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Rethinking Structure: A Matter of Scale

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Abstract

This practice-based research project explores compositional approaches to musical structure based on the notion of scale, that is the duration of a unit of music relative to its content and its surroundings. With a starting point in the dichotomy between fragmentary utterances (represented by Kurtág) and longer continuous statements (represented by Mahler and Wagner), the research asks how such differences in scale can be made the focus of a musical discourse within a piece and what new insights and working methods this leads to. Answers to these questions are embodied in the six compositions which form the core of this submission and further elucidated in the accompanying commentary, which is split into chapters that focus on different pieces and different aspects of the topic. Overall, this project seeks to find fresh approaches to compositional structure, reconcile seemingly conflicting influences, and generate new structural insights and approaches for composers and for musicians more generally.

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INTRODUCTION

“The average in-between size does not disconnect an idea enough from prosaic everyday life. The very small or the very big takes on added size emotion.”¹

Henry Moore

1.1 Overview and methodology

This research explores compositional approaches to musical structure based on the notion of scale, with a starting point in the dichotomy between fragmentary utterances and longer continuous statements. The research questions are:

1. In what ways can differences in scale be made the focus of a musical discourse?²
2. What new insights and working methods can this focus lead to?

The aim has been to find a fresh approach to compositional structure not limited by convention or moderation, and to find distinctive ways to create longer pieces. I have also sought to reconcile and further develop my compositional engagement with seemingly disparate influences on my composing – Kurtág on one end of the spectrum, Mahler and Wagner on the other. Finally, it is hoped that the research generates new structural insights and approaches both for composers and for musicians more generally.

Answers to the first research question are embodied in the six compositions that form the core of this submission. The commentary elucidates these, as well as providing the more specific answers required for the second question. The overall approach has been flexible rather than prescriptive. Almost all of the pieces included were written in response to professional commissions or institutional opportunities which arose during the period of research, keeping the project firmly connected to audience-facing contexts. That this was possible indicates the flexibility and scope of the research concerns. Nevertheless, each piece addresses the topic in specific ways, using techniques and approaches grounded in existing music and scholarship. The commentary is divided into chapters which reflect these different focuses:

CHAPTER TWO: The Fragmentary

Frammenti Ricercati for string quartet (c. 8')

SEXTET for mixed chamber ensemble (c. 18½')

¹ Henry Moore, “The Sculptor Speaks”, *Listener*, 18th August 1937, pp. 338–40, in *Henry Moore: Sculptural Process and Public Identity* (Tate Research Publication, 2015), accessed 14th December 2017, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/henry-moore/henry-moore-the-sculptor-speaks-r1176118>.

² “Musical discourse” is used here to mean what happens in a piece and the manner in which it happens, rather than in the sense of semiotics and discourse analysis. Further terminological issues prompted by this overview are addressed later in the chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: The Symphonic

Trio-Symphony for clarinet, viola and piano (c. 14')

PROTO-SYMPHONY for orchestra (c. 4')

CHAPTER FOUR: Silence

CHAPTER FIVE: Messages

Song-Messages for soprano and piano (c. 10')

Cello Messages for cello and piano (c. 28')

This chapter structure also presents the pieces in the order in which they were written.

1.2 Background to the research

The initial motivation for this doctorate was a desire to reconcile seemingly conflicting influences and tendencies within my own music. On one end of the spectrum lay a longstanding obsession with the massive, immersive statements of Austro-German late Romanticism, the complex large-scale structures of Mahler and Wagner. It is music which fascinates and perplexes me compositionally, and the musical effects enabled by its vast timescales fuelled a desire to write longer, larger pieces. Nevertheless, Mahlerian obsession has always been tempered by doubt that such portentous modes of expression are still feasible. This is not a new sentiment – cultural anxieties around the perceived subjective excesses of Romanticism have been behind many trends in twentieth-century classical music. Such neuroses may have since faded, but the musical-cultural context that produced *Parsifal* and Mahler's 2nd Symphony has long faded too. How could what fascinates and perplexes me about this music and its structures be brought into my own practice?

György Kurtág has made his own engagements with Austro-German Romanticism, his response being one of fragmentariness, deconstruction and uneasy homage.³ He represents the other end of my spectrum of influences and tendencies, namely a predilection for concentrated, fragmentary musical utterances. This is also influenced by Chopin and the early-Romantic fragment, which is “balanced and yet unstable”, an “image of the infinite” as Charles Rosen memorably puts it.⁴ The focused intensity of a Kurtág fragment has a similar effect on me to the prolonged intensity of a Mahler symphony. Unsurprisingly, the former mode of address had proved more practically achievable in my music before this research began, and it risked becoming a lazy mannerism. How could this tendency be built upon and put into new contexts?

³ An apposite example of this is the use of Wagner tubas in the 1994 orchestral work *Stele*, whose music in b. 21 of the first movement is marked “[Feierlich: Hommage à Bruckner]”. As a 21st-century British composer, Austro-German late-Romantic music lacks for me the direct political, historical and cultural connotations that it would have had for Kurtág, a Romanian Jew who began his musical studies in a Nazi-ravaged Budapest in 1946. See the first two chapters of Rachel Beckles Willson, *György Kurtág: The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza, Op. 7: a “concerto” for soprano and piano* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) for a detailed account of Kurtág's background.

⁴ Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 48.

Pieces of mine longer than five minutes had been few and far between prior to this project. This was partly a matter of opportunity, and partly a fear on my part of longer musical arguments falling into the polite, relentless continuity of “well-constructed” music. Judy Lochhead has noted the common analytical conception that “music is ‘well-structured’ if it has unity, coherence, and makes sense”, while Carolyn Abbate (referencing Wagner scholarship) argues that “the more unified a work, the more unquestionable its design, the more reduced, ordinary and negligible it becomes”.⁵ I sought an approach to structure which did not have unity, coherence, good proportions, and therefore ordinariness as its primary goal – however, I am not an iconoclastic composer in the avant-garde spirit. The desire was still for teleological structures and active, varied musical discourses, but achieved in surprising or unusual ways and which worked in spite of seeming imbalances. In other words, novel means to more familiar ends.

This research is simply the above impulses combined: reconciling conflicting influences and finding a fresh approach to structure. The combination led to some fruitful questions. How might units of music operating on radically different timescales be placed together within a piece to create an unconventional structural discourse? What are the technical and aesthetic implications of exploring the dichotomy between fragmentary and continuous? How does thinking about structure in the context of this dichotomy affect the thought behind how and why one thing follows another in a piece of music? My rethinking of structure would be a matter of scale, allowing critical but constructive engagement with contrasting and seemingly contradictory influences so as to produce unconventional but engaging structures, as well as new insights into structure, in a demonstrable research context. My personal artistic journey and the generation of new knowledge through research thus come together.

1.3 Definitions and clarifications

This research is a matter of scale because it concerns both the duration of a unit of music and how that music is unfolding (for example the musical rhetoric) in a particular context. Zooming in and out on a computer map is a useful analogy – a square mile may contain lots of detail or very little depending on the zoom. A brief example from *SEXTET* (the second piece in the portfolio) illustrates this: the fragment in bb. 26–28 has a clear two-part gestural structure, *Vivo* – *Calmo*. It is framed by silence, and the two ideas are heard only once each. This is a musical close-up. The gestures can be focused on in their own right and the weight of musical invention lies in the moment. By contrast, the passage at Letter G features the same motif repeatedly in the piccolo, slightly modified each time to form a long stepwise ascent, continued by the clarinet at Letter H and the piccolo again at Letter J. The weight of musical invention shifts from the potency of single gestures to repeated motifs gradually developed to form a continuous, goal-

⁵ Judy Lochhead, *Reconceiving Structure in Contemporary Music: New Tools in Music Theory and Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2016). p. 53. Carolyn Abbate, “Wagner, ‘On Modulation’, and *Tristan*”, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1, no. 1 (March 1989), p. 37.

directed line. This is a musical wide-shot. The visual analogy, though problematic, conveys why the dynamic and multifaceted concept of scale has been chosen for this research rather than discussing duration, style or rhetoric in isolation.⁶

Scale also involves perspective, an object's size or length in relation to something else (as when we talk about a "sense of scale"). A Blake watercolour looks small next to a Rubens oil painting but large next to a portrait miniature. Scale is always relative. Since this research involves putting discrete units of music which operate on radically different timescales alongside each other, this relativity is very important. However, scale can also be perceived relative to an abstract or extrinsic measure. For example, *PROTO-SYMPHONY* is around four minutes long, standing in relation to the timescale on which we might expect an orchestral work with "symphony" in the title to unfold. Similarly, the three instruments of *Trio-Symphony* seem paltry when compared with the full orchestra for which a symphony would typically be written. Playing with the relativity of scale in music can be intrinsic or can involve extrinsic associations and expectations, making it a subtle and varied angle from which to approach structure.

It is worth clarifying that the word "timescale" is used where necessary in this commentary to specify the durational aspect of the broader topic of scale (and to avoid confusion with other uses of the word "scale" in a musical context). Unlike the more neutral term "duration", "timescale" refers to the amount of time that musical events are given to unfold, and therefore concerns the dynamic relationship between duration and musical material described above. Given its structural focus, this commentary primarily concerns duration-related aspects of exploring the idea of scale in a musical context, but other aspects gain increasing prominence as the chapters progress.

It is also worth clarifying why "structure" is the foundation of this research, rather than "form" – the distinction is meaningful. Arnold Whittall defines form as the "constructive or organising element in music", implying that it is an active force, that it has agency.⁷ Later in his Grove article, Whittall notes how "form" can be seen in terms of discourse, "something in which the play of different, often ambiguous meanings is the decisive factor".⁸ For the purposes of this project, it is most helpful to see form as discourse in this way, or rather to say that musical discourse produces form. "Structure" has more positivistic and architectural connotations, a statement of fact rather than suggesting agency or function. Therefore, although "structure" is a helpfully neutral focus for the discussion of compositional processes in a research context, form is the ultimate concern. Through rethinking structure, how things are put together in a piece,

⁶ The visual analogy is problematic because it implies that the passage at Letter G is less detailed, which is not the case, and also because it creates a false sense of equivalency between space and time. Visual comparisons are used for explanatory purposes where helpful in this commentary, but the music in the portfolio is not directly informed by visual concepts or visual art.

⁷ Arnold Whittall, "Form", *Grove Music Online* (2001), accessed 18th January 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.09981>.

⁸ Ibid. Whittall contrasts this with the notion that "form" implies rationality and unity.

what interesting musical discourses can arise? This project has the nuts and bolts of compositional structure as a foundation on which the wider implications of the topic can be explored.

1.4 Contextualising the compositional research

“Scale” is not a field of musical study, but a flexible conceptual framework through which to consider structure, one which draws on various composers and fields. Nevertheless, it is a term used frequently and casually in relation to music. We might talk about a “large-scale piece” or a “full-scale opera”, largeness or fullness in these cases being variable and subjective. There is often a value judgement implicit in these casual uses of the term, “large-scale” perhaps implying profundity and worth, “small-scale” perhaps implying delicacy and simplicity, depending on historical and cultural context. There are attendant implications of style and genre too, and thus of audience expectations. It is thus unsurprising that although there is no particular field to review when discussing scale, subsequent chapters touch on many different fields in teasing out the resonances of the topic, from the early-Romantic aesthetic of the fragment and the psychology of musical expectation (as explored in Chapter Two) to the nature of musical eloquence and the arbitrariness of endings (as explored in Chapter Five). Each of these areas and many others will be addressed more fully as they arise in subsequent chapters, along with relevant definitions and clarifications, but it is helpful now to discuss some of the most important musical precedents for this research more generally.

As indicated above, the music of Kurtág, Chopin, Mahler and Wagner has been the backdrop to this research. While in many ways these composers represent particular extremes of scale, they each explore differences in scale within their own work too. For example, Part II of Kurtág’s *Kafka-Fragmente*, Op. 24, is an eight-minute single movement, contrasting strongly with surrounding movements which last mostly under a minute. The musical processes in play are almost identical, but the timescale on which they unfold is comparatively vast, creating an extreme play of scale found rarely in other music and ripe for further exploration.⁹ In addition, Stephen Walsh has noted how Kurtág assembles “bold, incisive but isolated gestures [...] into a large-scale work with a clear argument”, forming large macroscopic shapes in spite of a fragmentary, microscopic surface, and playing with the boundaries between small- and large-scale.¹⁰ Kurtág is the foundation of the fragmentary end of my spectrum of influences, and his importance is such that he is quoted at the beginning of every subsequent chapter. However, on this foundation also stands Chopin, particularly the Op. 28 Preludes with their “brevity and apparent disorder” (Jeffrey Kallberg paraphrasing Schumann), as well as Lutoslawski, whose “hesitant and episodic” introductory movements are followed by “developmental, goal-oriented

⁹ Similar contrasts can be found in the *Officium Breve*, Op. 28, for string quartet, in which the 11th movement is both much longer and more harmonically insistent than the surrounding movements, and in the *Hommage à Mihály András*, also for string quartet, in which a pointillistic, gestural fourth movement lasting around fifteen seconds is followed by a sustained, chorale-like fifth movement lasting around two minutes.

¹⁰ Stephen Walsh, “György Kurtág: An Outline Study (I)”, *Tempo* 140 (March 1982), p. 16.

and climactic” final movements.¹¹ The most pertinent examples will be explored in subsequent chapters.

Mahler typically offers distorted engorgements of traditional symphonic forms while playing with their usual functions.¹² However, the finale of the 2nd Symphony and the first movement of the 3rd Symphony offer bold and unrepeated experiments in fragmentary structure. Thomas Bauman writes of the finale of the 2nd that “Shapes move in and out of focus, unsponsored and unconnected. And yet the ordering of events is far from arbitrary” – one could imagine the same being said of the *Kafka-Fragmente*.¹³ The finale’s sudden fragmentariness is self-reflexive, breaking down the discourse of engorged symphonic forms with which the piece has been operating until that point, an effect little explored in other music and worthy of further examination.¹⁴ Other structural effects used regularly in Mahler’s music include “alienation effects” and “breakthroughs”, as characterised by Theodor Adorno, ranging from tiny rips in a continuous musical fabric to sudden stops or lurches into new moods and tempi.¹⁵ Much music is characterised by ruptures and sudden shifts, but Mahler’s are in the context of the Austro-German symphonic tradition, a prevailing grandeur and continuity, which makes them all the more alarming and alienating. Adorno himself notes how such effects are “only possible on somewhat familiar ground”.¹⁶ They have their power partly because they exist in relation to expectations of structure, continuity and scale.

Wagner wrote continuous musical discourses of unprecedented length in the Austro-German late-Romantic vein, forming part of the general musical-cultural backdrop to this research. However, the more specific notions of “endless melody” and the “art of transition” come into play in Chapters Three and Five when considering different kinds of continuity and the nature of musical eloquence.¹⁷

¹¹ Jeffrey Kallberg, “Small ‘forms’: in defence of the prelude”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 133. Charles Bodman Rae, “Lutoslawski, Witold”, *Grove Music Online* (2001), accessed 9th April 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.17226>.

¹² For example, the Scherzo of the 5th Symphony is the longest of the five movements and takes central position.

¹³ Thomas Bauman, “Mahler in a New Key: Genre and the ‘Resurrection’ Finale”, *The Journal of Musicology* 23, no. 3 (Summer 2006), p. 475.

¹⁴ Carolyn Abbate’s work on musical narrative contains analogous ideas about self-reflexion, namely pieces drawing attention to a “narrating voice” and how the music is being “told”. While this research does carry such narrative implications, they are not a focus. See *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 28-29 for a summary of these ideas.

¹⁵ Theodor Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 20. When Adorno speaks of “alienation effects” he is referring primarily to Mahler’s uncanny use of traditional forms and idioms, while James Buhler helpfully summarises Adorno’s idea of breakthrough as “a moment of structural reorientation, a deflection or ‘turning-aside’ (*Ablenkung*) from the expected formal course of a piece”. James Buhler, “‘Breakthrough’ as Critique of Form: The Finale of Mahler’s First Symphony”, *19th-Century Music* 20, no. 2 (Autumn 1996), p. 129.

¹⁶ Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, p. 20.

¹⁷ For a concise explanation of these two important Wagnerian concepts, see John Daverio, “*Tristan und Isolde*: essence and appearance”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner*, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 126-127.

As suggested above, length alone is not the significant factor with Wagner or with any of these other precedents, or else Webern and John Cage would be equally relevant. Rather it is the dynamic relationship between duration and musical content, both what the music does and how long it takes to do it within a particular structural, aesthetic and cultural context. It is helpful to note some other red herrings. Morton Feldman's idiosyncratic notions of "scale" as opposed to "form" are not useful in this context, and audibly playing with scale as defined here is not central to his musical structures.¹⁸ Similarly, one might look to a piece like Stockhausen's *Inori*, which uses a basic "Ur-gestalt", or formula, of which "all measurements and relationships in the large form are a projection".¹⁹ A crotchet in the formula is expanded into one minute of the final form, connecting the small-scale with the large. However, I would argue that this expansion is not audibly meaningful for listeners, whatever the work's qualities. This research is not concerned with abstract, atemporal musical architecture, but with teleological, varied and dynamic structural discourses unfolding in real time in which explorations of scale are made a focus for listeners.

In addition, the repetitious accumulations of Steve Reich and Howard Skempton, or miniscule differences in scale such as expanding and contracting cells in Stravinsky, are not of direct relevance here. It is important to limit the scope of any doctoral project, and this research deals primarily with discrete units of music as opposed to small surface repetitions and variations within a continuous flow. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the insights into structure afforded by this research can indeed be applied by fellow composers and musicians to music that is not part of the immediate artistic context set for this project.

★ ★ ★

This research stands somewhat between established compositional and academic areas, presenting a lens through which to view structure that brings many fields and ideas together but finds its focus and value in the compositions produced. Each piece highlights and embodies particular answers to the research questions, and any wider resonances and implications of the topic have only been relevant in as much as they have prompted tangible creative action. The research has also been steered by the varied external requirements for each of the pieces, opening up paths that might otherwise have been unexplored (as will become clear in the coming chapters). In closing this introduction, I will return to the Henry Moore quotation with which it opened. Moore notes that "the very small or the very big takes on added size emotion", and

¹⁸ Feldman distinguishes between form, as merely the division of things into parts, and scale, as the relationship and balance between parts and whole across a long piece, "finding that particular scale which suspends all proportions in equilibrium". This notion was heavily influenced by visual art and Mark Rothko in particular. Morton Feldman, "Crippled Symmetry", *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 2 (Autumn 1981), p. 103.

¹⁹ Karlheinz Stockhausen's introduction to the score of *Inori*, quoted in Gerson Leonardi, "*Inori*: Microcosm/Macrocosm Relationships and a Logic of Perception", *Perspectives of New Music* 36, no. 2 (Summer 1998), p. 66.

it is emotion, the experience that listeners have while hearing a piece, that is my ultimate concern as a composer. Research into structure is only relevant if it results in compelling, fresh and communicative musical experiences for listeners, and it is this purpose that the entire project serves.

THE FRAGMENTARY

Varga: What is it about fragment that inspires you?

Kurtág: That it is the exact opposite of ‘spick and span’.¹

2.1 Fragments and *Frammenti*

Firstly, a terminological clarification: what is a “fragment”? There is no standard definition for the term in a musical context, and while it can simply mean a small piece of a larger whole, its use is often more charged. The notion of the fragment in this research can be traced back to early-Romantic musical aesthetics. For Charles Rosen, writing primarily of Schumann and Chopin, the paradox of the early-Romantic fragment is that it is “at once complete and torn away from a larger whole”.² Schumann himself framed Chopin’s Op. 28 Preludes as “ruins”, “all disorder and wild confusion”.³ A fragment, then, is not only a small piece of a larger whole, but also has a particular expressive quality. The larger context it suggests may or may not be heard, and things can be left unsaid or unexplored, leading to a sense of profound ambiguity and even brokenness. While some have noted how this makes the fragment quintessentially Romantic, even “the most suggestively Romantic statement of all” for Richard Taruskin, Kurtág’s view is in the same spirit.⁴ When asked what it is about fragment that inspires him, he answers “That it is the exact opposite of ‘spick and span’”.⁵ And more than any other composer, Kurtág has made fragments an almost lifelong *modus operandi*.

What musical features give fragments their particular expressive quality? Brevity is implied, and endings are particularly crucial – the unresolved dominant 7th at the end of the first song of Schumann’s *Dichterliebe* is a famous example, while Chopin’s Mazurka Op. 7, No. 5 repeats

¹ György Kurtág interviewed by Bálint András Varga in *György Kurtág: Three Interviews and Ligeti Homages* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2009), p. 55. No information about translation is given in this book, though it can be assumed that the interviews were conducted in Hungarian and that any translations are Varga’s own, including highly idiomatic translations such as “spick and span”.

² Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, p. 48.

³ Schumann’s 1837 review of the Op. 28 Preludes from the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, quoted in Kallberg, “Small ‘forms’”, p. 133.

⁴ Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, n.d.), accessed 27th May 2020, <https://www.oxfordwesternmusic.com/view/Volume3/actrade-9780195384833-div1-007005.xml>. Taruskin suggests that in the Op. 28 Preludes, Chopin “invented a new genre” to embody the idea of the Romantic fragment.

⁵ *György Kurtág: Three Interviews*, p. 55. Stephen Walsh has noted the affinity between Chopin’s Op. 28 and Kurtág’s own *Hommage à András Mihály*, both of which feature “abrupt contrasts alleviated by some mechanical tonal scheme”, in “A Brief Office for György Kurtág”, *The Musical Times* 130, no. 1759 (September 1989), p. 526.

senza fine. Monothematicism and short-breathed musical gestures are common. The preludes of Chopin's Op. 28, for example, rarely provide structural contrast or sustained melody, and even those with seemingly traditional structures contain striking imbalances.⁶ There is often a sense of premature or arbitrary closure in fragments, a feeling that things could go on but don't. And in Kurtág particularly the mode of address is often highly gestural, punctured with pauses, and lacking a discernible pulse, creating a jaggedness that is the polar opposite of a symphonic ideal of continuity. Fragments are thus a matter of both brevity and the nature of the music itself, its unruliness, its suggestiveness, its imbalances and its lack of resolution. In other words, they are a matter of scale, the nature of the music relative to its length and proportions within a particular context.

It is also revealing to define fragments by what they are not. While the term "fragment" implies disorder and brokenness, the term "miniature" implies a complete piece that is simply small in scale, like a scale model. In Chopin's Op. 28, there is a clear difference between the tidiness of the A major prelude and the unruliness of the A minor prelude, in which the final cadence is bizarrely perfunctory. Likewise, in Kurtág's *S. K. Remembrance Noise*, the seventh movement presents a clear out-and-back trajectory, the violin expanding chromatically outwards either side of a middle G# before coming back in again at the end. By contrast, the fourth movement ends on a dissonant intensification of the opening idea, leaving an open wound. Differing levels of closure and structural balance can create very different effects, and Chopin and Kurtág play with the line between "fragment" and "miniature" in a way that other noted miniaturists do not. Some may expect Webern, for example, to be a central figure in this research given his importance in Kurtág's development and an outwardly comparable extremity of scale. However, I would argue that Webern's pieces can rarely be characterised as unruly fragment sets in which a play of discrete scales and modes of address, and the lines between fragment and miniature, are a significant part of the structural discourse.⁷ The same can be said of other noted twentieth-century miniaturists like Frederic Mompou and Erik Satie.⁸



Fragments, as defined above, were the starting point for this project. This is reflected in the title of the first piece in the portfolio, *Frammenti Ricercati* – literally, "researched fragments".⁹ The

⁶ The "raindrop" prelude, no. 15, is a notable example, its middle section lasting 48 bars against the first section's 27 and the reprise's 14. I would argue that this seeming imbalance is a vital part of the piece's particular effect.

⁷ A notable exception is the *Six Orchestral Pieces*, Op. 6, in which the fourth movement operates on a much larger timescale than the others and using a very different mode of address.

⁸ Mompou's unwillingness to use final barlines in the *Musica Callada*, for example, is a red herring with regard to this research – his balanced miniatures tend to cadence clearly and can rarely be classed as unruly fragments. Satie, meanwhile, though often playfully challenging excesses of scale, does not generally use different timescales or levels of closure as a means with which to create larger structures in a way that is pertinent to this research.

⁹ The title is a partial allusion to Ligeti's *Musica Ricercata*, a piece which sought to use rigorous limitations in order to experiment compositionally. There is no further connection between the two pieces.

piece was designed to be the opposite of “spick and span”, all but one of its movements being adapted from snippets of previous pieces or ideas which had been lying in my sketchbook, with no concern for motivic unity or through-composedness of any kind.¹⁰ Though there are recurring sub-motivic musical gestures, this is the result of my own compositional mannerisms and tendencies rather than by design. The intention was a pure experiment in scale, juxtaposing musical units operating on highly contrasting timescales (ranging from ten seconds to over two and a half minutes) within an overall duration of around eight minutes. In this sense the piece acted as maquette or prototype for the more ambitious and wide-ranging experiments of scale in subsequent pieces, as well as being a minimum viable product for the research. It embodies answers to my research questions in the bluntest possible form.

The movements of the piece are listed in Table 2.1 along with their sources and rough durations.¹¹ There is already a clear divide between the seven shorter movements and the two longer movements, the differences in duration stark for a piece with such a short overall duration. Crucially, these differences are also audible to the listener on the musical surface, a fact which is central to all the pieces contained herein: scale is made an active focus of the listener’s experience rather than an abstract structural concern.

Table 2.1 The movements of *Frammenti Ricercati* and their sources

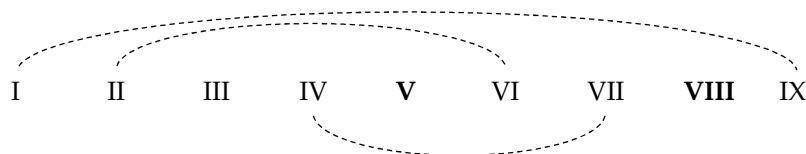
Movement	Rough duration	Source
I.	c. 25”	Unused idea from my sketchbook.
II.	c. 15”	Adapted from an earlier wind band piece.
III.	c. 20”	Adapted from an earlier violin and piano piece.
IV.	c. 10”	Adapted from an earlier violin and piano piece.
V.	c. 2’40	Composed especially for <i>Frammenti Ricercati</i> .
VI.	c. 10”	[see II.]
VII.	c. 10”	[see IV.]
VIII.	c. 2’30	Adapted from an earlier choral piece.
IX.	c. 35”	[see I.]

Although such an extreme contrast of short and long, fragmentary and continuous, is fairly uncommon in itself, the value and compositional skill lie in how it is deployed in practice and made to work. In *Frammenti Ricercati*, the main structural device used to this end is repetition. Listening to the piece, it is apparent that movements VI, VII and IX are doubles of movements

¹⁰ Kurtág’s fragments are likewise not usually written in the order in which they appear in the final piece, as is evident from scores such as *S. K. Remembrance Noise* and the *Kafka-Fragmente* in which a date of completion is given at the end of each movement. Many of Kurtág’s multi-movement works also feature transcriptions or elaborations of earlier pieces.

¹¹ These durations are my own estimations cross-checked against the workshop recording included with this submission. Any pauses between movements are not included.

II, IV and I respectively. These relationships can be demonstrated visually as follows, with the longer movements in bold:



The overall symmetry is obvious: movement IX is a near-exact repetition of movement I, framing the piece. However, movements VI and VII offer more distorted reflections. By repeating these tiny gestural fragments after over two and a half minutes of obsessively focusing on one pitch (movement V), attention is deliberately drawn to the contrast in scale, that is the contrast in both the duration and nature of the music. This is a self-reflexive effect. Meanwhile, the alterations made to the fragments when they are repeated (they are transformed from assertive to whispered) create a sense that the longer fifth movement has changed things, that it has structural agency. This is not a developmental or thematic device, but a scale-based gestural one. Kurtág's *Officium Breve*, Op. 28, for string quartet served as a model. In this piece, the twelfth movement is a lightly embellished repetition of the third in a radically different context, following a movement that obsessively focuses on one pitch and is much longer than those around it. Such near-exact repetitions are rare in Kurtág (even though self-similarity and recurring tropes are very common), but repetition became a key structural device in the early part of this research for its capacity to draw attention to and create effects using differences in scale. This was a matter of taking the *Officium Breve* and running with it.

Frammenti Ricercati was a minimum viable product for this research on a non-motivic basis and with a clear Kurtágian model. The ways in which tiny fragments and longer passages are juxtaposed draw attention to the seeming imbalances in the structure and make a virtue out of them. The use of repetition enhances this effect while also creating a sense of structural narrative in an atypical way. The central idea of altered repetitions of fragments after an intense, extended passage thus became one of the foundations of the quartet's longer and much more ambitious sequel, *SEXTET*.

2.2 Scaling up: the foundations of *SEXTET*

Like *Frammenti Ricercati*, *SEXTET* places units of music which operate on radically different timescales together in order to create an unconventional musical structure, one which maintains both coherence and directedness despite its seeming imbalances. Where it differs from the quartet is most obviously its length, but also its complexity and use of material. For ease of reference, below are the nicknames given to each unit of *SEXTET* in the order in which they appear in the final piece:

Motto (b. 1)

Motivic scaling (bb. 5-25)

Vivo – Calmo (bb. 26–28)
Scherzo (bb. 29–76)
Weird strumming (bb. 77–78)
Lamento (bb. 79–88)
Hoedown (bb. 89–245)
Lullaby (bb. 256–309)
Harmony (bb. 334–380)
Joni's Womb Bliss (bb. 381–392)

The gaps in this sequence of bar numbers are filled by modified repetitions of earlier units or by transitional material. Fig. 2.1 provides two proportional graphs of the final structure produced using timings from the live recording included with this submission (the timings for each unit include any pauses that follow). The first shows a broad fragmentary–continuous–fragmentary shape, while the second is a more detailed breakdown visualising the timescale contrasts involved.

Fig. 2.1a Proportional graph showing the broad structure of *SEXTET*

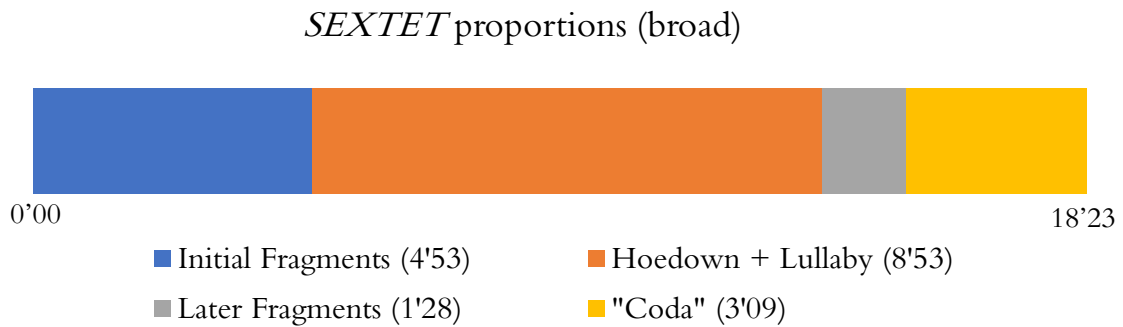
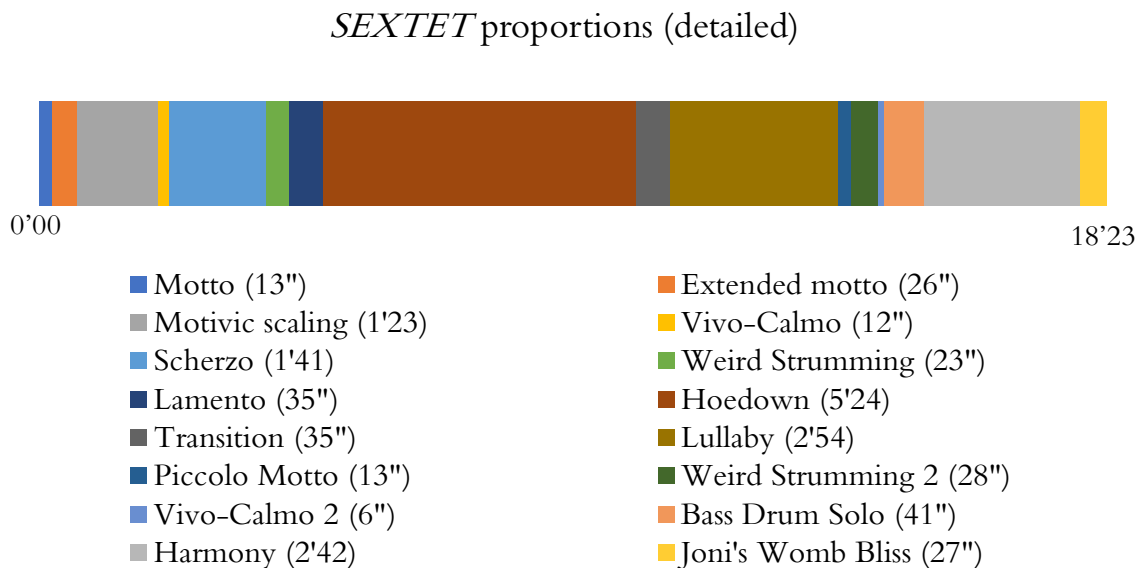


Fig. 2.1b Proportional graph showing the structure of *SEXTET* in detail



All the music in the piece was derived from a main motif or “motto” (Fig. 2.2) produced at the outset of the compositional process (but not featured in the final piece). This was not done in order to ensure organic coherence – I would side against analysts like Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger who seek to find spurious motivic unity in a set like Chopin’s Op. 28.¹² Rather, motivic working is a compositional tool which can help to define a piece’s sound-world and create particular discursive musical effects (the kind of effects which are the cornerstone of sonata form development sections). The motivic basis of *SEXTET* was a way to create audible musical consistency between the fragmentary and continuous components, adding a new dimension to the experiment as befitting a much longer piece than *Frammenti Ricercati*. It was also yet more of a departure from Kurtág, perhaps representing a fundamental aesthetic difference. Although Kurtág’s fragment sets often contain recurring sonorities (such as open strings), “they fail to ‘progress’ in conventional terms” as Rachel Beckles Willson says of the *Kafka-Fragmente*.¹³

Fig. 2.2 The clarinet “motto” which served as the basis of the music in *SEXTET*



Early on in the compositional process, patterns were extrapolated from the motto to freely produce related fragments without thought for structural context (these make up the final piece’s fragmentary components) as well as some “zoomed out” longer-range harmonic sketches with which the fragments would contrast. At this stage, nothing was decided about the final ordering beyond the fact that the piece would go from fragmentary to continuous and back again, an even simpler shape than *Frammenti* which could embody the research concerns transparently. This shape was decided before any material had been written. The final structure was thus another assembly job, only this time the units being assembled were musically related. In this way, *SEXTET* eschews supposedly organic musical development and tidy through-composed structural continuity, but maintains a motivic dimension as well as a clear overall trajectory. Structure is not an organic inevitability, but an invention guided by the nature of the materials.

2.3 Assembling fragments

The first five minutes or so of *SEXTET*, up to Letter G, are a fragment set. The intention was to create a series of fragmentary musical close-ups which nevertheless have a sense of progression and macroscopic shape. Though Kurtág’s fragment sets are largely non-motivic and non-

¹² See Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, “Twenty-Four Preludes Op. 28: Genre, Structure and Significance”, in *Chopin Studies*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1988), pp. 167-193. Such analyses embody the concern for unity above all which I distanced myself from in Chapter One.

¹³ Rachel Beckles Willson, *Ligeti, Kurtág, and Hungarian Music during the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 211.

developmental, they do form larger shapes through their piecing together and accumulation. Marta Kurtág says that “any work of [Kurtág’s] made up of several brief pieces is in fact one composition”.¹⁴ It is not simply that the fragments add up to more than the sum of their parts, but that they form a discourse when heard in real time in spite of the fact that they remain discrete. The principal devices with which this is achieved are contrast, grouping, differing levels of closure and repetition, each of which is addressed below in order to explain the thought governing the ordering of the fragments in *SEXTET*. The same principles of assembly also apply to every other piece in the portfolio.

Contrasts and groupings

When placing together units of music, from tiny fragment sets to vast symphonies, a fundamental concern is balancing contrast and continuity in order to sustain interest. On a surface level, the fragments in the first part of *SEXTET* display a range of moods and approaches which create a sense of variety and rhetorical cut-and-thrust when placed together. “Motivic Scaling” at Letter B, for example, contrasts texturally with the preceding sparse clarinet material. “Vivo – Calmo” at Letter C then provides a lively rhythmic contrast, increasing structural momentum in spite of its extreme brevity. However, the opening as well as Letters A, B, C and D all begin with the same three notes (the first three notes of the motto) before going in different directions. This does not create a sense of organic coherence as such, but it does induct the listener into the musical world of the piece, creating audible connections among the fragments while still allowing sufficient variety and contrast to reinforce their separateness.

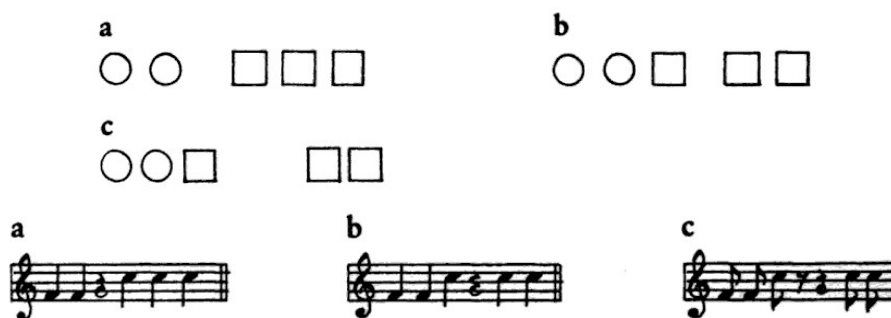
Nevertheless, Letter D marks a departure which closes off an initial larger group. The first 28 bars of *SEXTET* have a broadly slow, even static mood, and use a limited set of pitches. The manic “Scherzo” at Letter D splices together snippets from across the whole piece for a minute and forty seconds. We retrospectively group the first 28 bars together in contrast to the “Scherzo”. Kurtág’s aforementioned *Officium Breve* features comparable groupings: stylistically-connected movements form larger macroscopic units, creating a play between broadly consonant groups and broadly dissonant groups.¹⁵ Conceiving of structure in this way has parallels with ideas from cognitive musicology such as Lerdahl and Jackendoff’s generative theory, which asserts that “grouping can be viewed as the most basic component of musical

¹⁴ Marta Kurtág interviewed by Bálint András Varga in *György Kurtág: Three Interviews*, p. 65.

¹⁵ The first three movements, for example, centre around C major, which is contrasted strongly by the opening of the fourth movement, a tightly-packed *fortissimo* chromatic cluster which begins a chain of four broadly dissonant movements. Notably, the third movement, a transcription of the Szervánszky homage from the *Játékok* piano collection, is transposed up a major second from the original version (B \flat major to C major) in order to function as part of a C major-based macroscopic unit. It therefore functions as both a standalone piece and as part of one of the *Officium Breve*’s larger blocks, embodying the frequently fine line between separateness and continuity. The intricacies of the piece’s construction are explored in more depth by Benjamin Frandzel in “A Canon Across Time: György Kurtág’s *Officium Breve in Memoriam Andreae Szervánszky*, op. 28”, *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 43, no. 3/4 (2002), pp. 383–396.

understanding”.¹⁶ They explore how musical events are grouped together in our minds according to proximity and similarity much in the way just described, which is represented visually by the shape diagrams reproduced in Fig. 2.3.¹⁷ *SEXTET* was not constructed in accordance with these concepts, but they show a cognitive basis for how the piece is intended to function, and provide a framework for considering its scale-based effects.

Fig. 2.3 Shape diagrams and parallel music examples showing the basic principles of grouping, reproduced from Lerdahl and Jackendoff



Differing levels of closure

The first bar of *SEXTET* is a condensed version of the motto (Fig. 2.2) which says the same thing on a smaller timescale. Using this condensed version, rather than the original, avoided reinforcing a sense of cadential closure on C too much at the start of the piece. However, the version of the motto at Letter A is even less conclusive. Ending with B rather than C, and the subsequent bass drum residue, invite continuation. Such play between differing levels of closure is a useful way to create momentum and macroscopic shape across fragments. Jeffrey Kallberg has discussed how the abrupt or incomplete endings in Chopin’s aforementioned Op. 28 create the sense that “closure is deferred from prelude to prelude”, each one fulfilling or continuing a “closural promise left hanging”.¹⁸ The very feeling of incompleteness compels us to listen on. In *SEXTET* or works by Kurtág, in contrast to Chopin, a listener may not be able to tell when one unit ends and another begins, further blurring the sense of scale and continuity in a way complementary to the groupings described above. It is beyond the scope of this research to assess whether listeners perceive the endings of the units in *SEXTET* or not, but it is possible to explain the thought behind those endings and the intended effects of scale.

For example, “Motivic Scaling” at Letter B: the music occupies the same narrow registral and pitch space for 21 slow bars, before sudden extremity of register and an invasive $A\flat$ are introduced in b. 22. This radical shift problematises what we have heard so far but then refuses

¹⁶ Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), p. 13.

¹⁷ Ibid. pp. 40-41. The diagrams reproduced in Fig. 2.3 are found on p. 42.

¹⁸ Kallberg, “Small ‘forms’”, pp. 142-143. The nature of closure in tonal music is different to that in non-tonal music, but for the purposes of this discussion the general principle is the same.

to resolve the problem. Nevertheless, the sudden registral depth is also intended to ground the music and close off this unit, creating an uneasy mix of openness and closure that demands continuation. By contrast, the “Scherzo” is a closed structure, even a miniature. Though it is collage-like on the surface, its form is marked out by the recurring gesture of an ascending major third (in b. 29, b. 39, b. 47, b. 58 and b. 72). The “Scherzo” is therefore not only longer and busier than the surrounding units, but also has a tidier structure. After the “Scherzo” we hear another two short and inconclusive fragments, creating a short-long-short, open-closed-open structure from the beginning up to Letter G. Overall, the fragments’ lack of conclusiveness invites continuation, while varying levels of openness and closure are used both to provide contrast and to form larger arcs. The long-shot is made up of close-ups.

Repetition

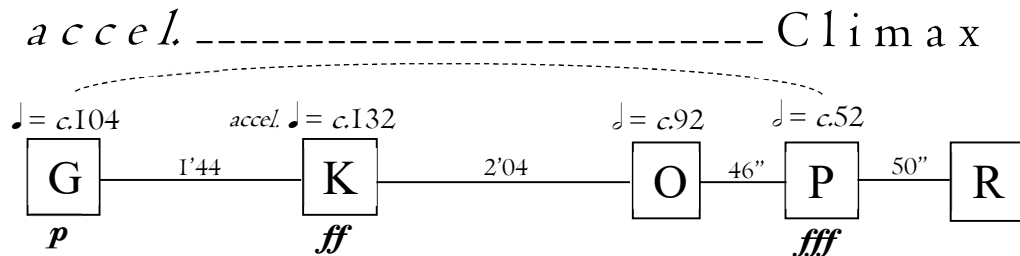
The significance that repetition can have in fragment sets has already been discussed in relation to *Frammenti Ricercati*. The most important wholesale examples in *SEXTET* will be discussed below, but the piece also features many direct repetitions or slight modifications of key motifs in different contexts. The most notable examples are the “leaping” clarinet figure from Letter C, which is scattered throughout the piece, and the bluesy passage first heard in bb. 61–64, which recurs almost exactly at b. 276 and b. 362. These repetitions are non-developmental, they fail to progress (to use Rachel Beckles Willson’s terms) in spite of the piece’s different modes of address. Like *Frammenti*, there are also recurring sub-motivic musical gestures which link the units. The strummed cello open strings in b. 22 are followed by similar gestures in the cello and piano in b. 27, for example. These sub-motivic gestures recurred subconsciously when writing the fragments, but they were then consciously used in order to create links between the units when deciding the final ordering.

2.3 Juxtaposing timescales

The opening fragment set of *SEXTET* already plays with differences in scale and the relationship between micro and macro. However, the true juxtaposition occurs with the following “Hoedown”/“Lullaby” sequence, which takes up more than half of the piece’s overall duration. This is a significant advance on the simple juxtaposition attempted in *Frammenti Ricercati*, to the point that Letter G marks a tectonic shift in the way that the music is operating. This is a true long-shot, not a composite long-shot. It was mentioned in Chapter One how the passage at Letter G features the same motif played over and over, slightly modified each time to form a long stepwise ascending line. The overall continuity and momentum of this section are crafted similarly through carefully-graded tempo increases and chromatic voice-leading. As visualised in Fig. 2.4, the “Hoedown” increases in both speed and energy up to the climax at Letter P/Q. Pitch and harmonic sequences are almost always chromatically ascending, for example the chords in bb. 174–190. This is complemented by the fact that there is almost always a discernible pulse, unlike any of the preceding gestural fragments, which allows listeners to lock in to the progress

of the music. The continuous passage from Letter G is active and goal-directed, not simply *long*; a way of composing clearly marked out from the fragments in both duration and intention. The music operates on a larger scale.

Fig. 2.4 Diagram of the “Hoedown” sequence of *SEXTET* (produced after the piece was finished using timings from the live performance included with this submission)



Such moments of lift-off are generally not present in Kurtág’s sets, the key examples of long movements hitherto mentioned being mostly slow and presenting no fundamental shift in discourse. However, they are present in certain pieces by Lutoslawski. *Livre pour Orchestre* is the most pertinent example. In this piece we hear three short but intense “chapters” separated by two “intermedes”. The intermedes, to quote Lutoslawski’s preface to the score, “consist of music of less significance played *ad libitum*”, while the conductor is instructed to adopt an attitude which suggests a pause between movements. However, the third intermede is not cut off like the previous two but instead “develops gradually into a large final movement”, a moment of exhilarating lift-off after a fragmentary opening.

This moment is exhilarating partly because it is unexpected. In his book *Sweet Anticipation*, cognitive musicologist David Huron notes that “As the events of a musical work unfold, the work itself engenders expectations that influence how the remainder of the work is experienced.”¹⁹ Somewhat analogously to *Livre*, the opening of *SEXTET* establishes a broadly fragmentary world, but then Letter G breaks the pattern. In Huron’s terms, this is a large-scale example of “dynamic surprise”, in which “the music is constructed so that the work itself will set up some work-specific expectation that is then violated”; there is arguably also “schematic surprise”, in which “the music is constructed so that it violates some existing schema the listeners have brought to the listening experience”.²⁰ Surprises can be pleasant or unpleasant. *Livre*’s is pleasant, I would argue, because its final chapter builds to a rousing climax, making the structure a clear one-way street from hesitant opening to thrilling finale. *SEXTET* is not a one-way street and its structure is less clearly signposted, with no ritualistic intermedes. As well as providing a moment of unexpected lift-off influenced by Lutoslawski, it also provides a structural disintegration influenced by Mahler.

As explained in Chapter One, Mahler’s 2nd Symphony passes from a broadly continuous mode of musical address into a fragmentary finale characterised by short bursts of music, silences,

¹⁹ David Huron, *Sweet Anticipation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), p. 227.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 269.

and haltings of the musical flow. Passages of music regularly disintegrate into bass drum or timpani rolls. Thomas Bauman, cited earlier, writes:

“Mahler’s finale [...] sets out as if it were bent on laying before us a full-scale instrumental design. But somewhere along the way the discursive modes of the German symphonic tradition become either stymied or exhausted, and they disintegrate in a final collapse.”²¹

This startling self-reflexive effect draws attention to the way in which the music had previously been speaking by presenting its very disintegration, a procedure that carries substantially more risks than Lutoslawski’s in spite of a similarly rousing final climax. There is a fine line between intentional structural failure and a structure that simply doesn’t work – not everyone would argue that Mahler’s structures do indeed work. To quote a memorable phrase of Adorno’s, Mahler “cannot be reconciled with the notion of standard competence”.²² Shifts in scale, going against structural expectations and intentional ambiguity about how the music is operating could clearly be frustrating or bewildering for a listener regardless of how carefully the piece is executed. But such risk of compositional failure is at the very heart of compositional research.

The continuous mode of address ushered in at Letter G of *SEXTET* (analogously to Lutoslawski) breaks down just before Letter T (analogously to Mahler). The increasingly halting “Lullaby” leads into an altered reprise of the “Lamento” (b. 300) which disintegrates into a bass drum roll, a direct link with Mahler’s finale. This bass drum roll can be seen as a musical primordial soup, a rumble which other music can collapse into or emerge out of, making it a potent device with which to explore structural breakdowns. A similar idea is used in the first movement of Mahler’s 3rd Symphony too, with descendants including the fourth of Webern’s *Six Orchestral Pieces* and George Benjamin’s *Ringed by the Flat Horizon* (from the bar before Letter GG onwards). When the fragmentary world returns in *SEXTET*, there is this time a continuous bass drum roll underneath. We thus perceive the completeness of the fragments differently, an effect enhanced by the ways in which they are altered and intensified (similarly to *Frammenti*). It is as though the bass drum is trying to maintain some sense of continuity, to glue the fragments together after the structural breakdown, before becoming more assertive at Letter W. This characterisation may sound fanciful, but it conveys how exploring differences in scale within a musical structure can have striking poetic and expressive consequences. Such consequences would go on to gain increasing prominence in my compositional thinking as the research progressed, as is demonstrated in subsequent chapters.

²¹ Thomas Bauman, “Mahler in a New Key”, p. 475.

²² Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, p. 20. Deryck Cooke, writing in 1960, asserted that form is “widely regarded as [Mahler’s] weakest point”, but that “even when Mahler temporarily loses grasp, the grandeur of the overall conception and the fascination of the material are sufficient to justify his claim to greatness”. Deryck Cooke, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to his Music* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), p. 13.

2.5 Endings

It is ironic that the overall shape created up to Letter X of *SEXTET* (fragmentary-continuous-fragmentary) can be seen as an imbalanced ternary form, a highly familiar structure rather than a newly-invented one. Furthermore, after the hard-driven “Hoedown”, the “Lullaby” offers calm in the manner of a slow movement after a sonata-allegro, giving the long central section of the piece from Letter G to Letter T a sense both of continuity and structural-rhetorical familiarity: climax followed by comedown. The “later fragments” (as they are labelled in Fig. 2.1a) can even be seen as an extension or logical result of this comedown, creating a larger arc which goes across the change in the music’s mode of address. Nevertheless, although the goal at the start of the compositional process was to create a simple shape that could embody the research concerns transparently, any sense of ternary obviousness and structural-rhetorical familiarity are deliberately thrown off by the piece’s coda.

“Harmony” and “Joni’s Womb Bliss” form this coda as shown in Fig. 2.1. “Harmony” is broadly continuous, driven by voice-leading and small gestural/registral climaxes. But it is also somewhat halting, resting briefly in b. 351 and b. 366. In context, it marks a return to a more continuous, harmonically-driven music but with greater hesitance and smaller climaxes – not quite a Mahlerian transcendent peroration. Its position just after the music has broken down, perhaps after the piece seems to have ended, creates a sense that the structure is extending beyond a familiar shape and going on longer than was necessarily expected. This effect of scale carries risks. The listener may simply be asking: “When will this thing end?”

Such concerns relate to the earlier discussion of closure among fragments and whether continuation is invited or implied. To enhance the feeling of extension and structural ambiguity, *SEXTET* seems as though it could be ending in several places, with each “ending” utilising a different kind of closing gesture.²³ These gestures are worth broadly defining as they are present throughout the portfolio and can be important in defining perceptions of scale and structure:

- 1) Reprise

The altered reprise of the very opening at Letter T could be perceived as a cyclical rounding-off gesture (as in *Frammenti Ricercati*).

- 2) Terminal drop-off

The clarinet’s glissando droop at the end of the held E in b. 360 could be perceived as a terminating gesture, the music dropping off the edge. A similar effect can be achieved with an ascending gesture (as in b. 14 of *PROTO-SYMPHONY*, for example).

- 3) Neutralisation

The neutrality of the violin’s “tuning” gesture in b. 366 has the effect of clearing the musical air, so to speak. (This moment could also be seen as a terminal drop-off.)

²³ While not directly informing *SEXTET*, Jonathan Kramer’s notion of “gestural time” in music provides a useful context for this idea, focusing as it does on function as distinct from temporal placing – for example, “the end” could happen in “the middle”. See Jonathan Kramer, “Multiple and Non-Linear Time in Beethoven’s Opus 135”, *Perspectives of New Music* 11, no. 2 (Spring – Summer 1973), pp. 122-145.

4) Stasis/insistence

The mechanical repetitions at Letter Y, and the G-B major third left held in b. 380, provide some tonal stability and do not invite continuation.

5) Sudden cut-off

The actual ending in b. 392, analogous to a hard blackout in film.

6) Button

This term is used in musical theatre to refer to the “bump” at the end of a song (such as a low pizzicato bass note after a held final chord) which acts as a punctuation mark.

Although the end of *SEXTET* features a sudden cut-off, the final quaver is also a button.

Playing with endings is a fitting way to finish a piece based on explorations of scale, structure and continuity. The actual ending is perhaps the most surprising of all. The passage at Letter Z lies in a clear E \flat major, the key of the “Lullaby”, giving a feeling of tonal stability. With its rhythmic pulsing and fresh, stable material, the passage also creates the sense of something new starting up after what seemed like an ending in b. 380. However, this is abruptly cut off. The last 11 bars turn out to be a final reanimation of the piece’s corpse, already given unnatural long life from Letter X onwards. Just as a new, more stable and continuous passage seems to begin, it cuts off early.

★ ★ ★

The structural interest of *Frammenti Ricercati* and *SEXTET* lies in the music’s shifts in scale and how they are managed. In these pieces, specific scale-based explorations in Kurtág, Chopin, Lutoslawski and Mahler have been adapted and built upon, becoming the focus of the musical discourse. While *Frammenti* uses juxtaposition and repetition in a straightforward and non-developmental way, *SEXTET* adds significant new dimensions to the same essential idea. I believe that their structures avoid convention without completely eschewing climax or traditional structural functions, fulfilling at least some of this research’s aims. But there is a bluntness and a simplicity to both. These two pieces proved that the basic idea of differences in scale as the focus of structure and musical discourse could yield fruit. The next step was to open up yet more dimensions.

THE SYMPHONIC

“When Abbado asked for *Stele*, I did seriously consider writing [...] nine symphonies, each lasting a few seconds.”¹

György Kurtág

3.1 Symphonies and the symphonic

The broad structural plan for *SEXTET* was decided before any of the musical material had been written or developed. However, as the research progressed, it became clear that a less deterministic approach would be needed if more subtle and ambiguous structures were to emerge. The subsequent piece, *Trio-Symphony*, was thus begun with no overarching plan. Like *SEXTET*, fragments were written first, but unlike *SEXTET*, the structure was to be an emergent invention guided by the research questions. The final piece is made up of eight fragments (ranging from twelve seconds to one minute and forty seconds) and two longer, more continuous movements (each around three minutes). Although these longer movements are almost identical in length, they operate very differently: the first is a headlong forward surge, a hectic development before we have heard a theme; the second is a long-breathed monody. Both represent aspects of the symphonic.

Before discussing *Trio-Symphony* in more depth, it is important to explain what is meant by the symphonic and why it is important in this research. The Grove dictionary states that the adjective “symphonic” applied to a work “implies that it is extended and thoroughly developed”.² In other words, it implies both a timescale and a particular kind of continuity which are the opposite of the fragment. To call something a “symphony” or “symphonic” often suggests musical thought of a portentous – and perhaps pretentious – nature, as well as rigour of motivic progression. This is captured by Mahler’s and Sibelius’s oft-cited contrasting definitions of the symphony, the former saying that it should be “like the world” and “all-embracing” (grand scale), the latter praising the “profound logic” and “inner connection between all the motives” (developmental continuity with roots in sonata form).³ With this comes a particular “aesthetic prestige” according to Julian Horton, for whom “symphonic mastery still confers technical legitimacy”.⁴ Such a view of symphonies as the “highest and most exalted form”,

¹ Varga, *György Kurtág: Three Interviews*, p. 50.

² Jan Larue *et al*, “Symphony”, *Grove Music Online* (2001), accessed 22nd June 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.27254>.

³ Gustav Mahler and Jean Sibelius quoted in Erik Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius Volume II: 1904-1914*, trans. Robert Layton (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 77.

⁴ Julian Horton, “Introduction: understanding the symphony”, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Symphony*, ed. Julian Horton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 4.

however widely held, is narrow and rooted in Beethoven as channelled by nineteenth-century Austro-German composers such as Brahms, Bruckner and Mahler.⁵ Countless composers have undermined, ignored, or simply predated such associations of the symphony with length and intellectual profundity. But the associations persist, and for a contemporary composer to call a work a symphony is still to make a statement, whether that statement is meant seriously or not. Thomas Adès goes so far as to say, “I find ‘symphony’ impossible to use now: it sounds so affected”.⁶ The terms “symphony” and “symphonic” cannot escape their grand connotations.

Though it is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully explore what is meant by “symphony” and “symphonic”, the following is important for the purposes of this research: when composers use these terms, there are always implications relating to scale. These can be broken down as:

- 1) Implications of duration (long)
- 2) Implications of structure (often sonata form, traditional four-movement plan)
- 3) Implications of musical mode of address (continuous, developmental)
- 4) Implications of composer’s intent (serious, universal)
- 5) Implications of instrumentation (orchestra)

The interaction between the first three of these (duration, structure and discourse) is at the heart of this research, but all five are engaged with in both *Trio-Symphony* and *PROTO-SYMPHONY*. When matters symphonic interact with the present research questions, it involves not only the nuts and bolts of compositional structure, but also the wider aesthetic, historical and cultural context in which the structures sit. How this interaction emerged is explained in the following discussion of *Trio-Symphony*.

3.2 Joins and fractures: *Trio-Symphony*

A proportional graph of *Trio-Symphony*, giving an overview of the structure, is shown in Fig. 3.1 (using timings from the live recording included with this submission). However, the piece’s greater structural ambiguity, and the differing ways in which the longer movements operate, make this graph much less revealing than those for *SEXTET* in the previous chapter. *Trio-Symphony* plays with scale in all of the same ways as *SEXTET*, but also in some significant additional ones, each of which will now be explored.

Extrinsic and generic expectations

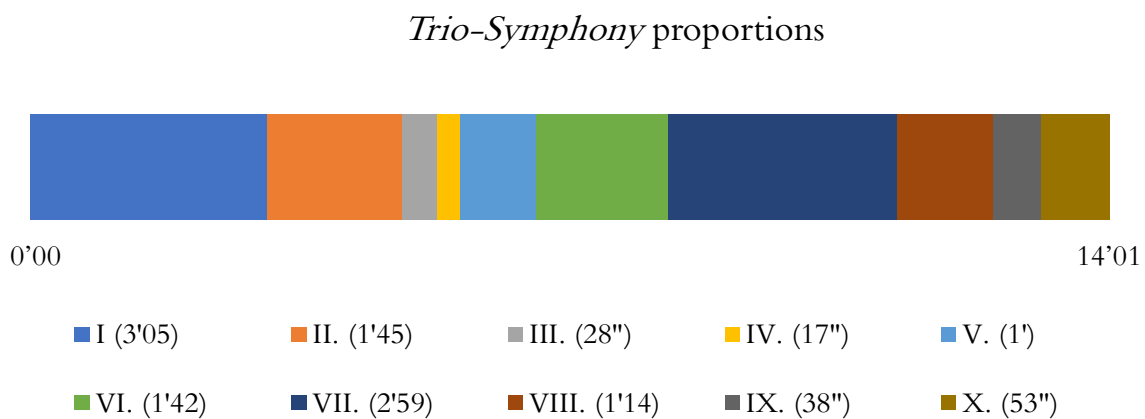
The “trio” portion of the title *Trio-Symphony* has a neutral explanatory aspect, but its link to the word “symphony” raises questions which relate directly to expectations of scale and structure. Is this a symphony for three players? If so, then in what ways? Does it have the extended duration and motivic wrangling that one might expect? Is “symphony” used sincerely

⁵ Jan Larue *et al*, “Symphony”, *Grove Music Online*.

⁶ Thomas Adès interviewed by Tom Service in *Thomas Adès: Full of Noises* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), p. 5. Carolyn Abbate rejects descriptions of *Tristan und Isolde* as a “symphonic poem” precisely because it “[saddles] *Tristan*’s music with the dubious pedigree of ‘structure’ and ‘organisation’ that reductive analysis will inevitably mistake for virtue”. Carolyn Abbate, “Wagner, ‘On Modulation’, and *Tristan*”, pp. 35–36.

or ironically? Title and content, and by extension genre and content, exist in a dynamic relationship. Jim Samson notes how literary and musical theorists have viewed genre as “a contract between author and reader, composer and listener, a contract which may of course be broken”.⁷ The symphonic promises made by the title *Trio-Symphony* (extended duration, seriousness of purpose, developmental continuity) are either partially fulfilled, fulfilled in an unexpected way, or simply unfulfilled in the piece itself. Fourteen minutes hardly qualifies as “extended”, and the structural hallmarks of a Classical symphony are absent. In fact, the majority of the movements are fragments and thus antithetical to the symphonic. Although the first movement provides continuous fast music in which aspects of sonata form can be dimly perceived (first subject at b. 1, transition at Letter B, second subject at Letter C), it has disintegrated into a static scramble by b. 83 after which the music’s mode of address becomes slow and fragmentary. This moment of structural disintegration is comparable to *SEXTET*’s, but here it is the opening gambit of the entire piece. Whatever structural and generic expectations the word “symphony” might carry, this defies all of them. The generic contract is broken.⁸

Fig. 3.1 Proportional graph showing the structure of *Trio-Symphony*



The subversive relation of title to content in *Trio-Symphony* should not be overstated. The word “symphony” has been used in a deliberately provocative or surprising way by many composers, with pieces as diverse as Stravinsky’s *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, Berio’s *Sinfonia* and Webern’s *Symphony* Op. 21 each subverting it in different ways and to different ends. However, the title *Trio-Symphony* carries implications about the scale of the music which affect how listeners perceive the structure, adding a significant new extrinsic dimension to the research. Choice of title and suggestion of genre can be an important part of how scale is made the focus of a musical discourse if they focus the listener on the matter of scale.

⁷ Jim Samson, “Chopin and Genre”, *Music Analysis* 8, no. 3 (October 1989), p. 213.

⁸ Julian Johnson asserts that Mahler frequently broke the “generic contract” in his early symphonies, which many contemporary listeners thought to be jokes or satires. *Mahler’s voices: expression and irony in the songs and symphonies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 186-187.

The sense of fragmenting a non-existent whole

Unlike the motto of *SEXTET*, the first material written for *Trio-Symphony* (bb. 1-8 of movement IX) had almost no melodic implications whatsoever, providing a harmonic haze out of which aspects could be brought into sharper focus. At the start of the compositional process, elements of this fragment were used to produce further fragments similarly to *SEXTET*, but it was decided that the seed fragment would not open the piece. Eventually, all the movements that make up the final piece except the first had been composed and copied out separately. Several possible structures had emerged, each creating a different scale-based discourse. In some, the long movement VII monody was a unifying peroration; in others it was a flowing opening before the piece fragmented; in yet others the movements were ordered from longest to shortest or vice versa. What became clear during these considerations was a lack of fast music. In being pointedly non-deterministic during the writing process, I had stayed within a comfort zone of slowness. The idea thus emerged that the piece would begin with a fast, continuous surge of energy followed by a long, fragmentary aftermath made up of the movements already written. The first movement was back-composed with the benefit of foresight.

As a result of this compositional process, the overall impression created by *Trio-Symphony* is not one of having been assembled (in the manner of *Frammenti Ricercati* and *SEXTET*) but of having been scrambled. Its movements are deeply connected and conspicuous musical features recur, most notably a focus on the pitch G3 (the viola's open G), which opens every movement except II and IV. But this is not a Sibelius-infused notion of symphonic progress with themes emerging organically and inevitably from motivic germ cells.⁹ The promised complete theme never arrives, and the actual motivic source (movement IX) is a hazy blur rather than an inevitable revelation. The arrival point on D in b. 17 of movement VI sounds stable and conclusive, but it is not the earned endpoint of some larger symphonic process, and it occurs in the middle of the piece. Movement VII stands out and articulates the overall structure because of its length (see Fig. 3.1) and its mode of address, a continuous melody unfolding on a much larger timescale than the surrounding gestural music. Perhaps it sounds like "the theme" because of its scale, but it hardly creates a sense of unifying arrival.¹⁰

The title *Trio-Symphony* emerged towards the end of the compositional process precisely because of this sense that a larger-scale whole had been fragmented, scrambled and put back in the wrong order, some pieces bigger or sharper than others. The word "symphony" suggests rigour, wholeness, seriousness of motivic purpose and continuity. And yet the true nature of the

⁹ According to Edward Laufer, Sibelius categorically stated that his themes were not built out of small fragments (as is commonly asserted), suggesting that in fact his themes have elements in common which can suggest this effect. Edward Laufer, "Continuity and design in the Seventh Symphony", in *Sibelius Studies*, ed. Timothy L. Jackson and Veijo Murtomäki (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 360.

¹⁰ The "Prélude à l'unisson" from Enescu's first orchestral suite was the direct inspiration for this movement, particularly the way that it combines lyricism and *recitativo*, its energising use of ornaments, and its artful deployment of register. That the violin's/viola's open G string plays an important role as a pedal note in both monodies is a happy coincidence, or perhaps a subconscious borrowing.

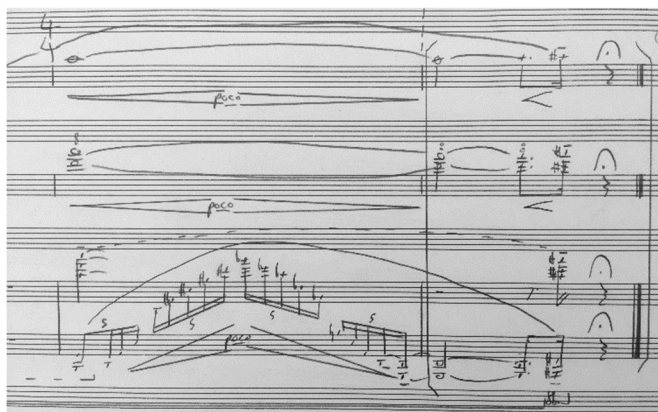
large-scale whole never emerges in *Trio-Symphony* because it never existed. This fact separates the piece from compositional processes that literally create a whole and then scramble it, and marks a difference both from the precedents discussed in previous chapters and from the deterministic approach of *SEXTET*. Nevertheless, that there is a sense of scrambling in *Trio-Symphony* is a perception difficult to quantify beyond explaining the research-led thought and processes behind it. The compositional devices involved (thematic ambiguity, writing movements out of order) are not noteworthy in themselves, but here they have been used consciously, in combination with the fragmentary-continuous dichotomy and guided by the research questions, in order to create a specific effect of scale, one which was not pre-determined but which emerged during the composition-research process.

Blurring boundaries between movements

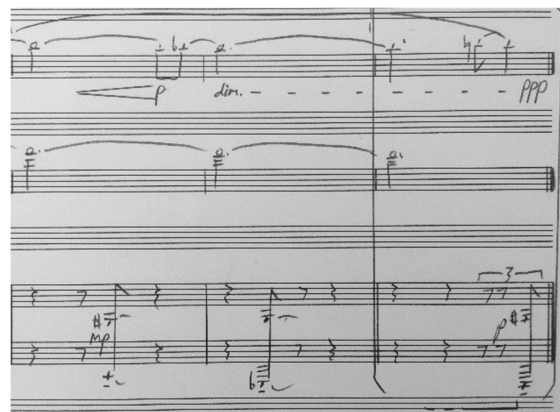
The previous chapter explored various devices with which fragment sets can be assembled, namely contrast, grouping, differing levels of closure, repetition and timescale juxtaposition. All of these are present in *Trio-Symphony*. For example, the viola's left-hand *pizzicato* open strings in movement III connect with the opening gesture of movement IV; movement V peters out while movement VI concludes firmly, closing off a larger group. However, a new device used in *Trio-Symphony* was the joining of fragments together, and came as the result of a perceived weakness. When the first movement had been written and the final order chosen, it was clear that too many of the movements ended with “buttons” – these can still be seen at the ends of movements II, IV and VII of the final piece, while movements VIII and IX ended with buttons in their original versions (Fig. 3.2). The buttons in movements IV and VII remained because they were less conclusive (notes are left hanging afterwards), while movement II's button served the important function of cutting off the initial surge of energy begun in b. 1. However, the last part of the piece saw three movements in a row (VIII, IX and X) all ending very similarly. This risked repetitiveness, an abundance of false endings too close to the actual ending, and the bittiness which can so easily plague a misassembled fragment set (and which arguably plagues the latter parts of *SEXTET*).

Fig. 3.2 The original “button” endings of movements VIII and IX of *Trio-Symphony*

Movement VIII manuscript, bb. 13-14



Movement IX manuscript, bb. 7-9



As a result, movement VIII was joined to movement IX by the passage in bb. 15-17, while movement IX was given three new bars of clarinet residue (bb. 9-11) which invited continuation rather than providing neat gestural termination. These procedures were directly informed by Wagner, particularly a common linking device found in his operas in which a solo woodwind line is left suddenly isolated, diffusing the musical tension before leading onto the next passage (Fig. 3.3 shows examples from *Siegfried* and *Parsifal*). A specific aspect of Wagner's large-scale continuity, one of the techniques in his art of transition, had become helpful in an unexpected way. The line between fragmentary and continuous can sometimes be a line for solo clarinet.

Fig. 3.3a Bass clarinet solo diffusing musical tension and then leading on to the next passage in Act III of *Siegfried* (vocal score)

The image shows a musical score for Act III of *Siegfried*. It features a vocal line with lyrics: "fried! Sieh' ma ter - reur! Sieh' mes - ne Angst!". Above the vocal line, there are markings for "ritard." and "rallent.". Below the vocal line, there is a piano accompaniment with markings for "dim." and "p". A red box highlights a section of the bass clarinet line, which is marked "p B. Cl." and "rallent.". The bass clarinet line consists of a series of notes that gradually slow down and then lead into the next passage.

The image shows a musical score for Act I of *Parsifal*. It features a vocal line with lyrics: "jagt weit durch die Welt: ihm hilft nur ei - nes, Wieder zurückgehend.". Above the vocal line, there is a marking for "Molto tranquillo e moderato.". Below the vocal line, there is a piano accompaniment with markings for "pp dolce." and "Bsn.". A red box highlights a section of the bassoon line, which is marked "sf" and "p". The bassoon line consists of a series of notes that gradually slow down and then lead into the next passage.

Fig. 3.3b Bassoon solo diffusing musical tension and then leading on to the next passage in Act I of *Parsifal* (vocal score)

The image shows a musical score for Act I of *Parsifal*. It features a vocal line with lyrics: "jagt weit durch die Welt: ihm hilft nur ei - nes, Wieder zurückgehend.". Above the vocal line, there is a marking for "rall.". Below the vocal line, there is a piano accompaniment with markings for "cresc." and "Bsn.". A red box highlights a section of the bassoon line, which is marked "sf" and "p". The bassoon line consists of a series of notes that gradually slow down and then lead into the next passage.

But this raises the question of when a fragment ceases to be a fragment. Even when movements are not directly linked together, there is a much greater degree of ambiguity for the listener as to when one unit ends and another begins in *Trio-Symphony* as opposed to *SEXTET*. When fragments are grouped or literally joined in such a way, the extent to which they can still be characterised as fragments is called into question. However, a difference in degree from

SEXTET has not become a difference in kind. In spite of its greater ambiguity, there are various ways in which *Trio-Symphony* retains the character of a fragment set dotted with conspicuous larger-scale movements: musical thoughts generally retain fragment-style brevity; short movements are separated by silence; there is a great deal of “close-up” gestural music; and the first and seventh movements are still clearly differentiated from the others in terms of both duration and mode of address. *Trio-Symphony* remains a structural discourse based on differences in scale, in which contrasting timescales and modes of address are made a focus of the music, but in a more nuanced and ambiguous way than *Frammenti Ricercati* or *SEXTET*.



Writing *Trio-Symphony* opened up new effects of scale and new extrinsic dimensions to the research, but it also resulted in new compositional insights and working methods. Part of the impetus for this research was escaping a fragmentary comfort zone and producing longer pieces which did not fall into familiar patterns. The experience of writing *Trio-Symphony* made it clear that starting in a comfort zone (writing discrete but musically-related fragments) did not need to be a hindrance, but could relieve structural pressure at the outset of the process while allowing a larger shape to emerge later, thus avoiding overly deterministic structures. This revelation with regard to working methods may sound banal given that countless composers work in similar ways, but here it was framed specifically in the context of this research and my spectrum of influences, tendencies, strengths and anxieties, providing a different angle from which to approach structural basics. This would continue to prove fruitful, as detailed in Chapter Five, but before the opportunity to write another longer piece arose, there was an opportunity to write a short orchestral work through which the symphonic could be explored in a very different way.

3.2 The miniature and the compressed: *PROTO-SYMPHONY*

When asked by Claudio Abbado to write *Stele* for the Berlin Philharmonic, Kurtág considered writing “nine symphonies, each lasting a few seconds”.¹¹ This notion was the starting point for *PROTO-SYMPHONY*. The eventual concept for the piece was condensing the large-scale action and grandeur of a late-Romantic Austro-German symphony into a tiny space. While *Trio-Symphony* concerns scrambling, *PROTO-SYMPHONY* concerns compression. There is a distinguished history of symphonies which do not operate on a large scale and deliberately underplay any portentous connotations – one might think of Gounod’s and Milhaud’s “little” symphonies or Britten’s *Simple Symphony*.¹² *PROTO-SYMPHONY* might seem to fall into the same category, a symphony with a qualifier implying something smaller or simpler.

¹¹ Varga, *György Kurtág: Three Interviews*, p. 50.

¹² These examples are diverse, Gounod’s symphony being “little” in that it is for wind nonet, and Britten’s being “simple” in that it uses material he wrote as a child.

However, “proto” here does not mean a sketch or draft, but something primordial and fundamental as in the German prefix *Ur*. The piece is not a scale model of a symphony (à la Milhaud) or a short symphony (à la Webern) but a compressed symphony.

The idea of compression, that is a lot of activity seeming to take place within a short time, is a common trope in music criticism. Fred Maus, in considering the idea of music as narrative, has dissected Donald Francis Tovey’s comment that the first movement of Beethoven’s *Appassionata* is a “tragedy in eight minutes” by asking whether “the same events could have been presented less rapidly [or whether] the tragic events of the story simply take eight minutes to occur”.¹³ For Tovey, the very fact that a satisfying tragedy could last a mere eight minutes marks a significant compositional achievement, one analogous to what is attempted in *PROTO-SYMPHONY*. Meanwhile, Gavin Thomas has commented that Kurtág’s own *...quasi una fantasia...* “gives the impression of an entire classical symphony having been distilled into just eight minutes of music”.¹⁴ Seemingly related to this are works like Schoenberg’s first Chamber Symphony, which conflates symphonic forms and functions into a 20-minute continuous piece. However, *PROTO-SYMPHONY* retains discrete units separated by silence rather than seeking to amalgamate or unify. The functions of traditional symphonic movements can also be utilised by composers without their traditional structures or placements – Margaret McLay has noted how Part II of Kurtág’s *Kafka-Fragmente* (referenced in Chapter One) “has the function of an extended slow movement”.¹⁵ A musical unit of any length, even the briefest musical gesture, could theoretically serve such a function in the right context.

Before explaining how compression was attempted in *PROTO-SYMPHONY*, it is worth noting that the piece also allowed direct engagement with the orchestral idiom of the symphonic end of my spectrum of influences. While this does not relate directly to structure, the sound-world created by the piece does carry implications of style and genre which can in turn imply timescale. The raucous and rapid stepwise ascending gesture with which the piece opens is taken directly from the finale of Mahler’s 2nd Symphony, for example; the accompaniment texture on page 10 is informed by the prelude to *Parsifal*. There are countless other examples. Such matters of style cannot always be separated from deeper matters of structure, especially when they evoke particular orchestral music in which massive structural proportions are the norm. The use of such orchestral gestures and textures adds additional dimensions to the piece’s central structural conceit, and thus to its explorations of scale.

¹³ Fred Everett Maus, “Music as Narrative”, *Indiana Theory Review* 12 (Spring – Fall 1991), p. 31. Maus’s work on narrative has strong connections with the earlier-cited work of Carolyn Abbate with regard to music drawing attention to how it is being “told”.

¹⁴ Gavin Thomas, CD review of Kurtág: *Scenes from a Novel; Messages of the Late R. V. Troussova; ...quasi una fantasia...* by Ensemble Modern/Peter Eötvös, *The Musical Times* 135, no. 1813 (March 1994), p. 172. Though I would not subscribe to this interpretation of the piece, Thomas’s statement nevertheless represents the trope of compression well. That both the Beethoven and Kurtág examples last eight minutes is a pleasing coincidence considering the source of Kurtág’s title.

¹⁵ Margaret McLay, “Kurtág’s ‘Kafka Fragments’”, *Tempo* 163 (December 1987), p. 46.

Though it is not divided into movements, *PROTO-SYMPHONY* has four clear sections. These are shown in Table 3.1 along with their durations and functions. This structure mirrors the Classical four-movement symphony, but the reflection is distorted: the opening section begins assertively before collapsing into uncertainty; the b. 16 scherzo quickly runs out of energy and is aborted; in b. 35 the scherzo is relaunched but the music collapses once again at the very end. Some of the scale-based procedures in play will be familiar from pieces hitherto discussed. The sections have varying levels of closure, for example, the second ending with a “button” and the fourth with “stasis/insistence” followed by a “terminal drop-off”. The altered repetition of the scherzo opening at b. 35 plays with our sense of continuity. The first three sections are fleeting but intense fragments, the fourth marks a lift-off in the manner of Lutoslawski. However, the desire for a sense of compression is behind the musical ideas and effects explored in *PROTO-SYMPHONY* that are not explored elsewhere in the portfolio.

Table 3.1 The sections of *PROTO-SYMPHONY*

Section	Bar numbers	Rough duration	Function
1	1-15	c. 50”	Opening movement
2	16-24	c. 15”	Scherzo (aborted)
3	25-34	c. 35”	Slow movement
4	35-107	c. 2’10	Scherzo (relaunched), becoming Finale

The ways in which sections 1, 2 and 3 signify traditional symphonic movement functions are obvious. The opening section provides intensity and thematic contrast, the scherzo light relief, the slow movement repose, and so on. But they are also fragments in their own right in the sense outlined in Chapter Two, with all the musical and aesthetic qualities that this entails. This is already one way in which the piece is compressed rather than miniature: the first three sections condense and embody traditional symphonic movement functions through the medium of the fragment. However, the feeling of compression is truly compounded in the relatively long section 4. The compositional intention behind this section was that it should sound like a great deal was being compressed into a short amount of time, the music pressure-cooked to a climax before disintegrating. But it was also intended to sound satisfying and well-proportioned in itself, rather than rushed or poorly executed. The musical intensification is achieved in a similar way to the central “Hoedown” of *SEXTET* but on a radically smaller timescale. Table 3.2 breaks down the structure of the passage for ease of reference. The durations are so specific because this was the precision with which the section needed to be planned in order to achieve the desired effect. Audio recordings of myself singing through the sequence were used to help with getting the proportions right.

Table 3.2 Breakdown of the final section of *PROTO-SYMPHONY*

Bar numbers	Tempo	Rough duration	Description
35-47	♩ = <i>c.</i> 140	<i>c.</i> 18"	Restart of the scherzo, this time continuing.
48-50	♩ = <i>c.</i> 160	<i>c.</i> 4"	Same material at a suddenly faster tempo.
51-64	♩ = <i>c.</i> 160	<i>c.</i> 20"	Pedal note ostinato with accumulating layers.
65-71	<i>accel.</i>	<i>c.</i> 9"	Accelerating transition passage.
72-87	♩ = <i>c.</i> 108	<i>c.</i> 30"	Hectic tutti leading to reprise of section 1 chord.
88-92	♩ = <i>c.</i> 66	<i>c.</i> 16"	Grand arrival point, breakthrough.
93-97	♩ = <i>c.</i> 126	<i>c.</i> 9"	Chaos, disintegration.
98-107	♩ = <i>c.</i> 60	<i>c.</i> 19"	Coda, sudden static residue and terminal drop-off.

So far, it may seem as though there is little to separate the construction of section 4 from a miniature as defined in this research, that is a scale model of a complete structure (as distinct from the opening three sections described above). However, there are various reasons why the passage creates a sense of compression rather than miniaturism:

1) *The rate of activity*

The result of using particular intensifying devices on this timescale is that a very great deal happens in a short space of time. This is meant literally – it is not that a great deal seems to happen, but that it really does. This is primarily due to the orchestral medium’s potential for rapid intensification by layering. A representative passage is bb. 51-64. A pedal note ostinato is established in the violas, the kind of textural base layer that is capable of underpinning much longer passages of intensification. Two new layers are added in quick succession: a slow blues (fl. 1, ob. 1, c.a., hns. 1-4, tpts. 1-2, later strings) and a jittery blues (cellos and bassoons). A high, sustained woodwind countermelody begins on the upbeat to b. 55, before contrabassoon, piano and double basses enter with a new layer in b. 60. Then the whole orchestra crescendos to an arrival point in b. 65. This kind of layering is a common technique, but it is used here in a targeted way over a shorter timescale than might be considered typical (twenty seconds in the case of bb. 51-64) to create a particular runaway effect in the context of the piece.

2) *The nature of the musical material relative to its timescale*

I would argue that bb. 72-87 (described in Table 3.2 as “Hectic tutti”) and bb. 88-92 (“Grand arrival point, breakthrough”) demonstrate what is typically regarded as symphonic grandeur, achieved through strongly directional melodic and harmonic lines combined with rich, strings-driven orchestration and an abundance of internal rhythmic energy propelling the music. Both passages give the sense that they could go on and on in the Wagnerian mode, but in fact they intensify rapidly and are then cut off. The music’s mode of address is seemingly out of proportion with the timescale on which it is actually operating. There is humorous intent here,

a sense that the music is trying to achieve Wagnerian grandeur without putting in the legwork – but this colourful interpretation must remain an unquantifiable metaphor.

3) *The use of rhythm and structural signposting*

Many orchestral pieces reach large climaxes in a small amount of time, but the use of rhythm and structural signposting helps to give *PROTO-SYMPHONY* its particular sense of compression. There is a tendency toward motor rhythms throughout, for example the “walking bass” in bb. 35-50 and the driving string semiquavers in bb. 88-92. Such clear articulation of the pulse makes both the sudden and gradual increases in tempo more acute (an important distinction from a gestural fragmentary mode). This is enhanced by structural divisions being clearly articulated, for example the *pizzicato* accent which launches b. 51 and the sudden textural shift in b. 88. Rather than seeking smoothness or organic growth, the compressed rate of activity is emphasised to the listener. Again, motor rhythms and structural signposting are common musical devices, but it is the way in which they are deployed alongside other musical elements and in the context of this research that make them noteworthy here.

The condensing of traditional movement functions into fragments, and the sense of hectic acceleration and forced climax, are what make *PROTO-SYMPHONY* a compressed symphony rather than a miniature symphony, a short symphony, or even fragments of a symphony. It is thus, paradoxically, a large-scale symphony that takes a short amount of time. Many of the same procedures are used as in previous pieces in the portfolio, but the new dimensions added relate directly to the instrumental medium for which the piece was written and the durational limits placed upon it, demonstrating the wide applicability and flexibility of the central research concerns.

★ ★ ★

The two symphonies explored in this chapter arrived at their titles in very different ways, and they embody contrasting answers to the question of how differences in scale can be made the focus of a musical discourse. Nevertheless, both engage directly with my symphonic precedents to a much greater extent than *Frammenti Ricercati* or *SEXTET*, adding greater depth and subtlety to the core structural experiments and teasing out wider implications of the topic. To my mind, the pieces not only stand in dynamic relation to a prestigious genre, but sometimes create the impression of getting that genre wrong, or of executing it in an ineloquent way. Such expressive, qualitative effects were increasingly becoming less like by-products of the research and more central to my compositional thinking about scale. This will become the focus of Chapter Five, but before that a brief detour is necessary.

Chapter Four

SILENCE

- Varga: I think you must have seen Darmstadt scores where caesuras were defined to the second– [...]
- Kurtág: In any case, it is not organic.¹

4.1 An elephant in the room

Kurtág’s fragment sets are always split into separate movements, but the length and quality of the silences between these movements are only intermittently indicated. There are occasional *attacca* markings or segues – each movement of *Stele*, for example, flows *attacca* into the next – but the matter is often left ambiguous. In *The Messages of the Late R. V. Trousova*, the progression of the four songs in Part II is made clear through the use of fermatas and *attacca* markings. But among the fifteen fragments in Part III, where perhaps the issue is most acute, there is scarcely an indication. The score of the *Kafka-Fragmente*, with its forty fragments, is completely silent on the issue.² This is important because it results in radically different experiences of structure and continuity when hearing the pieces performed live. Anecdotally, performances of Kurtág works that I love have been ruined by these breaks being mishandled, from silences so long that they destroy musical momentum to clumsy or insensitive page turns. Why would Kurtág leave this matter open so much of the time? If, as Marta Kurtág says, “any work of [Kurtág’s] made up of several brief pieces is in fact one composition”, then the joins between movements are surely vital in creating a sense of connection.³

Silences have an important role in delineating and defining musical structure, even being “crucial structural determinants” for Richard C. Littlefield.⁴ While previous chapters’ discussions

¹ Varga, *György Kurtág: Three Interviews*, p. 57.

² It is arguably inferred that there should be longer pauses between each of the four parts, but of what nature is unclear. The New York Times has reported that in Peter Sellars’ 2005 staging of the work, “one of [Sellars’] ideas was to surround each fragment with a kind of negative space. Silences would allow the music to breathe and allow listeners to absorb its concentrated power. [Soprano Dawn] Upshaw, too, relished the time to recover between fragments.” Interpreters clearly take advantage of the issue being left open to their own ends. Jeremy Eichler, “Fragments of Kafka, in song”, *The New York Times*, 12th January, 2005, accessed 13th July 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/12/arts/fragments-of-kafka-in-song.html>.

³ Varga, *György Kurtág: Three Interviews*, p. 65. *Pierrot lunaire*, which had a significant impact on Kurtág, is notable for giving very specific written indications about pauses between movements. Rachel Beckles Willson has outlined how *Pierrot* served as a model for Kurtág’s *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza*, while Stephen Walsh has noted its resemblance to *The Messages of the Late R. V. Trousova*. Rachel Beckles Willson, *György Kurtág: The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza*, pp. 3–4. Stephen Walsh, “György Kurtág: An Outline Study (II)”, *Tempo* 142 (September 1982), p. 16.

⁴ Richard C. Littlefield, “The Silence of the Frames”, *Music Theory Online* 2, no. 1 (January 1996), accessed 28th September 2020, <https://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.96.2.1/mto.96.2.1.littlefield.html>, 4.1.

of continuity and closure concerned what Littlefield terms “intramusical framing”, the syntactical role that silence has in creating a sense of closure or continuation has not been addressed.⁵ The previously-cited work of Lerdahl and Jackendoff asserts that musical shapes are grouped in our minds partly according to proximity and silence, an idea put to the test with real listeners by Diana Deutsch.⁶ We may assume that the longer the silence between two movements, the more separate they are and the shorter the scale on which the musical thought seems to be unfolding. But Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis notes how “two identical acoustic silences” can seem like they “occupy different lengths of time, or carry different amounts of musical tension” depending on both intramusical and extramusical context.⁷ There are also more pragmatic issues to consider between movements: should the audience applaud? Should they cough? Although the matter of how to handle movement breaks is often left to performers, some composers already cited in this commentary have famously taken the matter into their own hands, notably Schumann, Mahler and Lutoslawski.⁸ Given its structural importance, then, how was this issue approached in the context of the present research?

4.2 Approaches in the portfolio

When managing breaks between movements (or functionally-equivalent units in the case of *SEXTET* and *PROTO-SYMPHONY*), the choice for the composer is essentially between specific (for example “4–5 seconds” over a fermata, or pauses written out metrically) and relative (for example a fermata marked *lunga*). Given the clear importance of these breaks in defining a listener’s sense of scale, structure and continuity, it could be assumed that utmost specificity would be required in order to have maximum control over the research experiment and avoid the Kurtágian performance pitfalls mentioned earlier. Leaving anything to chance – or to

⁵ Ibid., 1.5. Littlefield takes this idea from Naomi Cumming’s notion of “syntactic framing” in “The Subjectivities of ‘Erbarme Dich’”, *Music Analysis* 16, no. 1 (March 1997), pp. 5–44.

⁶ Lerdahl and Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*, pp. 40–41. Diana Deutsch, “Grouping Mechanisms in Music”, in *The Psychology of Music* (3rd edition), ed. Diana Deutsch (San Diego: Elsevier, 2013), pp. 183–248. Deutsch summarises a range of studies in this chapter, including several of her own, asserting that “grouping by temporal proximity has emerged as the most powerful cue for the perception of phrase boundaries” (p. 209). While temporal proximity does not necessarily involve silence, Deutsch’s own experiments split simple pitch sets into sections using rests. Cognitive studies like these inevitably focus on small extracts and cannot take into account the infinite complexity of hearing real performances.

⁷ Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis, “Silences in music are musical not silent”, *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 24, no. 5 (June 2007), p. 485. See also Margulis, “Moved by Nothing: Listening to Musical Silence”, *Journal of Music Theory* 51, no. 2 (Fall 2007), pp. 245–276.

⁸ The movements of Schumann’s Cello Concerto proceed without pauses, while Gilbert E. Kaplan has noted Mahler’s indecision about how to manage movement breaks in the 2nd Symphony, which asks for a pause of five minutes after the first movement. Gilbert E. Kaplan, “How Mahler performed his Second Symphony”, *The Musical Times* 127, no. 1718 (May 1986), pp. 266–271. In *Livre pour Orchestre*, Lutoslawski indicates that in the intermedes, the conductor should “suggest that this is the moment for the audience to relax, change position, cough etc.”, playing with the very notion of relaxation between movements and incorporating it into the structural design. Each of these examples connects with wider matters of how concert etiquette developed through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

performers' instincts – could be seen as too great a risk, or too great an abdication of compositional responsibility. However, *SEXTET* offers a cautionary tale in this regard which affected the approach in every subsequent piece.

In order to micromanage the unfolding of its structure, fermatas between units in *SEXTET* were given a duration range (*e.g.* 3–4”, the range never greater than a second). The music was not split into movements in order to facilitate flow (in spite of the units remaining discrete), and pauses were not written out metrically in order to maintain the sense of negative space between units. Pause lengths were decided only at the very end of the compositional process based on the following, sometimes subconscious, factors:

- 1) the level of closure (intramusical framing);
- 2) the piece's overall momentum and this particular break's role in it;
- 3) the time needed for listeners to take stock of the preceding music;
- 4) practicalities such as instrument changes and player recovery time.

For example, there are longer pauses at the end of “Motivic Scaling” (bb. 5–24) and “Scherzo” (bb. 29–75) because these are longer movements which listeners need longer to take stock of. There is a short pause after “Vivo-Calmo” (bb. 26–28) because the energy that this unit generates carries into the following “Scherzo”. However, when the original version of the piece was premiered in Cornwall in May 2018, it became clear that these pauses had been severely mishandled. Almost every pause in the piece was shortened or cut in the revised version premiered in London the following July – Fig. 4.1 shows an annotated copy of the Cornwall score, indicating the extremity of some of the changes. The original version lacked sufficient momentum, and the abundance of pauses from Letter X onwards was especially problematic.⁹ The piece was not fragmentary in an expressive or poetic way, but merely disjointed in the manner of the poor Kurtág performances mentioned earlier. This difficult experience made two things clear: firstly, that the fruits of this research live or die in performance and not on the page; and secondly, that a few seconds here or there can have a fundamental impact on overall structure and on our sense of scale and continuity.

The revisions required for *SEXTET* could be seen as an argument for even greater precision and caution when dealing with movement breaks – mishandling them meant that the piece did not initially work. But it also pointed to the problems of such specificity, particularly given that performance context can profoundly affect how such breaks feel and function. Greater flexibility, rather than greater specificity, had a better chance of ensuring that the structures generated through this research could work in a variety of contexts. Allowing performers to negotiate silences based on relative notational indications avoided the risk of misjudging the precise number of seconds required and creating a misleading sense of rigidity. Aside from this, the precise indications in *SEXTET* were still based on instinct, and in this sense were not really precise at all. As a result, the decision was made that subsequent pieces should guide players

⁹ This loss of momentum after Letter X also led to a radical tempo increase from $\text{♩} = c. 84$ to $\text{♩} = c. 104$. The pauses in the piece are all proportionately shorter in the revision, for example long pauses remain relatively long.

while allowing them to use their instinct, except in cases where a specific effect might be required (such as a 10-second pause). The only piece in the rest of the portfolio which features precise pause indications and no division into movements is *PROTO-SYMPHONY*, which was for pragmatic reasons: firstly, it allowed the durational micromanagement necessary for this particular commission; secondly, as the piece was to be played in a 40-minute workshop, it would have been unwise to add any unnecessary blockages to the score.

Fig. 4.1 Some of the changes to pauses in the original version of *SEXTET* (bar numbers show the equivalent passage in the final version)

The image displays three sections of musical notation from the score for *SEXTET*, illustrating changes to pauses. Each section includes original notation and handwritten red annotations.

- bb. 307-309:** Shows notation for Flute, Bass Drum, and Violin. Annotations include "2-3''" and "6-7''" written in red above the flute staff, and "pp" below the bass drum staff.
- bb. 311:** Shows notation for Bass Drum and Violin. Annotations include "2-3''" and "5-6''" written in red above the bass drum staff, and "pp" below the violin staff.
- bb. 365-367:** Shows notation for Flute, Clarinet, Percussion, Piano, Violin, and Viola. Annotations include "(FATAL)" written in red above the flute staff, and "poco acc" and "più appass" written in red above the clarinet staff. Other annotations include "pp", "p cresc. po", "damp", "pizz arco", "più appassionato (vib.)", "sfz", "cresc. poco", "arco, più az", "pizz., vib.", and "p cresc. po".

Of the remaining pieces, *Trio-Symphony* and *Song-Messages* both have a performance note at the front of the score indicating that they should be performed continuously without any release of tension. This is pre-emptive of the Kurtág performance problems discussed above, but it also indicates a particular structural intent. Players are encouraged to consider the movements as part of a continuous flow, one step towards understanding structures which may at first seem piecemeal or unusual, and which might otherwise suggest being performed in a disconnected manner. Listeners are consequently encouraged by the performers' maintenance of tension to listen *through* the silences. This naturally increases the possibility of not being able to tell when one unit ends and another begins, but this is an ambiguity with which I am comfortable as discussed in the preceding chapters.

Both of these pieces, as well as *Cello Messages*, also use combinations of fermatas and *attacca* markings to give a clear but not over-prescriptive sense of what should happen between movements. An example of where a more specific effect is required comes in the last bar of the first movement of *Trio-Symphony*, a bar's rest with a fermata and the instruction "freeze" followed by an *attacca* marking (the players have just been told to "stop suddenly"). At this moment, the piece radically shifts from frenetic continuity to slow fragmentariness. The sudden freezing dramatises this shift, while the *attacca* marking ensures that the pause does not last too

long and that the freeze is held until the next movement begins. A structurally important break is managed rather than dictated. *Song-Messages* provides *attacca subito* markings after movements III, IVa) and IVb) in order to maintain structural momentum, but there is also a very specific *segue* between movements V and VI. The pulse is maintained throughout the silent bar that ends V and segues into VI, helping to create a macroscopic line in which VI dispels the energy and tension generated by V. There is greater flexibility elsewhere in the piece where such specific effects are not needed. Finally, *Cello Messages* uses *attacca* markings after the first, second and fourth movements, but allows a rest for both players and listeners after the third movement with a fermata marked *lunga* and no *attacca*, something that might be very welcome in the midst of such a long and intense solo piece.¹⁰

It could be argued that the composer-researcher gave up after the difficult experience of *SEXTET*, and that the subsequent lack of specificity fails to thoroughly handle and theorise this issue and its relation to the research. Meanwhile, the prevailing compositional view is still a conservative one, seeing silences between movements as negative space and structural definition rather than active force.¹¹ But this is not an abdication of responsibility – the lessened specificity is the approach that best serves the music in question. Above all, I write music to be interpreted by players and performed in concerts. The fragility and indeterminacy of that tradition, and the flexibility and expressivity of notation, are an important part of this. Nevertheless, Kurtág’s aforementioned notational vagueness, though often compelling and suggestive, is too loose. A balanced approach can account for the importance of movement breaks and their impact on our sense of scale and continuity in such fragile structural experiments, while still allowing performances to be flexible and dynamic. Each break in each piece has a certain quality and a certain role in the structure that was considered during the compositional process, but there is little merit in labelling each silence with a quality or function after the fact (“calm silence”, “tense silence”) and trying to detail its exact impact on perceptions of scale and structure, beyond the very specific cases already mentioned. There is, as Margulis puts it, an ultimate ineffability in listeners’ responses to silence, an ambiguity of the sort that is central to the performance tradition in which the music of this portfolio lies.¹² The elephant is still in the room, but it has been acknowledged and partially tamed.

¹⁰ In pieces even longer than *Cello Messages* – sixty minutes rather than twenty-eight minutes – choosing when and how to relax or not between movements or units could become an even more potent musical device.

¹¹ This view is summed up well by Edward T. Cone, who notes how a performer may decide that “although each movement is separate, performers and audience should have no ‘free’ time between movements – that these moments represent frame, like the intermediate frames of a triptych”. Edward T. Cone, *Musical Form and Musical Performance* (New York: Norton, 1968), p. 17.

¹² Margulis, “Silences in music are musical not silent”, p. 501.

Chapter Five

MESSAGES

“Recently, the piece gave me immense joy when I realised how the music halts again and again, [...] it stumbles – and then finds itself again.”¹

György Kurtág

5.1 Scale and eloquence

The symphonic, as explored in Chapter Three, is perhaps the ultimate in eloquence, the ability to speak fluently and at great length as a master musical orator. Wagner is a famous example, his stated ideal being the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, endless melody, the art of transition, a fluid totality which does not pause to question itself. Such an extreme vision can easily seem preposterous, and critiques in this vein date back to Wagner’s own lifetime, including well-known barbs from ambivalent admirers like Debussy and Nietzsche.² More recently, Carolyn Abbate has lamented that much English-language Wagner analysis has been infused “with robust and manly rhapsodies to largeness, vastness, immensity”, instead of appreciating the works’ uneven surfaces and idiosyncrasies.³ It would seem that many have been taken in by what Adorno describes as Wagner’s phantasmagoria, “the perfection of the illusion that the work of art is a reality *sui generis*”.⁴ But even if one finds Wagner’s vastness and immensity illusory or repellent, it remains compositionally impressive. I would argue that few composers would not wish to be so eloquent and fluent, even within their own musical parameters.

Fragments can have a kind of eloquence too, in seeming to suggest a great deal within a small space, but their expressive effect is often the result of a sense of brokenness or jaggedness. Kurtág himself has compared the jerky fashion in which his music moves to stuttering, implying not so much a choice to be fragmentary as an inability to speak in any other way.⁵ Describing Chopin as a “master of small forms” can be backhanded, the suggestion often being, according to Jeffrey Kallberg, that a “mastery of large forms eluded him”.⁶ Smallness and fragmentariness

¹ Varga, *György Kurtág: Three Interviews*, p. 49. Kurtág is referring to *Colindă-Baladă*, Op. 46, which he was composing at the time of the interview with Varga.

² Debussy famously described Wagner as “a beautiful sunset that has been mistaken for a sunrise”, while Nietzsche characterised him as “the artist of *décadence himself*”. Claude Debussy, “German Influence on French Music”, *Mercure de France*, January 1903, in *Debussy on Music*, ed. and trans. Richard Langham Smith (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), p. 83. *A Nietzsche Reader*, ed. and trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 141.

³ Abbate, “Wagner, ‘On Modulation’, and *Tristan*”, p. 41.

⁴ Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London; New York: Verso, 2009), p. 74.

⁵ Varga, *György Kurtág: Three Interviews*, p. 65. On p. x, Kurtág says “stuttering is my mother tongue”.

⁶ Kallberg, “Small ‘forms’”, p. 124. In this chapter Kallberg explores the status of the miniature in nineteenth-century musical life and how small forms ranked lower (and still do) than larger ones.

can clearly be seen as musical weaknesses, but they are surely relatable ones – the inability to go on or express something fully are deeply human experiences. It is a powerful paradox that a composer can communicate by failing to communicate. As Stephen Walsh puts it in relation to Kurtág: “One can hardly make notable poetry out of lamenting that notable poetry can no longer be made; but there is undoubtedly a certain poignancy somewhere along the course of that apparent tautology”.⁷ Perhaps such a mode of communication is truer to life than Wagner’s vastness and immensity; perhaps Wagner’s vastness and immensity are a more ideal condition for art than stuttering and apparent failure.

The fragmentary–continuous dichotomy at the heart of this research came increasingly to carry such overtones as the project progressed. Some of the particularly effective aspects of *SEXTET*, *Trio-Symphony* and *PROTO-SYMPHONY* related precisely to the sense that the music sometimes seemed confident and fluent, and sometimes seemed to falter or get it wrong. The central relationship was not only between fragmentary and continuous, but between ineloquence and eloquence, stuttering and fluency, uncomfortably reflecting some of my own compositional insecurities. *Song-Messages* and *Cello Messages* thus attempted to dramatise these expressive human implications of the research questions in a more prominent and conscious way than any of the preceding pieces, leading to a range of new insights and considerations.

5.2 Making it explicit: *Song-Messages*

Song-Messages is marked out from the rest of the portfolio by two things in particular. Firstly, the piece fits comfortably within a genre: the song cycle (that is a collection of distinct but thematically-connected short songs intended to be performed together). The early-Romantic song cycle, with its settings of short poems that express one idea very intensely, has deep connections with the early-Romantic fragment. Ruth Bingham has noted how the nineteenth-century song cycle “offered appealing anomalies: [...] miniatures in an infinite whole, open-ended closed pieces, unity in variety, circular forms, and inexplicit meanings”.⁸ Considering these origins, it is perhaps unsurprising that many of Kurtág’s most seminal and indeed most fragmentary works are, in essence, song cycles.⁹ The genre is thus well-placed as a vehicle with which to explore the present research questions. The generic implications of the title *Song-Messages* create an expectation of musical thought on a smaller scale, quite the opposite of *Trio-Symphony* and *PROTO-SYMPHONY*. The second thing that marks *Song-Messages* out is the fact that it sets text, namely brief extracts from a variety of sources which explicitly draw

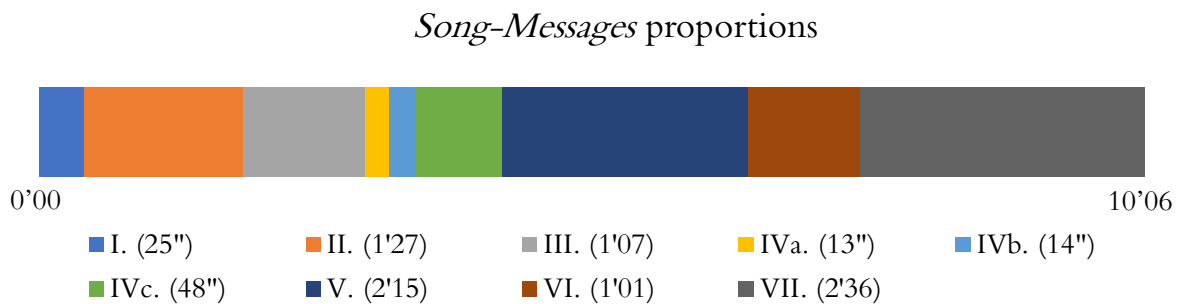
⁷ Stephen Walsh, “György Kurtág: An Outline Study (II)”, p. 11. This sentiment is echoed in Julian Johnson’s comment that Mahler’s music comes close to “an essentially existentialist conundrum, worthy of Samuel Beckett, to attempt to speak while knowing the inadequacy of speech.” Julian Johnson, *Mahler’s voices*, p. 288.

⁸ Ruth O. Bingham, “The early nineteenth-century song cycle”, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*, ed. James Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 102.

⁹ Notably *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza*, *The Messages of the Late R. V. Trousova* and the *Kafka-Fragmente*. The extent to which the movements of these pieces can be described as “songs” is debatable, but they are all cycles of short vocal movements linked by author and theme.

attention to the matter of scale in order to make it a focus of the musical experience. The following brief analyses of selected songs, grouped into three thematic categories, demonstrate how the interaction of text and music in the piece sheds new light on the research questions. Fig. 5.1 shows a proportional graph of the entire structure for reference (again using timings from the live recording included with this submission, inclusive of movement breaks).

Fig. 5.1 Proportional graph showing the structure of *Song-Messages*



Quashing delusions of grandeur (Movements I and IV)

The first movement of *Song-Messages* recalls Bernstein’s “I Hate Music!” but without the pay-off of loving to sing. The two-part gestural shape of the piano part (explosive keyboard-spanning upward gesture followed by residual deflation) is in the manner of a typical Kurtágian fragment, but here the sentiment of the text offers explicit justification for the music being so short-breathed. The scale of the music, how it speaks and for how long, embodies a clearly defined human feeling: weariness of music. In a research context, questions may be raised about the extent to which music can be argued to embody such feelings or concepts at all, but this would take other types of research to address. In Kurtág’s *Colindă-Baladă*, the piece being referred to in the quotation which opens this chapter, the music does not literally stumble, just as the music of this first song is not literally weary. But for Kurtág – and for me – the metaphor is indistinguishable from reality for the purposes of composition. As Leo Treitler says in relation to the slow movement of Beethoven’s piano sonata Op. 10, No. 3:

If I experience Beethoven’s sonata movement as mournful, I do not experience that quality as something foreign to the prevailing character, quality, or sense of the music; on the contrary I experience it is being of the essence of the piece [...] The effect of metaphor is no part of the experience for me.¹⁰

Nevertheless, what can be argued more firmly is that the song *associates* its small scale, its gestural terseness and lack of continuation, with weariness of music. The audience are immediately

¹⁰ Leo Treitler, “Language and the Interpretation of Music”, in *Music and Meaning*, ed. Jenefer Robinson (Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 38. Treitler is arguing against semiological approaches which separate the music from what it is signifying, questioning why music “has been so singled out for all this metaphor-labeling” and denying a simple duality between the musical and extramusical.

alerted to issues of scale, of how and why music should continue, and they take on an accessibly human dimension. This sets the tone for the piece and affects how subsequent songs are perceived.

Similarly, in movement IV (diminutively subtitled “3 Little Songs”, once again preparing the audience for brevity) the texts prohibit continuation. In each case, after the voice has sung the words, the music must and does stop. The stoppages are fairly arbitrary in musical terms alone, and nothing within the music has been exhausted or resolved. Songs a) and b) consist only of brief gestures, and the piano has little autonomy beyond supporting short syllabic settings of the texts. In song c), however, the piano part is disjunctly melodic, working methodically through a 12-note row using rising intervals and subtle rhythmic propulsion. In context, it sounds like the tentative emergence of a new sense of line and pianistic autonomy, a subtle shift in scale. But this ends in b. 10 just before reaching note 12, leaving the voice to provide a colourless epigram. Larger-scale eloquence is not achieved.

A world in a grain of sand (Movements II and VI)

Movements II and VI draw attention to extremes of scale by spotlighting William Blake’s famous phrase “a world in a grain of sand” and Emily Dickinson’s image of “this short life that only lasts an hour” respectively. The music of movement II repeats one short motif with modifications over and over again. This commonplace compositional procedure gains a sense of human fragility when associated with a text that verbalises what the music is trying to achieve: maximum motivic eloquence with a small amount of material and on a small timescale. The movement’s structure is more miniature than fragment with its quasi-ternary shape, the opening motif returning at its opening pitch in b. 16 having been heard in transposed and altered versions in between. After the stark brevity of the first song, it sounds positively symphonic.

Movement VI, on the other hand, is more fragment than miniature, the music responding more directly to the text (the highest vocal note in b. 4, for example, to stress how *little* is within our power) and the ending leaving an open wound with repeated minor-ninth dyads. Its through-composed, open structure befits its function (determined after it was written) as a bridge between movements V and VII (the link from V to VI was mentioned in the previous chapter, while movement VII takes the repeated F at the end of VI and transforms it into a new ostinato). It is movement VI’s fragmentary qualities that allow it to function in this way within the overall structure of *Song-Messages*, but its position between the longer and more continuous movements V and VII also give it the sense of being in parentheses or quotation marks. The movement’s scale marks it out while simultaneously allowing it to function as a bridge.

Attempting continuity (Movements V and VII)

Movement V is somewhat analogous to the lift-off moments in *SEXTET* and *PROTO-SYMPHONY* as inspired by Lutosławski: after four highly concentrated and fragmentary movements, there is a shift in scale. Though hardly extended in duration, the movement is long by comparison and its way of speaking is more goal-directed, with a clear build-up, climax and

comedown, and with only one brief silence just before the high-point. The reductions in Fig. 5.2 show the background level of the song’s drive towards its b. 28 climax, achieved using well-worn devices such as gradually ascending pitches and gradually increasing dynamics. However, these reductions smooth the music over in a misleading way, and the movement does not have an eloquent flow: its continuousness is sustained by a constant jitter of morse code; the surrounding musical gestures are terse and angular; its arrival points and climax are achieved through quick cutting and sharp punctuation points; and it lacks the rhythmic-metrical drive of the central section of *SEXTET*, the opening of *Trio-Symphony* or the final section of *PROTO-SYMPHONY*. All of this is appropriate for such a despairing text, but it also give the song’s familiar sense of build-up a restless, fragmented quality in spite of near-continuous sound. The music unfolds on a larger scale than the previous movements in terms of both duration and goal-directed continuity, but in a deliberately unsettled and stutter-like way.¹¹

Fig. 5.2a Reduction of the vocal part in movement V of *Song-Messages* up to the climax

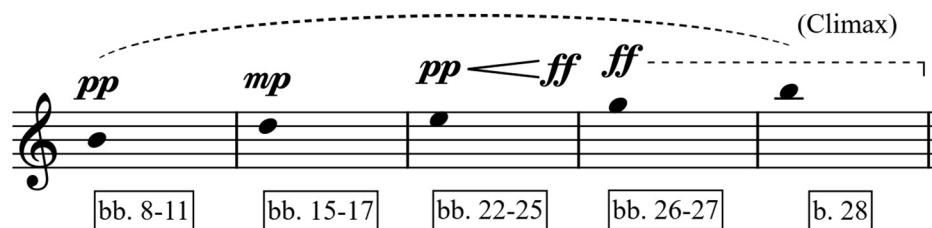
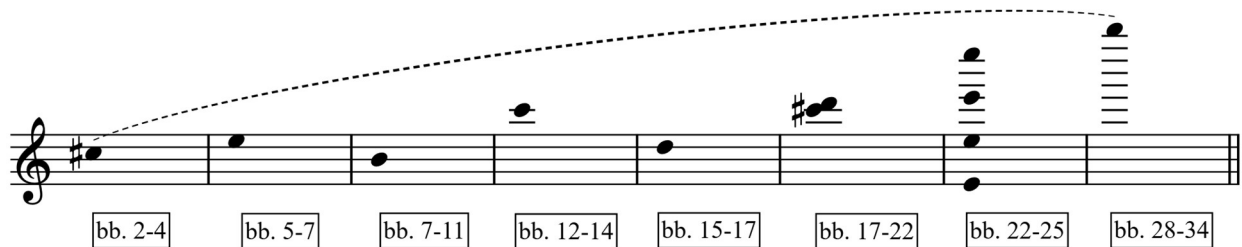


Fig. 5.2b Reduction of the piano “Morse code” line (middle staff) in movement V of *Song-Messages*



Conversely, Movement VII utilises one of the simplest possible techniques for maintaining musical continuity: a pedal-note ostinato. In context this is both soothing (ritual rocking motion, the most harmonically and rhythmically stable music in the piece so far) and atrophied (simplicity combined with mechanical repetition as if musical invention has dried up). The return of the text of the first song in b. 15 is a cyclical gesture, but the piece does not end with the same kind of music that it started with. On the word “music” in b. 24, the voice lifts off into an extended

¹¹ The use of Morse code material, which is also a prominent feature of *Cello Messages*, was inspired by another piece with a sense of vulnerability and confession, Kurtág’s *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza*. The potential for using Morse code in music to actually encode messages is of little relevance here – the interest lies in the half-mechanical, half-human quality of its sound as imitated by instruments.

melismatic vocalise, gradually and smoothly rising to a climax on b. 30's G# before falling back down to form a larger arch shape. This is by far the most continuous and melodic musical idea in the piece, and the opposite of the terse, gestural mode of much of the preceding music.¹² The scale on which the music is operating expands more smoothly than it did in movement V, the contour and climax no longer disjunct. But this is short-lived: by b. 35 the voice has tailed off and soon after the piano abruptly stops. Like the end of *SEXTET*, this is a trick of scale, a false perspective. However, the device carries richer resonances here because of its context in the piece and its use of text.



Song-Messages adds new layers to the question of how differences in scale can be made the focus of a musical discourse by making the issue explicit through the interaction of text and music. When the piece does attempt continuity on a larger scale, it seems unable to eloquently achieve it. The piece thus dramatises and makes apparent not only the compositional questions at the heart of this research, but also the human impulses which led to them being asked in the first place, the desire for eloquence from one who feels more comfortable with the fragmentary.

5.3 Searching for breakthrough: *Cello Messages*

One of the goals of this research was to find distinctive ways to create longer pieces, and indeed certain effects of scale are only achievable within a long overall duration (as in Mahler's 2nd Symphony). It was thus decided that the finale of the project, *Cello Messages*, should at the very least outlast *SEXTET*. However, rather than attempting ever more extreme contrasts of scale, *Cello Messages* explores how the fragmentary and continuous can confront each other within as well as between movements, the difference between large-scale symphonic eloquence and the poetry of the fragment dramatised through musical structure and discourse. The following discussion explores how this is achieved on a technical level using three categories: *Punctured continuities*, *Fragmented fragments*, and *Undermined resolutions*.

Punctured continuities (Movement I)

The writing process for *Cello Messages* started, unsurprisingly, with fragments, but a new aspect of the compositional practice was writing out specks of material with the potential for expansion and combination like incipits on a contents page (Fig. 5.3). This was another attempt to use an inclination for fragmentary musical thought as an asset. At the end of the "fragment stage" of the process, what became movement II (nicknamed "Chant") had been written in its entirety, alongside a much shorter version of movement III (nicknamed "Lullaby"), a fragment that

¹² There is a comparable melismatic flowering in the final movement of Kurtág's *Kafka-Fragmente*, with extremely long melismas on the words "nacht" and "part". This does not go hand-in-hand with metrical regularity, but contrasts strongly with the preceding music. Any influence on *Song-Messages* was subconscious.

would itself go on to be fragmented in movement IV (nicknamed “D \flat /C \sharp ”), and the beginnings of movements I and V as incipits (“K” and “D” respectively in Fig. 5.3). As with *Trio-Symphony* and unlike *SEXTET*, general ideas about overall structure were deliberately not pinned down so as to avoid creating an insufficiently flexible mould too early in the process.

Fig. 5.3 The page of “incipits” produced for *Cello Messages* (A, B, D, G, I and K can all be found in some form in the final piece; the rest were not used)

The image displays a page of handwritten musical notation for 'Cello Messages'. It consists of two columns of staves, each containing several musical fragments labeled with circled letters A through K. The fragments are written in various clefs (bass, alto, and tenor) and include tempo markings such as 'Lento', 'Largo', and 'Alto', as well as dynamic markings like 'p' (piano) and 'f' (forte). Some fragments include performance instructions like 'ped.' (pedal) and 'pizz.' (pizzicato). The notation includes notes, rests, and some complex rhythmic patterns, all written in a clear, legible hand.

The following step was to compose out the incipit nicknamed “Lilting” (“K” in Fig. 5.3) with the goal of achieving a continuity that would contrast with the fragments written thus far. However, this decision brought to the fore questions which had been looming in the background of the research. Is a fragment a fragment because it must be, or because it is made to be? Is it impossible to continue, or is there merely a lack of will to continue? For that matter, why and how should any music continue at all? These questions may sound pretentious or uselessly general, but they have very practical implications for composers. Regardless of whether one feels that one has anything to say artistically, there is the question of how and why to continue on a technical level. Various systems and mechanisms (tonality, serialism, text setting) can provide answers by determining certain factors. *SEXTET*’s continuous passages are essentially minimalistic; *Trio-Symphony*’s long monody is derived from a row matrix;

PROTO-SYMPHONY and *Song-Messages* utilise pedal notes and rhythmic ostinati. A pretext for the continuity of these passages felt particularly necessary to avoid them becoming the kind of fragments with which I felt most comfortable.¹³ But the mechanism and justification by which music continues or fails to continue cannot be taken for granted in research that concerns the relationship between the fragmentary and the continuous. Much as one might like to feel that music proceeds as it does because it must, because of some process or force within the music itself, it is in fact fundamentally arbitrary. A fragment is a fragment because it is made to be, *pace* Kurtág. Composition is an act of will.

This somewhat grand pronouncement became the underpinning of the explorations of scale and structure in *Cello Messages*, more fully developing the sentiment expressed in Chapter Two that structure is not an organic inevitability but an invention guided by the nature of the materials. Many composers have embraced this essential arbitrariness and made it a feature, especially the arbitrariness of when to stop: the striking endings of some of Chopin's Op. 28 preludes have already been mentioned, but we could also cite Ligeti etudes with "conclusions more like 'cut-offs' than structural closures" (as Ian Pace puts it) or Stravinsky's use of perfect cadences as "terminating conveniences" (as described by Pieter van den Toorn).¹⁴ These liberating thoughts in mind, there was no technical pretext for continuity when writing the first movement of *Cello Messages*, rather a simple directive: keep going. The goal was to continue the musical thought on the surface and see where it led with no particular system or mechanism, but without falling into comfortable mannerisms by cutting things off. This was as much a personal compositional challenge to myself as a research-driven philosophical experiment – at this stage the two were entirely intertwined.

The movement includes several moments at which, in other contexts and without the directive to keep going, the musical thought may well have been allowed to stop in the fragmentary spirit familiar from much of this portfolio. Many of these moments demonstrate the ending gestures catalogued in Chapter Two:

b. 18

The whole texture shifts registrally downwards as part of a "terminal drop-off", marking the end of the initial working of the "Lilting" incipit.¹⁵

¹³ This reflects Stephen Walsh's comment that the longer movements of Kurtág's *The Messages of the Late R. V. Trousova* are "eked out by ostinato", in "György Kurtág: An Outline Study (II)", p. 16.

¹⁴ Ian Pace, "Maintaining Disorder: Some Technical and Aesthetic Issues Involved in the Performance of Ligeti's Etudes for Piano", *Contemporary Music Review* 31, nos. 2–3 (April–June 2012), p. 180. Pieter van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 332. Van den Toorn makes his point specifically in relation to Stravinsky's octatonicism, noting how seeming dominant-tonic resolutions in his neoclassical music have a "parenthetical" character because they are conventional terminating gestures incidental to pitch organisation. Notably, Charles Rosen proffers that the disruptive E \flat in the penultimate bar of Chopin's F major prelude serves to "expose the tonic as an artificial symmetry, an arbitrary convention, to suggest a different world of musical experience outside [...] formal traditions", in *The Romantic Generation*, p. 98.

¹⁵ While this doesn't reach the bottom of the keyboard à la Ligeti, the gesture is comparable. An example of where a similar gesture does cut off a movement is the end of the first movement of Thomas Adès's *Traced Overhead*.

bb. 24-25

The piano has both a “sudden cut-off” and a “button”, while the cello has another “terminal drop-off” (this time ascending), just as the energy of the music seems to be increasing.

bb. 36-37, bb. 41-42 and b. 59

The cello material is abruptly neutralised into ascending chromatic scales after the piano has already stopped, a composed failure to continue developmentally.

bb. 99-100

The music has been broadly continuous from b. 43 up to this point, including driving through moments where silences could have happened such as b. 59 and b. 94, and there is a reprise of the opening in b. 95. The music’s petering out in b. 99 is particularly striking because of this preceding continuity, and also potentially terminal-sounding in the context of a cyclical reprise.¹⁶

These are not just carefully-placed silences for dramatic effect, but permitted “failures” of musical line utilising fragment-influenced ending gestures. It is not a question of tricking listeners into thinking that the piece has ended, but of playing with their sense of scale in terms of the interaction between duration (how long a musical thought goes on) and mode of address (the way in which it does so). And these failures of line create the sense of ineloquence described at the beginning of this chapter because of their context, their relation to a prevailing continuity.¹⁷ Although many pieces alternate different ways of speaking musically or utilise disruptive silences, this is a specific use of such effects to specific ends.

It should now be acknowledged that this movement ultimately became a sonata form, or rather an evocation of a sonata archetype (to adapt Michael Tippett’s terminology), sitting between a “historical archetype” (for example the middle-period symphonies of Beethoven) and a “notional archetype” (the *idea* of a symphony), as shown in Table 5.1.¹⁸ Having taken on the directive to “keep going”, the music fell into particular rhetorical and formal patterns as it was written, something of which I had become conscious when composing what became the “second subject”. The emergent sonata form could easily have been stifled at this point – after all, it could be considered ironic or even hypocritical for a quasi-tonal sonata form to emerge as part of research seeking fresh approaches to structure, and in a movement intended to avoid

¹⁶ Further moments of silence in combination with gestural termination, which there is not space to discuss here, occur in b. 106, b. 108, b. 121 and b. 197.

¹⁷ Such effects have precedents in striking passages of the traditional repertoire with which I have had a long fascination, namely bb. 40-47 of the Cavatina of Beethoven’s String Quartet, Op. 130, bb. 48-74 of the slow movement of Schumann’s Piano Quartet, Op. 47, and moments in several of Mahler’s symphonies but particularly the 3rd, 4th and 9th. These moments of seeming musical stuttering are powerful precisely because of the context in which they sit, and are brought about sometimes by literal gaps akin to stopping in the middle of a sentence, and sometimes by the disturbance of an established pattern.

¹⁸ Michael Tippett, “Archetypes of Concert Music”, in *Tippett on Music*, ed. Meirion Bowen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 89-90.

predetermined mechanisms for continuity. However, it was accepted and became the backdrop to the surface compositional process described above for two reasons. Firstly, sonata forms are not made long through mechanical process, but on more wide-ranging and flexible notions of statement, contrast, repetition and development. I would argue that these are indeed archetypal, and thus different from some of the more specific or mechanical pretexts for continuity mentioned earlier. Secondly, evoking the musical rhetoric and tonal relationships of a traditional sonata form in some aspects of the movement (as opposed to a consistently generalised archetypal approach), had particular value in the context of this research for the following reasons:

- 1) The historical sonata form’s symphonic-organic associations represent aspects of the continuous end of my spectrum of influences.
- 2) The sense of scale and traditional continuity in the first movement are disrupted in the ways described above, making this an unusual and as it were ineloquent sonata form.
- 3) The movement’s relative structural well-behavedness affects how listeners experience subsequent movements in important ways.¹⁹

As a result of its research-driven compositional process, the first movement of *Cello Messages* evokes both the prestigious continuity of sonata form and a fragmentary gestural mode of speaking – both eloquence and ineloquence. Its continuity is periodically punctured but the music nevertheless ploughs on. This conflict that the movement establishes also paves the way for subsequent movements’ explorations of scale, continuity and fragmentariness.

Table 5.1 The first movement of *Cello Messages* viewed as a sonata form

<i>Section</i>	<i>Function in terms of sonata form</i>
bb. 1-18	First subject (in “tonic”)
bb. 19-59	Transition
bb. 60-94	Second subject (in “dominant”)
bb. 95-197	Development (encompassing first subject “tonic” recapitulation in b. 169)
bb. 198-221	Second subject recapitulation (in “tonic”)
bb. 222-246	Coda

Fragmented fragments (Movements II, III and IV)

Somewhat akin to *Trio-Symphony*, the second movement of *Cello Messages* marks a shift into a more fragmentary world. This is not simply a traditional sonata progression from fast to slow, but a sudden arresting of momentum and a shift in the prevailing mode of address. The Morse-like rhythmic motifs of the first movement are zoomed in on and transformed into a 2-minute

¹⁹ This fact, as well as the disruptions previously mentioned, separate *Cello Messages* from other recent pieces which have consciously engaged with sonata form as a historical archetype (including musical rhetoric and tonal relationships) such as Thomas Adès’s *Piano Quintet* (2000).

liturgical chant, the duration and nearly one-note nature of which sharply contrast with the preceding continuous-developmental discourse (however ineloquent) while establishing the more hesitant world of the third movement. Although the second movement was written without thought for structural context, and would still work as a standalone fragment, it takes on new significance in the context of the final structure, as seen with movement VI of *Song-Messages*.

The third and fourth movements, on the other hand, offer contrasting new angles on the approach explored when writing *Trio-Symphony* of using a working method with its starting point in fragments in order to create larger structures. Both movements are founded on fragments written near the start of the compositional process, but they utilise their respective fragments very differently. The source fragment for the third movement, “Lullaby”, essentially consisted of bb. 1-10 and bb. 35-38, lasting around three and a half minutes. The passage in bb. 11-34 was inserted much later for the following reasons:

- 1) The movement would otherwise have been too short in proportion to the first movement;
- 2) The original version could have gone on, but didn't.

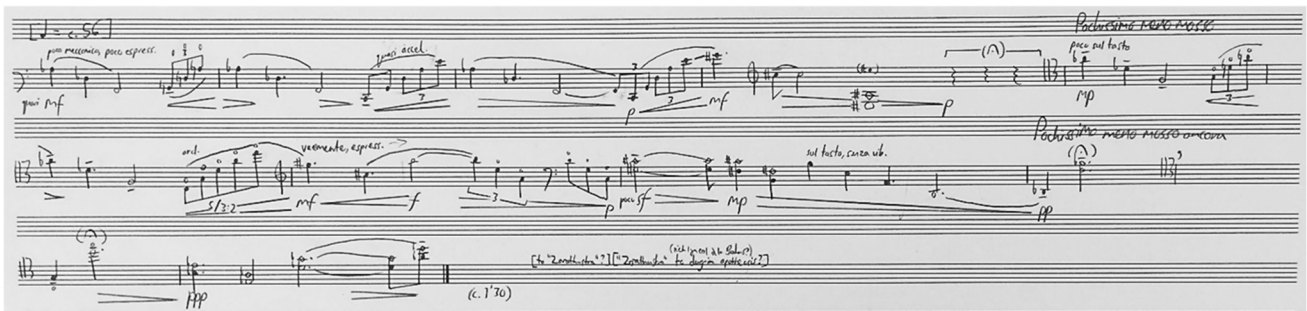
These things may sound like blessings in research that plays with expectations of scale, but the intention was never to create structures which felt imbalanced, rather to create structures that worked in spite of seeming imbalances. When the first movement was complete and “Chant” and “Lullaby” had been chosen to follow it, “Lullaby” felt both too long to provide a true timescale contrast and too short to sufficiently balance the first movement and hold its own.

The matter of how “Lullaby” could have gone on but didn't relates to preceding discussions of the aesthetic of the fragment and composition as an act of will. The hesitant phrases at the opening of the third movement generate significant tension and expectation. The *fortissimo* outburst in b. 8 was the climax of “Lullaby”, but the more dramatic outburst at b. 12, inserted later, heralds a continuous, forward-driven passage lasting until b. 33, when the hesitant world returns. While the original version *could* have gone on, the final version *does* go on. This could be seen as a poetically suggestive fragment being tamed into a movement which reveals its hand. However, the final version ends in exactly the same way as the much shorter “Lullaby”, including the terse punctuation of the cello's concluding gesture. The quality of fragment is retained in the framing, and in the end no lasting breakthrough to eloquence has been achieved by the b. 12 outburst. This internal effect of scale was a direct result of the new working methods explored in Chapter Three. In addition, this fragment interrupted by continuity is a mirror image of the first movement's sense of continuity punctured by fragment. Such effects are only achievable in longer pieces.

The fourth movement, by contrast, fragments a fragment. The *meccanico* material which enters in b. 28 may sound like a fast finale starting, but it repeatedly trails off, interleaved with more expressive short phrases from the cello (b. 39, b. 52, b. 68). These phrases are themselves

fragments of the earlier-cited fragment “D \flat /C \sharp ”, shown in Fig. 5.4.²⁰ During the compositional process, this was personified in my mind as the cello attempting to oppose the mechanistic fast music and reintroduce lyrical continuity. By the end of the movement, cello and piano are in unison, as it were agreeing on lyricism and paving the way for the more wholeheartedly lyrical movement V. A pre-existing fragment has thus been broken down and used in such a way that it becomes an active structural agent both within the fourth movement and within the piece as a whole. Incorporating or elaborating a short fragment into a longer movement is nothing new – Boulez’s orchestral *Notations* are striking examples, and Kurtág has done this countless times too. But in the fourth movement of *Cello Messages*, the fact is made audible so that it becomes the focus of the musical discourse and so that the quality of the original fragment is retained and even enhanced. It is the way in which the fragment is used and to what end in the context of the piece which make this worthy of research, not the compositional procedure in itself. This is a new lens through which to see familiar ideas, and a new process by which to apply them.

Fig. 5.4 The original fragment used for the second half of movement IV of *Cello Messages*, nicknamed “D \flat /C \sharp ”



Undermined resolutions (Movement V)

There is less to say about the final movement in that its structure is fairly conventional and largely free of ineloquent disruptions. With a reference point in the Romantic symphonic slow movement by way of Act II of *Tristan* (an attempt at Wagnerian eloquence), the structure of the movement is tidily defined by a recurring theme (heard in b. 5, b. 34, b. 45 and b. 67), pushing towards a climactic breakthrough in b. 90 with the cello’s sonorous low B.²¹ This description glosses over much musical detail, but as with *SEXTET*’s “Hoedown”, the salient feature is the movement’s general mode of address in relation to those already discussed. In spite of this seeming victory for eloquence, however, *Cello Messages* still ends on a question mark. The first movement’s “Lilting” figure re-enters atop the piano’s tolling low B’s in b. 103,

²⁰ The device with which the sense of a fast finale starting is achieved, a walking bass, connects with the final section of *PROTO-SYMPHONY* and the final movement of *Song-Messages*, using mechanised energy to achieve continuity and creating a false perspective.

²¹ Analogous slow movements which lead to a sense of breakthrough include those of Bruckner’s 7th Symphony and Mahler’s 4th, while there are famous precedents for using the slow movement as a symphonic finale in Tchaikovsky’s 6th and in Mahler’s 3rd and 9th. These heavily Romantic reference points were a backdrop to the compositional process.

providing a flat-7th blue-note quality and a seeming sense of cyclical resolution. However, as the low B's fade away, the centre of gravity shifts to A, disrupting that resolution (an oblique reference to the famous accented Eb at the end of Chopin's F major prelude). Although in many ways a long sought-for eloquence is achieved in the final movement, the seeming gesture of cyclical unification in b. 103 is in fact a disruption, and the music soon cuts off in the fragmentary spirit.

By the time of *Cello Messages*, the structural ideas and processes with which this research began (demonstrated by the juxtapositional experiments of Chapter Two) had become fused with their expressive effects and wider implications. This is why the music is described using metaphor and personification to a greater degree in this chapter than in previous chapters. The cello and piano do not literally "agree on lyricism" in movement IV, just as the music is not really "stuttering" in movement I. However, these are not just colourful ways of describing the music – they explain how aspects of the research manifested in the compositional process. The expressive effects are achieved on a technical level by playing with scale, with the relationship between duration and musical content in a particular context. *Cello Messages* does not simply juxtapose small movements with big movements, but is a large-scale multi-movement construction that makes scale, in many guises and with many of its implications, the centre of the structural discourse throughout.

★ ★ ★

Song-Messages and *Cello Messages* dramatise and make explicit matters of scale by using specific compositional devices to expressive ends. There has been discussion of both the compositional devices and the expressive ends, but the latter must remain subjective. While it is reasonable to argue that a musical line being frequently halted creates a sense of stuttering, it cannot be said with any certainty that listeners will find this indicative of a human struggle to deliver an eloquent message. While a contrast between fragmentary and continuous can be made apparent to a listener, seeing this as a contrast between ineloquence and fluency is a qualitative judgement. All that this commentary can do is explain the compositional devices and the research-driven thought behind their usage, all in the hope that it will yield meaningful experiences for listeners.

CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The long and short of it

This commentary will not simply stop in the fragmentary spirit, but will attempt to conclude itself in a way that most of the pieces in the portfolio pointedly do not. A summary of the ways in which differences in scale have been made the focus of musical discourse throughout the portfolio will lead into an assessment of the research's originality and value, followed by a consideration of paths which could be explored further, and finally a brief coda.

The first and most obvious way in which differences in scale have been made the focus of musical discourse in the portfolio is through the juxtaposition of timescales, principally in the form of short discrete fragments sitting alongside much longer continuous passages within the same structure. These are not merely contrasts of duration, but contrasts between different modes of musical address, ranging from a highly gestural fragmentary mode to a symphonic-developmental mode. This blunt form of juxtaposition, inspired particularly by Mahler, Kurtág and Lutoslawski, is present throughout the portfolio but most acute in *Frammenti Ricercati* and *SEXTET*. In these two pieces, the contrast is so conspicuous as to inevitably define their structures, and the two modes of address are very clearly differentiated. The contrast is still pronounced in the remaining pieces, but there are greater subtleties and ambiguities as explored in Chapters Three and Five. Timescale juxtaposition has been executed in various ways in the portfolio to achieve various effects, such as using repetition to highlight the juxtaposition and create a sense of structural narrative. Within these broader structural juxtapositions, the line between fragmentary and continuous is played with throughout the portfolio by using differing levels of contrast, closure, connection and momentum both across fragments and within longer passages, as well as by using varied ways of creating continuity to different effects, adding further interest and complexity.

Another way in which differences in scale have been made a focus is through playing with expectations of scale, both on an intrinsic musical level and in terms of wider cultural, historical and aesthetic associations. Particular modes of address are often established only to be subsequently contrasted, creating “dynamic surprise” (to use David Huron’s terminology as cited in Chapter Two). Similarly, our sense of scale is played with through unexpected stoppages or false starts within particular modes of address, as well as through music seeming large-scale or small-scale relative to the music around it. With regard to wider associations, the values implied by differences in scale have been explored, such as the prestige of large-scale symphonic music or the potential ineloquence and incompetence of fragments. Existing forms, styles and genres with implications of scale are played with (for example the sonata form, the symphony and the

song cycle), sometimes through the relation of title to content and sometimes within the pieces themselves.

Finally, in the specific case of *Song-Messages*, extremes of scale and their implications are made a focus through the use of text and its interaction with the music.

The composer-researcher may hope that the originality and value of this research are apparent from listening to the pieces themselves, but it is necessary to attempt to spell this out in more concrete terms. On a fundamental level, the kind of timescale juxtaposition at the core of this project is still in itself unusual, as explained in Chapter One. I would argue that such contrasts are rarely the consistent focus of a composer's output, and that the effects achievable through exploring this in such an extreme and focused way are rarely accessed beyond the aforementioned precedents. The contrasts of scale employed within this portfolio are also generally more extreme and frequent even than these precedents. Fundamentally, the music is novel in that it consistently does something that is rarely explored and pushes it to an extreme. This simple novelty has inherent value, but it can only ever be a starting point.

More distinctive is the combination of this approach with the aim of achieving discursive, teleological structures. The seeming contradiction between the fragment and goal-directed continuity is fully embraced, with familiar goals or shapes often achieved in unusual or unexpected ways, defying seeming imbalances. Significantly, fragments were not merely a starting point for sketching purposes during the compositional process, intended to be expanded and subsumed later. Their very nature as fragments has been incorporated into larger, more varied structures. In some cases, they even become active structural agents in a larger context precisely because they are fragments, because they exhibit particular qualities in relation to music operating on a larger scale. This is a substantial extension and development of how Kurtág and others work with fragments (for example forming macro-structures or using fragments in later pieces), a difference in degree becoming a difference in kind. Far from merely being a matter of fragments versus continuity, short versus long, this research is about what different scales and related modes of address mean and do in different contexts. Related to this is how the portfolio draws together influences in surprising ways, such as combining a Kurtágian fragmentary gestural language with a sonata form, or putting Lutosławski's and Mahler's structural effects alongside each other, addressing the research's stated goal of reconciling seemingly conflicting influences and tendencies.

Aside from generating compelling new music, another goal of this research was to generate fresh insights into musical structure and compositional working methods. Problems relating to structural proportions, musical flow, managing influences, engaging with the past, pretexts for continuity and so on are everyday concerns for composers, but the overarching framework of considering structure as a matter of scale allows new understandings and approaches. For example, it can lead us to think afresh about how and why one thing should follow another in music, as explored throughout this commentary. Putting together units of music operating on radically different scales challenges purity of approach and allows for reconciliation of influences,

but not in an iconoclastic or postmodern way. The research also engages some more fundamental compositional questions. Why continue? Why stop? Why make things long or short? This commentary cannot hope to provide answers to such broad questions, but it does provide a new angle for thinking about them, and ways to make them part of the musical discourse of an actual piece.

It is also hoped that the discussions and analyses of existing music in this commentary, as well as the specific technical devices and compositional approaches described, will provide insights and ideas for composers particularly and musicians more generally. This could range from listening to Kurtág with fresh ears to using a particular grouping device in a piece. Finally, on a personal level, the experience has been of incalculable worth. Regardless of any broader claims for originality and value, this project has undoubtedly given me new insights into structure, new working methods, a deeper understanding of my influences, the ability to produce more effective longer pieces, and frankly greater competence in writing music. For me as a composer, at the very least, this research has achieved its goals.

6.2 Paths to explore further

The matter of scale, as defined here, is broad by nature, encompassing a wide range of musical elements and possibilities. It is therefore unsurprising that there are still many paths to explore further. In listing these, it is hoped that the value and potential of the topic are made ever more apparent, rather than creating any sense of absence in the preceding work. It may have been noted that none of the pieces in this portfolio approach the length of a Mahler symphony or a Wagner opera – there is not even a piece approaching the length of the *Kafka-Fragmente*. Nevertheless, I believe that the approaches and techniques employed are able to be expanded. *SEXTET* and *Cello Messages* begin to point the way, but even longer pieces would allow ever more extreme juxtapositions of scale and ever more powerful and varied discursive effects. The goal of this project was not to write something as long as Mahler's 3rd Symphony, but to find approaches to structure through research which could enable effective and innovative pieces of such a length in the future. This research is both a starting point and a foundation for such future work.

The use of repetition as a structural device in this context, only really explored in *Frammenti Ricercati* and *SEXTET*, could also be taken further. This is especially true for longer pieces, given the potential for fragments to be intensely concentrated and distinctive in the manner of a Wagnerian *leitmotif*. Layers of audible repetitions of different fragments occurring in different contexts within a piece with a long overall duration could take the simple repetition devices described in Chapter Two much further. Similarly, there is scope for a more daring and radical use of pauses, silences and movement breaks. The pieces included here essentially use silence as frame, as outlined in Chapter Four, but *Cello Messages* in particular suggests viewing silence as more of an active structural agent in a way that is ripe for continued exploration.

Given that only one of the pieces in the portfolio uses text, it is unsurprising that there is much more to be investigated with regard to the interaction between text and scale. *Song-Messages* manages this interaction in fairly simple ways, but future pieces could, for example, set the same text on different timescales within the same cycle, or set text in such a way that suggests a greater or lesser degree of musical eloquence. More generally, the idea of dramatising and encoding a sense of eloquence or ineloquence in music could also be matched by a higher degree of theatricality and spatialisation in the staging of pieces. For example, instruments could have different ways of speaking, or different levels of eloquence, within an ensemble, and this could be reflected by placing players or groups in different parts of a space.

Another element only faintly present in the portfolio, but which I am determined to engage with further, is humour. Fragments have an inherent potential for humour because they implicitly challenge the need for large-scale coherence and because of their potential for gestural-rhetorical flair, especially when sitting alongside longer passages. I would argue that the incongruous cadence at the end of Chopin's A minor prelude is indeed grimly comic, just as the ending of the F major prelude is playfully comic. The fact that humour is an area in which contemporary classical music rarely excels gives me greater determination to make it a more prominent feature of future explorations of scale.

There are also several aspects of this research that could be taken further in an academic context, given how the notion of scale encompasses many different fields. For example, how can expectations of scale be codified or measured within the field of music cognition? Researchers like David Huron, Lerdahl and Jackendoff, and many others not cited here provide models for expectation more generally, but how could this be seen specifically in terms of scale and its implications? There are semiological questions too. In what specific ways are small or large scales signified and how does this create meaning? Viewing structures in terms of scale also opens up new analytical angles. A small amount of such analysis has taken place within the musical context set by this commentary, but more wide-ranging and rigorous attempts could follow. Such further explorations are well beyond the realm of this project, and beyond the realm of compositional research more generally, but might well merit exploration by others.

6.3 Coda

This commentary presents just one conceptual framework through which to compose. There are countless other ways in which one could describe or analyse the music in the portfolio and its effects (such as considering musical temporality or the psychology of expectation more comprehensively), but the pieces were generated by rethinking structure in terms of scale. Even when this fragile overarching concept subsumes many other fields and approaches, it does not become uselessly general because it keeps the focus on structure, on what is happening in the music and how and why at any given moment. What's more, it does not artificially isolate musical elements or result in dry laboratory pieces, but provides a flexible way of conceiving structure. This flexibility has befitted the fact that each piece written arose in relation to a specific

commission or context. The research often flowed via these different situations, opening up paths that would not have been explored if each piece had been written in the abstract. Above all, it is hoped that this research offers a new angle on some old and familiar problems, questions of how and why one thing follows another in music. Providing one more way of looking at these questions is no bad thing.

This being said, it is worth noting just how many aspects of the compositional process have not been discussed here. Why were particular harmonies selected? How were details of rhythm and orchestration decided? What other music influenced these pieces, from Beethoven to Knussen to funk to Céline Dion? While any description of compositional process that does not take all such things into account is incomplete, research must set its limits. Ultimately, the pieces speak for themselves as wholes. If they are effective, it is because of the totality and not because of research-driven structural experiments alone. And it is the pieces in this portfolio as wholes that are the true new knowledge and new experience generated by this research. As stated earlier in relation to the Henry Moore quotation with which this commentary opened, it is emotion, the experience that listeners have while hearing a piece, that is my ultimate concern as a composer. This compositional research is only relevant in the end if it has resulted in music that is compelling and communicative to listeners. Like many a composer, I hope that my music needs little explanation. But to explore and explain the thought behind it, and to make that thought rigorous and rich through the formal process of research, has been of immense value to me as a composer. My hope is that it will also be of value to others interested in composition and in music more generally.

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List of players featured in the accompanying recordings

Frammenti Ricercati

Violin I: Eloisa-Fleur Thom
Violin II: Sophie Mather
Viola: Robert Ames
Cello: Oliver Coates

Workshop recording, Silk Street Music Hall, 1st February 2018.

SEXTET

Flute/Piccolo: Fiona Sweeney
Clarinet/Bass Clarinet: Heather Ryall
Violin: Arisa Nemoto
Cello: Peter Davis
Percussion: Megan Landeg
Piano: Niklas Oldemeier
[conducted by the composer]

Live recording, Silk Street Music Hall, 11th July 2018.

Trio-Symphony

Clarinet: Balázs Sándor
Viola: Eszter Kalocsai
Piano: --- [the player has asked not to be credited]

Live recording, Milton Court Concert Hall, 1st December 2018.

PROTO-SYMPHONY

London Symphony Orchestra, cond. Jack Sheen

Workshop recording, LSO St. Luke's, 8th March 2021.

Song-Messages

Soprano: Héloïse Werner
Piano: Natalie Burch

Live recording, Clapham Omnibus, 1st December 2019.

Cello Messages

Cello: Joe Davies
Piano: Daniel Chappell

Session recording, Silk Street Music Hall, 16th December 2020.

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