 who simply said “Of course!” and mentioned an early example which I deduced to refer to Dufay in connection with the Brunelleschi Dome, led to gradually diminishing the scale of the intensive research and redirecting the approach to concentrate on actual music that could be made from a personal perspective. This was reinforced in discussion with my personal supervisor. Additionally, a theory which had evolved, titled Total Field Theory was, similarly, agreed in discussion to be back pedalled upon, because the remit was simply too wide, to allow for anything and everything, which incidentally still recurs, as will be seen. Both the theory and the initial rigorous comprehensive research are not wasted and still echo in subsequent research. Together they form a foundation upon which to build the later new beginning concentrating upon actual composition. It is not intended to submit the initial research, just to have it in the background if anyone wants to see more preliminary detail. This fuller research was carried on with including addressing intended chapter headings, but after a while it seemed fruitless since the new line of research was effectively starting after this point: after the accepted proof that music could be made from architecture. So, towards the end it is unfinished. Probably another 30k words or so would have wrapped up the argument neatly, but with the thesis accepted as not needing proving the effort to complete this could not be justified. Even with the unfinished larger thesis there are still evident many examples to sufficiently indicate that acceptance of the initial thesis as ‘a given’ is justified. So, this is submitted for the First Review merely as background supplementary information.

Second attempt (10k words approx. to date)

To reiterate, then, the second attempt, starts from the basis that music can be made from architecture and concentrates upon a personalised account of this, in fact an exploration. The title then takes on the word ‘odyssey’, since it is less of a rigorous quantification, in almost encyclopaedic form, of how the two disciplines can be linked, but is more of experimentation. This was formally intended as the primary research that accompanied the secondary literature research of extant work in this field, namely to add to the existing canon of musical work having proven that it was possible to do so. So, in this sense, it is justified, since it is a unique response to the questions initially set out in the larger First attempt.

The model for this style is as Steven Daverson, who contrary to Williams’s loose approach (yet coherent in the end) simply works through his intended compositions for his PhD submission (which was successful; he has since gone on to an on-going distinguished composing and teaching career) discussing them and explaining the methodology and influences. Naturally, the style soon becomes my own as I believe it should do and does. For instance, if one were to set out to imitate another composer, for me, it does not take many bars before the ideas that proliferate in my head take over to provide original and individualistic music. The same is true with prose writing style.

General themes emerging

As already indicated several doubts crept in during the First attempt as to whether or not in reality a true and faithful translation, transliteration, or howsoever one wishes to describe the process of deriving music from: to keep this simple at this stage: a building, was possible at all. Then, in discussions with my supervisor, it seemed simple to again merely accept the proposition that it was possible, as had been carried out by countless others, such as Xenakis. I was, in a way treating the quest too seriously. If one were to continue in an extremely serious vein, then it might still be possible to query the absolute validity of such translations, or interpretations, or, again, howsoever one is to call this process, or even act. It is as though one were to accept a shadowy wavering image of the artefact to be made music of and in ordinary everyday terms and to just get on with the task. In the end, as with Katrina Burton, there is still the aim of getting under the skin of what one is trying to represent. This is an in-process task and a fascinating one. Perhaps by the end, there may be crystallised a more cogent answer to this particular question. So, the questions are shifting. There are many relevant topic areas as mentioned in the First attempt, such as materialism, reality, the method chosen to obtain the music, by chance, or indeterminacy, use of external influencers, such as websites of instruments as in *Folkestone Bandstand*, or electronic means such as in *The Life of Zaha Hadid*. These are perhaps the two most substantial examples that could be submitted for the primary research. The research has morphed from a full blown secondary research followed by related primary research taking the field of research into new territory. It is now more performance led research or research through composition, or a combination of the two, with hints perhaps of the classical approach still in the background. It is the ‘odyssey’, a quest, a stochastic trial and error, proceed and experiment as one goes approach now. There is this element of experimentation and evolution. Various other compositions demonstrate examples of this evolution, ideas of sounds, which lead from one composition to another. Some examples from these compositions can be included to show this build-up of material.

There are two other salient points that have emerged from the research both from the First attempt and in this Second revised new beginning attempt. They are to do with sociology and philosophy, namely the definition of what precisely is an architectural object. Again, in discussion with my supervisor this became evident as to being

capable of wide definition. In fact the remit of what can be included as material for translation into music from architecture ends up as being quite wide, in fact very wide. This then brings back echoes of the Total Field Theory. So, the possibilities are endless—and exciting.

Other running themes are: a dichotomy between ancient and modern, which is becoming resolved in, for me, not needing to be mutually exclusive. Both are fine and all shades in between too. Another theme is definitely: electronica. It seems that contemporary classical music for want of a better description ultimately invariably ends up with use of computers, synthesizers and a whole host of intelligent mechanisms to aid composition and playing. This is definitely a field for exploring further. Having commenced an interest in Artificial Intelligence and Intelligent Buildings whilst teaching construction, it became, to me, quite evident that science fiction imaginings of very advanced robots and computer systems are inevitable. I personally think positively about these developments and yet feel that the imagined outcomes such as robot rights and a multitude of other ethical and other concerns are real. One consequence of this is to extrapolate the use of computers in music, then to value the role of humans, even mistakes. Then, related to this, is another emergent factor of actually getting players, humans, to play one's music, for real. The intention is to try to participate more in some way or another, to meet performers, try to get to know them and their idiosyncrasies and write specifically for them whilst retaining the overall aim of writing to explicate architecture in musical form. The aim is to continue learning, experimenting, keeping an open mind: this is the current state of play in my research as at the end of the first year.

I have participated in two conferences and collaborated with another PhD student, primarily in the first instance to help her, in my response to an open call for participants; in the process I wrote a scenario and composed an orchestral piece over the 2019 summer break called *The Magical Mountain* based upon an idea suggested by her, plus she came to our house with her husband, a musician, we all played guitars and she emerged with a composition, a song which she said she may later mess around with, perhaps using a piano. I do not know whether this can be included in the portfolio as an example of architectural expression musically. I tend to think not. It is just *ad hoc* collaboration of trying to help one another. This led to another piece which has echoes of a piece written for orchestra during the masters course, *Dawn Rising (Summer)*. I wanted to call it (*Summer-Autumn*) since it had sad overtones of the transition from glorious summer to colder autumnal days, but the positive side of me won out and I could not bring myself to include the element of sadness in the title even though it was in the music. Both pieces are expressive and tonal, yet with various devices that could be described as modernistic. Originally, the programmatic *Magical Mountain* started to evoke a Stravinskyesque tone but I thought that this was inappropriate for the collaboration and forced it to remain tonal. On the newly emerging wide remit perhaps there are grounds for including these pieces, but I somehow do not yet feel convinced.

My latest idea is having, again, during the summer break paid for and watched, a Michael Blackwood fascinating documentary film called *A Day with Zaha Hadid*, to make a piece out of this. This would be modern and definitely related to architecture; also, it seems that I have developed upon an existing veneration for ZH's work. I would have to hire the programme again, but this could be fruitful. Thinking further about this gem of an interview filmed at a retrospective exhibition, 14.5.—17.8.2004 at MAK Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna, it may be stretching interpretation too far, yet it has an aura of authenticity when Zaha Hadid lets down her guard and speaks naturally to the camera and interviewer as if she was explaining her legacy to the world—it has a quality, to me, of a pre-emptive last will and testament. She was quite

clear, for instance, that architecture's role is for "well-being" of people, that she increasingly became concerned with the integration of "civic", "urban", "the city" and the project, which endorses the view that architecture is not just a building or other designed artefact, it is an amalgam of many things essential to life. Where previously she had said that her winning the Cardiff opera house competition three times (!) yet not gaining the commission was down to her Iranian origins and her femininity, she went against this when she showed exasperation at the slowness of the world accepting her, as "prejudice", specifically not due to "gender" or "nationality", but to a slowness to adopt "ideas". For me, it is poignant that this person who started life in Baghdad, where the western world has thrown in a huge hand grenade, was in a region where all that we know of as culture, the arts, science, medicine, poetry, music, mathematics emanated, as many call 'the cradle of civilisation'. A thought was to have a third turning of the research and devote it to a study of Zaha Hadid and write music as emanating from her, but with her 'catholic' broad vision, interest always in the new in mind, she would probably endorse a more wide sweeping encompassment of the research, largely as initially envisaged, yet with all the twists and turns that happen along the way.

Then, it is our expressed intention, of the other PhD student and me, to collaborate further and utilise the facilities of the Daphne Oram building, hopefully the studios and maybe just experiment and see what comes out. For me, all the time I will be looking to relate the music to architecture, but in the process there is simply the *quid pro quo* of helping another student—possibly something interesting could ensue. I will carry on trying to go to conferences to learn and hopefully have some experimental music played and then recorded, which could be used for the portfolio.