

**A RADICAL IDIOM: STYLE AND MEANING IN THE GUITAR MUSIC OF DEREK
BAILEY AND RICHARD BARRETT AND *ENERGY SHAPES*, AN ORIGINAL
COMPOSITION FOR ELECTRIC GUITAR AND ELECTRONIC SOUNDS**

by

Aaron Brooks

B.Mus., East Carolina University, 2009

M.A. in Music, University of Pittsburgh, 2011

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This dissertation was presented

by

Aaron Brooks

It was defended on

March 28, 2014

and approved by

Amy Williams, Assistant Professor of Music, Music Department

Mathew Rosenblum, Professor of Music, Music Department

William Scott, Associate Professor, English Department

Dissertation Director: Eric Moe, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Music, Music Department

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The freely-improvised music of British electric and steel-string acoustic guitarist Derek Bailey, who lived from 1930-2005, and the notated electric guitar music of British composer Richard Barrett (b. 1959) bear remarkable similarities, despite originating from different working methods, creative voices, and cultural contexts.

In order to understand this musical style, which I have named “radically idiomatic guitar music,” after a term created by Richard Barrett, I have conducted analyses of micro-level sonic events and larger musical structures utilizing the musicians’ own thoughts on their music along with an analytical approach which investigates oppositions of pitch and rhythmic motive, melodic range, register, and timbre. With each analytical approach, I have discovered a plurality of possible structural readings, which in each case encourage a flexible and creative approach to hearing the music. I have additionally investigated outside critical responses to their music, and briefly discuss the socio-cultural significance of the music through lenses provided by Jacques Attali and Ernst Bloch. I have found that, despite tensions in its creation and reception, the music strives to express a socialistic ideal through the creation of idealized sonic societies, where imagination may be explored free from the restrictions of top-down power structures.

Through this investigation, I have found that radically idiomatic guitar music, through its musical abstractions from conventional styles, its multi-layered musical structures which resist

any single aural or analytical reading, and its problematization of familiar instrumental vocabulary, is capable of provides an exciting example of how music might be experienced without clear hierarchies or normalized sets of expectations, inviting us to play an active role in structuring its affect. It is at the same time a music of rigorous thought and craft, and a sound-world of sonic freedom and exploration.

My original composition, *Energy Shapes*, for electric guitar and electronics, attempts to exemplify this musical style both in its rigor and perceptual subjectivity, while altering some of the style's basic characteristics by utilizing microtonal elements, by incorporating rhythmic grooves, and by at times making explicit genre references.

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PREFACE

I would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their support and encouragement:

- My wonderful parents, Annette and Fred Brooks.
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

A lightly overdriven electric guitar plays quick, angular, bursts of sound. The harmonies are terse and dissonant, frequently employing cluster-chords combining harmonics with conventionally played notes. The guitar leaps around its entire range in Webern-esque fashion, exhibiting a sharply directed rhythmic character, despite a lack of clear pulse or meter. A stereo amplifier setup combined with a volume pedal allows for occasional swirling swells on single notes and chords. After approximately half a minute passes in similar fashion, a torrent of drums and electric bass fills the sonic space before eventually, and only briefly, establishing vaguely rock-inspired rhythmic patterns. The guitar proceeds much as it had before, both seemingly oblivious to its accompanying rhythm section and yet expertly complimenting it.

Elsewhere, a dense tangle of sounds quickly swells out of nothing, clearly electronically generated, but carrying some of the sonic characteristics of the steel string guitar. A heavily distorted solo electric guitar quickly asserts itself into the foreground, playing high speed non-tonal lines. Large intervallic leaps, chromatic pitch-saturation, and a constantly shifting pulse within this melodic line recall virtuosic post-war serial music. However, the guitar-tone, along with techniques like tremolo picking and whammy bar dive-bombs, invoke a rather different type of instrumental heroics: namely those found in heavy-metal guitar solos. As the guitar's noisy electronic accompaniment is forcibly faded into silence from the mixing board, the guitar finds

itself losing its amplification as well, ending the piece with an ironic series of rhythmically square, unamplified scales.

The impressionistic descriptions presented above describe two pieces of music that arise from two rather different working methods, artistic voices, and cultural contexts. The former is an improvisation entitled *Quinka Matta*, featuring British guitarist Derek Bailey accompanied by experimental rock duo Ruins.¹ The latter is the final movement of *transmission*, an elaborately notated work for electric guitar and electronic sounds by British composer Richard Barrett.² Despite the differences in presentation and method, Bailey and Barrett's guitar music display remarkable similarities. Both musicians have created a non-tonal electric and steel-string guitar style that is both intellectually challenging and viscerally exciting in its kinetic energy and sonic novelty. Both musicians ostensibly seek to stylistically distance and abstract their guitar music from the popular and folk genres that the non-classical guitar is frequently identified with, while at times evoking or collaborating with such stylistic signifiers in defamiliarized ways.

The younger Barrett (born 1959) has made clear that there is a concrete influence in at least one direction. In his program note for *transmission* for electric guitar and live electronics, completed in 1999, he describes the piece as:

“...an attempt to reconceive the electric guitar itself, neither as an expanded (or impoverished, depending on one's point of view) version of its “classical” forebear, nor as a medium for effecting a fashion-conscious fusion with its familiar contemporary vocabulary. *transmission* uses a “hybrid” instrument equipped with both “electric” and “acoustic” outputs, and uses playing techniques related to both of the above traditions [electric and classical] as well as (probably most importantly) what Derek Bailey calls “non-idiomatic improvisation” (to which I would prefer the term “radically idiomatic”). Thus it draws, more than any of my other compositions to date, on my own modest

¹ Derek and Ruins, *Saisoro*, Tzadik TZ 7025, 1995, compact disc.

² Richard Barrett, *transmission*, (Essex: United Music Publishers, 1999).

experience and abilities as an improvising guitarist, from the times before I found a deeper “instrumental vocation” in the domain of electronic music.”³

It would seem that, where Bailey has tended to view his guitar style as avoiding all musical idioms, Barrett finds that such guitar music is itself a “radical” idiom. It would also seem that he feels a consistent style begins to exist in guitar music with these shared characteristics that is in some way significantly opposed to traditional types of guitar music.

Based on the sonic similarities between Derek Bailey and Richard Barrett’s guitar music, and based on the above evidence of direct artistic influence, the present study will hypothesize that Bailey’s “non-idiomatic” and Barrett’s “radically idiomatic” guitar music form a coherent musical style, despite the former existing primarily within the stylistic and cultural realm of free improvisation, whereas the latter has been largely realized within the world of contemporary notated composition. The study will seek to understand this style, first in terms of its origins within Bailey and Barrett’s artistic thinking and in micro-level sonic events, second by varying means of structural musical analysis of longer excerpts, focusing on oppositions of registers, rhythmic types, melodic ranges, pitch extremes, and timbres, and finally in a brief discussion of the music’s critical and cultural reception and meaning.

³ Richard Barret, *DARK MATTER - interview with Daryl Buckley and programme note*, 2003, <http://richardbarrettmusic.com/DARKMATTERinterview.html>.

2.0 DEVELOPMENT OF “RADICALLY IDIOMATIC” GUITAR MUSIC AND A LOOK AT ITS SONIC DETAILS

It is important to note that neither Derek Bailey’s “non-idiomatic” nor Richard Barrett’s “radically idiomatic” formulations apply only to music for guitar. In his book *Improvisation* Derek Bailey discusses “non-idiomatic” improvisation after several chapters concerning a variety of “idiomatic” improvisation types. For Bailey, the term “idiomatic” refers less to practical instrumental technique and more to musical styles and traditions. He distinguishes between the two as such:

“I have used the terms ‘idiomatic’ and ‘non-idiomatic’ to describe the two main forms of improvisation. Idiomatic improvisation, much the most widely used, is mainly concerned with the expression of an idiom – such as jazz, flamenco or baroque – and takes its identity and motivation from that idiom. Non-idiomatic improvisation has other concerns and is most usually found in so-called ‘free’ improvisation and, while it can be highly stylized, is not usually tied to representing an idiomatic identity.”⁴

In other words, Bailey defines “idiomatic” improvisation as improvisation within a given musical tradition, which carries clearly defined stylistic characteristics. “Non-idiomatic” improvisation resists clearly defined stylistic tendencies and parameters. It is thus paradoxical that Bailey’s “non-idiomatic” playing, in its efforts to resist traditional improvisational styles, formed the clearly identifiable personal idiom described briefly above.

⁴ Derek Bailey, *Improvisation*, 2nd ed., (London: The British Library National Sound Archive, 1992), xi-xii.

In both *Improvisation* and in Ben Watson's biography, Bailey traces the development of his mature improvising style through musical experiments with the Joseph Holbrooke Trio, a group consisting of Bailey on guitar, Gavin Bryars on bass, and Tony Oxley on drums. Bailey, born in 1930, made his living playing music for most of his life. He spoke of alternate employment options as follows, demonstrating his down to earth personality and slightly sardonic sense of humor:

“When somebody says they would rather work in a factory than play music that they don't like or don't believe in, the answer's obvious. It means they've never worked in a factory.”⁵

Bailey thus played popular songs in jazz and dance bands and in recording sessions beginning in the 1950s. By the early 1970s he was able to drop commercial work in favor of focusing solely on his career as a free-improviser.⁶ The Joseph Holbrooke Trio, active initially from 1963-1966, straddled these two periods. Bailey described the group as imperceptibly moving from traditional jazz to freely improvised music over the course of its relatively isolated existence in Sheffield, England. Bailey credits the other two musicians with much of their propensity towards musical experimentation, with Oxley following developments in modern jazz and Bryars following contemporary composition.⁷ Experiments during this period included playing modal melodic lines out-of-phase with the underlying harmony, dividing beats into finer units and superimposing rhythmic orientations, improvising serially on small pitch-sets, incorporating melodic dissonances routinely, and other quasi-systematic improvisational procedures. The group eventually arrived at a point where it was improvising entirely freely, without direct recourse to such procedures. Bailey describes the final result somewhat casually:

⁵ Bailey, *Improvisation*, 16.

⁶ Ben Watson, *The Story of Free Improvisation*, (New York: Verso, 2004), 182.

⁷ Bailey, *Improvisation*, 86.

“So the whole was somewhat atonal in character, played in a discontinuous, episodic manner, with two instruments – amplified guitar and percussion – matched to the volume of a very softly played double-bass.”⁸

Bailey’s style continued to develop in the following decades as he focused more on solo playing and “semi ad-hoc” collaborations.⁹ In “Derek Bailey’s Practice/Practise,” a recent article by Dominic Lash, Lash does much to define the basic building blocks of Bailey’s mature solo style. Lash points to a list of technical characteristics presented only in the first edition of Bailey’s *Improvisation*:

“A list of the types of measures which proved successful would include: combining pitch with non-pitch (‘preparing’ it but not using a fixed preparation), constructing intervals from mixed timbres, a greater use of ambiguous pitch (e.g. the less ‘pure’ harmonics-7th onwards), compound intervals, moving pitch (which includes glisses and microtonal adjustments), coupling single notes with a ‘distant’ harmonic, horizontally an attempt to play an even mix of timbres, unison pitches with mixed timbres-elements of this kind, and many others, proved useful.”¹⁰

Lash additionally discusses notated sketches of musical ideas found in the Incus Archives.¹¹ These include sketches that assign different noteheads for different techniques, such as harmonics, open string notes, and fretted notes. They also include instructions on varying ways to play cluster chords utilizing different techniques and timbres.¹² In exploring the rigor with which Bailey developed his guitar style, Lash attempts to resolve the seeming conflict of a definable musical style in the service of “non-idiomatic” playing:

“...Bailey constructed his mature improvisational vocabulary according to very specific criteria which did not aim at sonic novelty for its own sake, but rather submitted willingly to certain musical and physical constraints with the intention of pursuing that which was continually malleable.”¹³

⁸ Bailey, *Improvisation*, 89.

⁹ Bailey describes such temporary groupings of improvisers as his ideal performing situation. Watson, 116.

¹⁰ Dominic Lash, “Derek Bailey’s practice/practise,” *Perspectives Of New Music* 49, no. 1. (January 1, 2011): 156.

¹¹ Incus is a record a label which was run by Derek Bailey for many years.

¹² Lash, “Derek Bailey’s Practice/Practise,” 151.

¹³ Lash, “Derek Bailey’s Practice/Practise,” 144.

It is significant to note that Bailey briefly dabbled in notated composition, creating the *Three Pieces for Guitar*, in 1966 and 1967, which explicitly explore his interest in the 12-tone writing of Anton Webern.¹⁴ Although notated composition would not remain a major pursuit, he continued to assert the influence of Webern and early electronic pre-composed music on his playing.¹⁵ Before analyzing specific sonic details of Bailey and Barrett's radical guitar idiom, we will briefly explore the development of Richard Barrett's musical voice.

Barrett's youthful experiences were somewhat different than Bailey's. Graduating from college in cellular biology and microbiology, his limited early experiences with academic music training were less than fruitful.¹⁶ After a brief encounter with Cornelius Cardew at King's College in 1981, he left the school shortly after Cardew's death, frustrated when, among other things, an attempt to organize an improvisation ensemble at the school's music department attracted no other interested participants.¹⁷ Barrett went on to study composition privately with Peter Wiegold in the following years, garnering recognition at the Darmstadt Summer Course in 1986 and winning the Gaudeamus Prize in 1989.¹⁸

Concurrently with the development of his career as a composer, Barrett formed improvisational electroacoustic duo FURT with Paul Obermayer, which is still active at present. With FURT there is some crossover with Derek Bailey's career, as they have at times performed with free-improvisers such as saxophonist Evan Parker, who was a frequent collaborator of Bailey's. Improvisation found its way into Barrett's pre-composed output with pieces like the

¹⁴ Derek Bailey, *Pieces for Guitar*, Tzadik 7080, 2002, compact disc.

¹⁵ Bailey, *Improvisation*, 107.

¹⁶ John Warnaby and Christopher Fox. "Barrett, Richard," *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed March 3, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/subscriber/article/grove/music/45770>.

¹⁷ Richard Barrett, "Cornelius Cardew," in *New Music 87*, ed Michael Finnissy and Roger Wright, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 21.

¹⁸ John Warnaby and Christopher Fox. "Barrett, Richard."

fourth movement of *transmission*, which will be discussed at length later, culminating in the final movement of his *CONSTRUCTION* cycle, premiered in 2011, which consists of a 20 minute group improvisation by the Elision chamber ensemble plus the composer on electronics.

Barrett's artistic influences are broad. In addition to expressed admiration for post-war composers such as Cardew, Xenakis, and Stockhausen, slightly older British contemporaries such as Michael Finnissy and Brian Ferneyhough¹⁹, and the European free-improvisation milieu containing figures such as Derek Bailey and Evan Parker, he listed a handful of rock guitarists when asked about the possibility of rock and heavy metal sonic signifiers in *transmission* by the author:

"But, over and above that, the seemingly referential examples you mention are part of the instrument's historical vocabulary in a similar way to the shadow cast over the technique of "classical" instruments by their past repertoire. And, in the case of the electric guitar, the historical vocabulary is not a product merely of what the player does with his/her hands but also of the way the sound of the instrument is conceived and set up. So for example the way everything is set up in part 2 [*transmission II*] is going to be reminiscent of some of Fripp's work whatever else happens, and, as an admirer (and, in my young days as an electric guitar player, occasional attempted imitator) of his work, when something like that occurs I'm not motivated to avoid it. I think that if music does have its own individual personality it can display its influences without seeming to be ashamed of them or sounding superficially derivative. In this connection I would mention not just obvious examples like Fripp, Derek Bailey and Hans Reichel, but also less obvious ones like Frank Zappa, Vernon Reid, Bill Frisell and Steve Howe, and guitarists I've worked with personally such as Gunnar Geisse, Han-earl Park, John Russell and of course Daryl Buckley and Seth Josel. But at the same time the music doesn't "refer" to their work any more than the use of the sitar in *negatives* refers to Indian music."²⁰ [*negatives* is a chamber work that incorporates a number of folk and non-western instruments]

¹⁹ See the previously cited article on Cardew and his article "Stockhausen today and tomorrow" on his website, <http://richardbarrettmusic.com/Stockhausen2012.html>, where the above article on *Dark Matter* was taken from. Also writings praising Xenakis, Ferneyhough, and Finnissy appear in "Xenakis," in *Contemporary Music Review*, 2002, vol. 21, 2/3, "Avant-Garde and Ideology in the United Kingdom Since Cardew," in *New Music, Aesthetics, and Ideology* (Die Deutsche Bibliothek, 1995, p. 174), and "Michael Finnissy: An Overview" in *Contemporary Music Review*, 1995, vol. 13, 1 respectively.

²⁰ Richard Barrett, e-mail interview with author, December 20 2013.

Similarly, in developing his electroacoustic improvisational style in FURT, Barrett asserts the importance of early experiences with consumer-grade music gear:

“The experience of playing Casio samplers through guitar effects pedals and the like still exercises an influence on the way we work now. We’re not making the kind of electronic music that comes from experiences at IRCAM or any of those posh places, but from a pathway which has gone through and beyond the lowest electronic music technology there is.”²¹

FURT’s music would later become much more high tech, but it is clear that experiences both within and outside the music academy were formative in the development of Barrett’s musical language. It is also significant that both Barrett and Bailey have experimented with notated composition and improvisation. However in Barrett’s case, both methods of musical creation became of major importance to his career, whereas Bailey chose to pursue improvisation for the most part exclusively.

Barrett described his use of the term “radically idiomatic” in more detail in our correspondence:

“I should point out that Derek Bailey is using “idiomatic” in a somewhat different sense from the one I’m using. He is talking about styles of playing: jazz, flamenco, rock & roll and so on (to take a few guitar-related examples) and so for him “non-idiomatic” denotes a music which doesn’t situate itself within preexistent styles of that kind but which (ideally) generates its own “style” as it comes into being. On the other hand, I’m using “idiomatic” to mean something which, in terms of notated composition for instruments, is written in an ergonomic way, so as to “fall under the fingers”, a particularly important issue when it comes to composition for guitar of course. Now, “idiomatic” in this sense generally means indeed conforming to traditional ideas and limits regarding instrumentalism, and the idea behind “radicalising” this situation is to try and rethink instrumentalism from first principles, while at the same time acknowledging the history of the performer-instrument relationship...”²²

Rather than being primarily concerned with the avoidance of traditional musical idioms, Barrett’s radical idiom seeks to rethink the possibilities of instrumental performance from a

²¹ Bob Gilmore, Richard Barrett, “Richard Barrett,” *Paris Transatlantic*, 2009, <http://www.paristransatlantic.com/magazine/interviews/barrett.html>.

²² Richard Barrett, e-mail interview with author.

tactile stance. This approach can be seen in works such as *Ne Sonje plus a Fuir* for solo cello. In an interview with Arne Deforce, who has performed the piece, Barrett describes the following generative materials:

“The material which lies behind the piece actually consists of a series of trajectories across all 4 strings. That means that I divided each string into a number of different registral bands, and I then constructed straight lines which would scan across from top to bottom of a specific band.”²³

The starting point for the music is the physical construction of the instrument, hence the somewhat tongue in cheek interview title *The Resonant Box with Four Strings*. Concrete pitches are not a given in the piece’s initial conception, to say nothing of a cohesive musical idiom. We also begin to see Barrett’s propensity for employing rigorous systems in creating his notated work. In regards to *Ne Sonje* he states:

“Of mathematical thinking, certainly. I have a kind of "toolbox" of mathematical techniques, which over the years I've gradually added to and incorporated into a set of computer programs. I should be clear that they are only tools and thus are not intended to be "visible" as such in the compositions, any more than is the scaffolding which helps in the construction of a building. Most of them have in common the idea of some kind of in-time process which is algebraically formulated and allows for a certain statistical uncertainty, producing for example a distribution of data-points around an overall tendency in whatever dimension or parameter, or combination of parameters, is being composed.”²⁴

Barrett goes into greater detail in explaining such mathematical techniques in an article concerning his *Liebestod* for recorders and reverberation units. In this work, a pitch series is subjected to expansions and contractions of range, ranging from microtones around a single pitch, to the entire range of the instrument. Varying types of functions (linear, exponential, etc.) determine how wide or narrow the pitch resources are at a given point in the piece.²⁵ In our correspondence, Barrett elaborated on a similarly rigorous, and similarly instrumentally

²³ Arne Deforce, Richard Barrett, *The Resonant Box with Four Strings: Interview with Richard Barrett*, 2000, http://www.arnedeforce.be/composerfiles_toelichtingen/BarrettResBox.htm.

²⁴ IBID.

²⁵ Richard Barrett, “Tranquility of Decomposition,” *Tijdschrift Voor Muziektheorie*, Volume 6, Number 1, (2001): 45.

conceived starting point for the composition of *transmission*, which involved constructing ergonomic groups of pitches to match collections of rhythmic durations that gradually progress up and down each individual string, creating a background resource of harmonic possibilities, based around superimposing different groups of physically close frets on different strings:

“Perhaps it would help if I explained the process of composition in more detail. The basis of the pitch-material is six strands of pitches which were constructed in the following way. Firstly a span of 120 rhythmical units was divided into “phrases” of between 2 and 7 units. Then, the beginning of each phrase was assigned a pitch on the 1st string, with these pitches gradually progressing up and down the range of the string. Then the remaining pitches of each phrase were filled in, using the pitch of the first string as a guide to left-hand position and creating constantly-changing harmonic fields including the use of harmonics and open strings. The resulting strand of pitches could therefore be played at high speed with each phrase *legato* since each phrase can be played without a shift of left-hand position, and the shifts between phrases are generally very small. This process was then repeated using traversals of the other five strings in turn, to give the six strands of 120 pitches from which everything in the piece is derived. At this stage, Daryl recorded the six strands separately. This recorded material was used as the basis of all the electronic sounds that feature in *transmission*, and is particularly clear in part 6 where the strands are heard simultaneously with very little transformation: at the time when the basic material of the piece is finally “exposed”, it is compacted into a dense and chaotic texture where individual strands are very difficult to disentangle aurally.

The six strands are then projected onto the duration of all six parts of the piece, each part making its own trajectory between the strands. I think it’s possible to hear this to varying extents through the piece, especially in the relationship between parts 1 and 3 since these use more of the pitch-strands than the others, while in part 2 so few pitches are used that the original material has basically been erased. The degree to which this material is “transmitted” to the surface of the music is the basis of the title.”²⁶

Despite the level of pre-compositional rigor and systematization, *transmission* is a work that requires its performers to improvise more or less freely in certain sections. It is clear that, although Barrett’s path to the “radically idiomatic” guitar music of *transmission* involves a great deal of non-real time compositional thinking, it is also intrinsically linked to the approach of free improvisers such as Bailey, both in sound and conception. In the following examination of Derek Bailey and Richard Barrett’s “radically idiomatic” guitar music as a style, we will employ a

²⁶ Richard Barrett, e-mail interview with author.

definition of this music that is between those of the two musicians. Radically idiomatic guitar music is thus intimately concerned with the physical experience of playing the instrument as it attempts to break away from the instrument's traditional techniques and vocabulary. The connection with instrumental physicality is clear in the great care with which Bailey took to develop his playing style, through individual practice, technical note taking, and performance, and in Barrett's employment of the guitar's construction as a fretted 6-stringed instrument as a key component in his composing of *transmission*. Through its abstractions and constant flux in the pitch, rhythmic, and timbral domains, radically idiomatic guitar music develops a sonic language that encourages the reconsideration of what guitar music can be in light of what it is already known to be, via creative navigation of its musical forms through listening and analysis.

To begin to define this style, we will explore the surface level implementation of pitch, rhythm, and timbre in short excerpts of Barrett and Bailey's music. Figure 1 presents reductions of opening passages to two pieces: *E* from the posthumously released record of Derek Bailey solo steel string improvisations *This Guitar*, recorded in 2002 and released by the Rectangle Label in 2011²⁷, and *transmission I* by Richard Barrett. Timing indications in the Barrett are taken from Daryl Buckley's recording on the album *transmission*.²⁸

Both excerpts open with material that is relatively more chordal, and follow it with material that is more melodic, making them ideal passages to discuss the pitch characteristics of radically idiomatic guitar music. In both cases, significant changes in musical texture follow the material presented in the reduction (the issue of segmentation will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter). Bailey's improvisation begins with melodic gestures that allow pitches

²⁷ Derek Bailey, *This Guitar*, Rectangle bandcamp digital recording, accessed December 12 2013, <http://rectangle-records.bandcamp.com/album/this-guitar>.

²⁸ Richard Barrett, *transmission*, NMC D117, 2006, compact disc.

Derek Bailey - *E* - Opening harmonies and melodies

[5,9,10,11,0]
(01237)

[10,0,1,2]
(0124)

(track beginning)

[10,0,1,3]
(0235)

[10,0,1]
(013)

chromatic space between A and Eb tritone filled in
[9,11,0]
(013)

19"

(non-pulsed space)

♩ = 177

♩ = 122

♩ = 133

♩ = 111

♩ = 158

22"

(1:1 tempo ratio)

(3:4)

(3:5)

33"

(contains all chromatic pitches except for E)

Richard Barrett - *transmission I* - Opening harmonies and melodies

[4,5,6,7,8,9,10]
(0123456)

[11,2,3,4]
(0125)

[11,1,3,5,6,8]
(023579)

[11,1,2,5]
(0236)

(track beginning)

5"

♩ = 81

(upper melodic voice only, contains all chromatic pitches)

5:4

4:3

7:6

5:4

3:2

9:10

8:7

3:2

6"

13"

Figure 1. Opening harmonies and melodies in Derek Bailey's *E* and Richard Barrett's *transmission I*

to overlap and strummed chords fanning out from a droning B flat, before more discreetly melodic material begins 22 seconds into the improvisation. During this harmony oriented opening, Bailey fills in the chromatic space between the A to E flat tritone. Normal form and prime form labels are given to this passage to demonstrate both the ubiquity of the half-step and the motivic relationships of pitch and interval. The half-step, minor third trichord (013) recurs both in isolation and within larger groups of notes, while certain key pitches are maintained throughout the passage, with B flat being the most prominent. This occasional tendency towards a local tonic is more commonly a characteristic of Bailey's playing than Barrett's guitar writing. The following melodic material demonstrates two other key aspects of the style. Bailey tends to saturate the chromatic field: every chromatic pitch, with the exception of E natural, is sounded within approximately ten seconds. This melodic line additionally demonstrates a preference for wide melodic range and frequent intervallic leaps, often requiring harmonics and behind-the-bridge playing to execute. There are eleven leaps of over an octave, while the passage has a total melodic range of nearly four octaves.

Barrett's notated movement is more hyperactive. Whereas Bailey's opening filled in a tritone chromatically over a leisurely 22 seconds, Barrett's opening gesture of a five-note chord quickly followed by a high harmonic similarly fills in a tritone almost instantly. Barrett's opening chordal stabs display a similar predilection to half-step cluster based sonorities, but they are seemingly less motivically unified than Bailey's opening. This may seem counter-intuitive, but given that Barrett constructed his piece around a repertory of 120 pitch-duration pairs per string, using this framework as a background structure for additional compositional invention, it is not surprising that such a complex generative system would result in music that is less clearly patterned in small-scale surface passages than an improvisation stemming from a highly intuitive

approach to real-time playing. As in the Bailey example, Barrett follows this harmonic material with clearly melodic writing, although again, the pace is much quicker. Barrett's melody presents every chromatic pitch, and is also characterized by leaps and a wide, although somewhat less extreme, melodic range, with 12 leaps over an octave and a total range of just over three octaves. Barrett's above description of the hand-position based building-blocks of *transmission* make clear an important aspect of radically idiomatic guitar playing: although extremely disjunct melodic material may not be native to many traditional guitar styles, it is a latent possibility within the instrument's design, as the wide range of the open strings make for many physically easy melodic leaps. Idiomatic guitar playing, in the sense of music that "lies well under the fingers," is not rejected, but is reevaluated.

Figure 1 additionally demonstrates key aspects of Barrett and Bailey's rhythmic language. In the Bailey reduction, rhythms are transcribed for the melodic line. In the Barrett example, they are copied from his hand-written score. The *Transcribe* software was used to aid in notating Bailey's rhythms after starting from an aural identification of points of shifting tempo, using a system of averaging distances between pulses and rounding tempi and tempo ratios. Discreet metronome markings are shown above the staff, whereas tempo ratios relative to the initial tempo of 177 eighth notes per minute are given below the staff. The opening four attacks, each of which is of a different duration, and in a combination which perceptually resists formation of a clear pulse, are notated proportionally. We can see from this example that, rather than avoid pulsed-based rhythm entirely, Bailey frequently plays short bursts of pulses that quickly shift speed in often unusual tempo proportions (7 to 10, 3 to 5, etc). This sonic effect is transformed into Barrett's notation, which has been copied only with regards to top-voice melodic pitches and rhythm in Figure 1. Barrett's melodic passage utilizes a similarly constant

shift in pulse-speed. Although different recordings of *transmission I* sound quite different rhythmically, they still effectively recreate this general rhythmic character.²⁹ It is significant in the Barrett example that his tempo shifts always fit across varying numbers of beats. This is perhaps more due to the limitations of notational convention than a stylistic difference from Bailey, and in fact Barrett does employ time signatures that imply incomplete tuplets in later movements. Barrett and Bailey's radical idiom utilizes constant rhythmic shifts in a way analogous to chromatic-pitch saturation. Pulse, pitch, interval, and tempo are all integral aspects of the style, but they operate in a non-hierarchical way that is conducive to the structural flexibility the two musicians seek.

Beyond rhythmic and pitch vocabulary, timbral variety, playing technique, and electronic signal processing play an integral role in Bailey and Barrett's guitar music. We have seen the emphasis Bailey places on constantly moving between harmonics, fretted notes, open strings, behind the bridge playing, and other various techniques in his notes on his style above. He has also experimented with stereo amplification setups and some degree of distortion. Barrett's score for *transmission* similarly asks the player to employ sul ponticello (close to the bridge) and sul tasto (close to the fingerboard) playing, harmonics, whammy bar bends, and tremolo picking, among other playing techniques. The electronic processing of the guitar signal is also a major factor in the piece's sonic detail and dramatic structure, at times requiring a second performer to change reverberation, distortion, and pitch shifting settings in real-time.

Rather than attempt to demonstrate Bailey and Barrett's timbral variety from brief musical examples, I have recorded several of the above playing techniques and created

²⁹ Daryl Buckley has recorded the piece on the aforementioned *transmission* and on the more recent *Dark Matter* compact disc. (NMC D 183, 2012 respectively) Seth Josel has a streaming recording on myspace.
<https://myspace.com/sethjosel>

spectrograms from the recordings to show the acoustic differences. These spectrograms are shown in Figure 2. Spectrogram 1 shows the increased number of upper partials, which recede rather quickly, when the pitch D3 (using the American convention for octave numbers, where C4 is middle C) is played as an open string, rather than a fretted note on the lower A-string. The sound is thus brighter in character when played on the open D string rather than on the A string, but only briefly. Spectrogram 2 represents *sul tasto* vs. *sul pont.* playing of the same pitch. In this case, the *sul pont.* note is not only noticeably richer in upper partials, but also noisier, containing more high non-harmonic frequency content than the mellower *sul tasto* note. Spectrogram 3 demonstrates the difference between a plucked harmonic and a normally fretted note. The harmonic is less rich in overtones and contains considerably more attack noise. Spectrogram 4 shows the most extreme contrast thus far, between a low E played with a clean tone and subsequently with heavy distortion. The distorted pitch is extremely noisy, saturating much of the frequency spectrum with non-harmonic sounds. It also loses harmonic focus earlier than the more focused clean pitch. The final spectrogram demonstrates an effect often found in Bailey's playing, where two different harmonics are allowed to ring together, creating a pulsating beating effect caused by their slight microtonal difference in pitch.

The constant rotation between these sorts of timbres in Barrett and Bailey's guitar music once again destabilizes the notion of a core "tone," while nevertheless being intrinsically tied to the possibilities of the guitar as a physical instrument and providing much of the excitement and color of the aesthetic.

Much of the above descriptions of musical surfaces could be attributed to the early and post-war atonal and serial music listed as influences by Bailey and Barrett, respectively. However, the particular combination of rigorous pitch, rhythmic, and timbral variety as

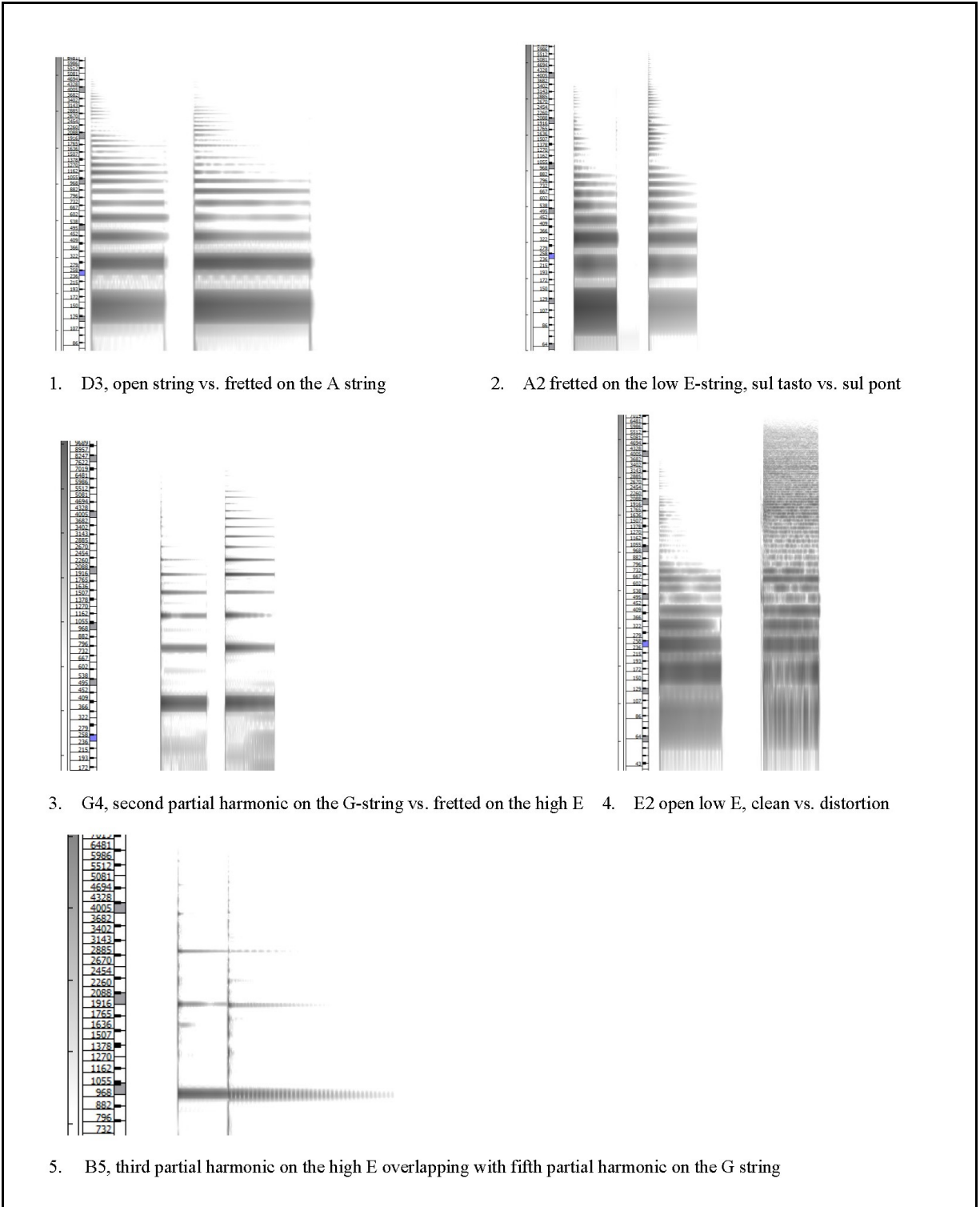


Figure 2. Spectrograms of some guitar playing techniques employed by Bailey and Barrett

specifically applied to the steel-string acoustic and electric guitars produces a musical style that is both cohesive and successful in radicalizing the sonic vocabulary of this ubiquitous family of instruments. Having sketched a definition of the micro-level characteristics of radically idiomatic guitar playing, we will now attempt to understand more complete spans of music.

3.0 ANALYSES

The guitar music of Derek Bailey and Richard Barrett presents a number of challenges for the analyst when dealing with larger musical excerpts. Chief among them are segmentation, or the parsing of the music into structurally significant units, and perceptual transparency and subjectivity, or the degree to which these structures are perceptible, and the degree to which diverging paths through the music may be experienced, or may be created in the act of listening.

Both Barrett and Bailey's music problematizes segmentation at the broadest level of the "piece." Barrett has demonstrated a preference for creating works that exists in multiple formats, both as part of larger cycles, and as separate extractable pieces, which are at times split into several movements. Several of these cycles, including *Opening of the Mouth*, *DARK MATTER*, and *CONSTRUCTION* combine improvised music with notated music, and thus can differ dramatically from performance to performance. *transmission*, for electric guitar and electronics, written between 1996 and 1999, exemplifies all of these tendencies. It is a 20+ minute, six movement work that may be played either as a stand-alone piece, or as a portion of the expansive *DARK MATTER* cycle, where it is augmented by additional instrumental and vocal parts, and is scattered throughout the cycle's 80+ minute duration. Furthermore, the piece incorporates both rigorously notated and improvised music in both formats. The wild, hyper-active fourth movement pushes most towards the latter, placing free-improvisation on the parts of the guitarist and electroacoustic performer between notated fragments. The highly melodic opening

movement, by contrast, is completely through-composed. Although there is a degree of fixity to *transmission* as a repeatable musical work, there is also a high degree of flux from one performance to the next. Hence an analysis can work towards understanding the piece, but cannot claim an absolute authority, as the piece itself does not exist in a single authoritative form.

Segmenting Derek Bailey's music into individual, analyzable "pieces" is an even more strained endeavor. In Dominic Lash's article concerning Bailey's musical style and practice, introduced above, Lash points out that Bailey was surprisingly unconcerned with the way in which record producers would edit his improvisations for recordings. Such edits could involve seemingly arbitrary truncations of improvisations, or separating single improvisations into separate tracks. Even more astonishingly, Lash points out that Bailey speculated that his entire life time's worth of improvising could represent a single continuity.³⁰

3.1 *TRANSMISSION V AND G*

As the fixed "piece" is elusive in both Barrett and Bailey, and as analyzing every possible version of a piece, or analyzing an entire lifetime of guitar playing as a single piece, represent near-impossibilities, I will begin my segmentation by looking at the way the music is disseminated and parsed in recordings and in score. Although Derek Bailey may not have preferred recordings in his own listening, they are one of the only ways in which his work has

³⁰ Dominic Lash, *Derek Bailey's Practice/Practise*, 161.

been heard since his death in 2005, with the exception of occasional arrangements.³¹ Similarly, for those not present at the handful of live performances of *transmission* and *DARK MATTER*, the two commercially available recordings of the piece, both featuring guitarist Daryl Buckley and the composer on electronics, are among the only versions of the work readily accessible. I will analyze the fifth movement of *transmission*, focusing primarily on Daryl Buckley's performance on the album of the same name, published in 2006 by NMC records, but taking into account key differences in the later complete recording of the *DARK MATTER* cycle, published in 2012 by the same label. To begin to analyze Derek Bailey's music, I will explore the short, mercurial track entitled *G* from the posthumously released, digital-download-only album *This Guitar*, recorded by Bailey in 2002. These excerpts were chosen as starting points due to their brevity and due to their use of clearly differentiated musical textures. Analytical segmentation will present further issues as these pieces are examined, but first I will briefly discuss the significance of perceptual transparency and subjectivity in Barrett and Bailey's music.

Derek Bailey's music, and freely improvised music in general, places a premium on a given moment in time and on a specific place. In an interview originally published in *The Wire*, where Bailey was asked to respond to a number of recordings without being told of their authors, he humorously described his ideal distribution method for recordings of his own music in a moment of exasperation with the whole exercise:

“When they listen to it, they'd better get hold of it while it passes – it's not recordable, it's not savable. But if you haven't heard it before you can hear it if you want to. At the moment I'm waiting for someone to show me how to do that.”³²

³¹ Such as those by Chris Burn, they may be streamed at <http://www.chrisburnmusician.com/#!bailey-and-lamb/c1x3>.

³² Ben Watson, *Derek Bailey and the Story of Free Improvisation*, 421-422.

What Bailey describes is essentially science fiction, but, in more neutral terms, it points towards the importance of the first hearing in experiencing his music. It is clear that any analysis of his music, if the guitarist's intentions are to be taken as significant, must take into account structural and sonic features that are immediately accessible at the music's surface. Nevertheless, Derek Bailey's playing appears on hundreds of recordings, all of them fully repeatable. Musical structures that only reveal themselves upon repeated hearings therefore need not be discounted, however of-the-moment the initial artistic impulse may have been. I will thus permit gradations in transparency of musical structures found in my analyses of Bailey's music, but will not stray too far from those aspects of the music that are immediately apparent.

Barrett has not expressed such a stark opinion on the primacy of first hearings, although he has indicated a desire for clarity at first impression. At the beginning of an essay on his orchestra piece *Vanity*, completed in 1994, he states:

"Obviously with a work as complex as this, an in-depth analysis would have been far too time-consuming to contemplate, so I restrict myself to those aspects which I think might be immediately apparent on a first hearing."³³

He then proceeds to explain the work in broad strokes, speaking of such aspects of the music as instrumental groupings, density level, textural shifts, and political implications. More frequently, Barrett has emphasized the importance of subjectivity in hearing his music. In the above mentioned interview with Arne Deforce, he states:

"I am not interested in expressing my experiences to audiences and performers but in people actually having an experience of their own. Something should be happening to them, not just in front of them. The listener should be confronted with him- or herself, though reflected and refracted through the music in such a way as to defamiliarise and therefore perhaps to create some kind of insight; and what applies to the individual listener here could also apply in the more social act of listening to a concert."³⁴

³³ Richard Barrett, *Vanity – beginnings of an analysis*, 1996, <http://richardbarrettmusic.com/VanityAnalysis.html>.

³⁴ Arne Deforce, Richard Barrett, *The Resonant Box with Four Strings*.

Barrett makes this point even more explicitly in discussing his electroacoustic improvisational project FURT, a duo with Paul Obermayer which has been active since 1986. In the 2009 interview for *Paris Transatlantic*, he states the following:

“The philosophical standpoint behind it is that the listener is encouraged to make his/her own experience out of encountering the music rather than being told what to listen to and for, taking part in the musical process and participating in it, rather than being a passive recipient - an experience which might also vary from one listening to the next. As a listener I try to listen further into a given piece of music, even in recorded form; each time and try to discover something new about it. That new thing exists principally within the listening mind, but the seed of it is there in the music somehow. So I guess what we're doing is scattering lots of seeds!”³⁵

We are thus invited to create one of many, perhaps infinite, paths through the music. The specific musical structure experienced emerges from both the music, and from our own thoughts and experiences. Although this is true in all music to a degree, this music is unique in its explicit desire to encourage such creative listening as much as possible. It is music that resists the formation of a limited number of related categories of experience. Bailey has expressed a related desire: that the audience influences and participates in the creating of the music, as it is improvised:

“There’s much more going on between a performer and an audience than just communication. I don’t know what happens but I think that the audience’s role in listening to improvising – and I never liked saying anything about audiences because if anyone asks what I think about an audience, I’m just grateful there is one – but actually I would think that an audience listening to improvisation has a greater responsibility than any other type of audience because they can affect the musical performance in a direct way, in a way that no other audience can affect the musical performance.”³⁶

My analysis will take into account the importance of both perceptual clarity and creative listening. In order to create descriptions of the musical structures that relate to clearly audible aspects of the music, I will loosely adopt Fred Lerdahl’s notion of “salience” in non-tonal music.

³⁵ Bob Gilmore, Richard Barrett, “Richard Barrett.”

³⁶ Henry Kaiser, Derek Bailey, *Derek Bailey the interview London 1975*, 1975, <http://bells.free-jazz.net/bells-part-two/derek-bailey-the-interview-london-1975>.

My intent with the following analyses will be to address what Lerdhal calls a “listening grammar,” or a way of describing the experience of hearing a piece, rather than a “compositional grammar,” which refers to the processes used by the composer to create the work. Compositional grammar in Barrett and Bailey was briefly discussed in the previous section with regards to Bailey’s process of practice, experimentation, and note taking, and Barrett’s pre-compositional planning. Lerdhal argues that in the absence of the hierarchy creating “stability conditions” present in tonal harmony, “salient” musical events take over as primary organizational units. He lists a number of ways in which a musical event can be more salient than other events surrounding it, such as relative loudness, density, duration, metrical position, and registral position.³⁷ Although I will not use these ideas to focus on harmonic prolongation in the way that Lerdhal does, the notion that such easily-hearable, surface-level events produce musical forms, sign-posts, and hierarchies will be central to my approach.

In order to address Barrett and Bailey’s emphasis on perceptual subjectivity and creative listening I will focus on a number of musical parameters, which will at times create rather different segmentations and structural readings of *G* and *Transmission V*. The following analyses will thus be both a loosely systematic investigation of the progression of surface-level musical events, and an act of collaborative creation, presenting only a small handful of the many possible “stories” told by the music.

Richard Barrett’s *transmission V* occurs as a moment of repose, both in the solo version of *transmission*, and within the *DARK MATTER* cycle, after the frenetic, largely improvised fourth movement in the former, and after *Ars magna lucis et umbrae - transmission IV* in the latter, which combines an extended version of *transmission IV* with a solo for vocalizing

³⁷ Fred Lerdhal, “Atonal Prolongational Structure,” *Contemporary Music Review* vol. 4 (1989): 65-87.

clarinetist and ensemble music. The solo version of the movement, which is combined with clarinet, acoustic guitar, and voice in the version present in *DARK MATTER*, consists of a number of quick, chordal and single-note attacks, separated by silences and what Barrett calls “indiscreet sounds” in his score. These sounds consist of quiet, pseudo-improvised noises made by the guitarist, such as scraping, pressing against the electronic pickups, tapping the strings with the pick, etc. The chords and pitches typically occur in small groups. This harmonic/melodic material is set within a highly irregular rhythmic grid. Concurrent with the clean guitar sound used to project these chords and melodic lines is an electronically processed musical layer. This second stratum consists of a heavily distorted version of the same guitar chords/notes, which is drastically pitch-shifted in various ways throughout the movement. This distortion-guitar layer is also run through a reverb unit, giving it varying degrees of synthetic spatial distance from the dry, clean sound. Both effects processors are manipulated in real time via foot pedals. Although the thick, compressed distortion used in the recording of the solo version of the movement is similar to the guitar sound frequently used in heavy metal, the affect is rather different from what Robert Walser described in discussing the semiotics of heavy-metal distortion:

“Thus, distortion functions as a sign of extreme power and intense expression by overflowing its channels and materializing the exceptional effort that produces it.”³⁸

In *transmission V*, this distortion is controlled and backgrounded; the less processed “clean” guitar sound is louder. This produces a technologically counter-intuitive musical texture that would not have been possible in the earlier days of electric guitar amplification. Rather than exerting extreme power and intensity, *transmission V* uses its guitar-distortion as a sort of ghost, only vaguely alluding to the sonic signifiers of heavy rock music. The version of the movement present on the later *DARK MATTER* recording uses a rather different processed sound, removing

³⁸ Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil*, (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 42.

the semiotic connection with rock music almost entirely, in favor of a sound that is quieter, and that is almost total resonance: a sort of acoustically impossible, continuous morphing of perceived room size. In order to consider *transmission V* as a single musical entity, and in order to focus primarily on the guitar's role in the piece's musical argument, I have decided to focus my analysis on the solo version, as heard on the 2006 NMC recording.

As chordal stabs make up so much of *transmission V*'s musical argument, it is tempting to investigate harmonic configurations as major form-builders. However, a quick intervallic analysis of the first two lines of the score reveals no less than five distinct prime forms. Barrett seemingly confirms this harmonic unpredictability in a note to the performer in the score:

“Emphasize variations in (acoustic) timbre and dynamic, don't substitute for the indicated strings; no chords to be spread or strummed – their pitch-content should be interpreted as primarily a timbral parameter.”³⁹

Once again, more important than the internal configuration of the harmonies are a set of radicalized structural possibilities stemming from the guitar's physical construction and the guitarist's ergonomic experience of hand positions and playing techniques. An analytical emphasis on intervallic structures present in the score also ignores the distortion layer, which is necessarily more indeterminate in pitch, due to Barrett's generalized contour notation for the foot pedal, and the lack of precision inherent in foot pedals themselves. Rather than focusing on specific pitch collections, my initial analysis will instead simplify the score and the auditory experience by tracing registral activations and spread, creating a reduction of the music into regions of higher or lower chords which are more or less gapped, harmonies, distortion sounds, and relative densities of sound across pitch space. Other salient features considered will include the starkly irregular rhythmic language, and the prevalence of pauses and “indiscreet sounds.”

³⁹ Richard Barrett, *transmission*, (Essex: United Music Publishers, 1999), 19.

My analytical findings are shown in Figure 3. I have replaced staff notation with lines representing 7 registers, numbered according to the American convention, where middle C is the first note of register 4. Although this is an arbitrary segmentation of registral space, it is a necessary one, as the guitar lacks characteristic registers in the manner of the clarinet or flute, due to the recurrence of pitches on different strings. In this reduction I am showing only the registers of the fundamental frequencies of each chord tone, and only the lowest pitch of the distortion sounds, as these sounds tend to resist parsing into multiple pitches. The registral regions of the distortion sound were determined with the aid of *Sonic Visualizer*, whereas the “acoustic” pitches were taken from the score. I have used sounding pitch, rather than the guitar’s transposition an octave lower in mapping the clean and distorted sounds to my reduction. Clean pitches are represented in registral space as black boxes, while distortion pitches are shown with white circles. I have included the location of pauses and “indiscreet sounds” in my reduction, and I have boxed those groups of notes where 3 or more successive attacks happen in a single tempo. I have based my segmentation of the movement around 14 phrases, which are divided by the pauses and “indiscreet sounds,” considering these markers to be readily differentiated by ear, and thus the most salient aspects of the musical texture. I have also included line numbers, referring to the score, along with timing markers to aid in reading the chart.

A number of analytical conclusions can be drawn from this reduction. The following list is organized by moving from conclusions affecting the greatest number of musical sections to the least. The degree of salience of the observations will be discussed later.

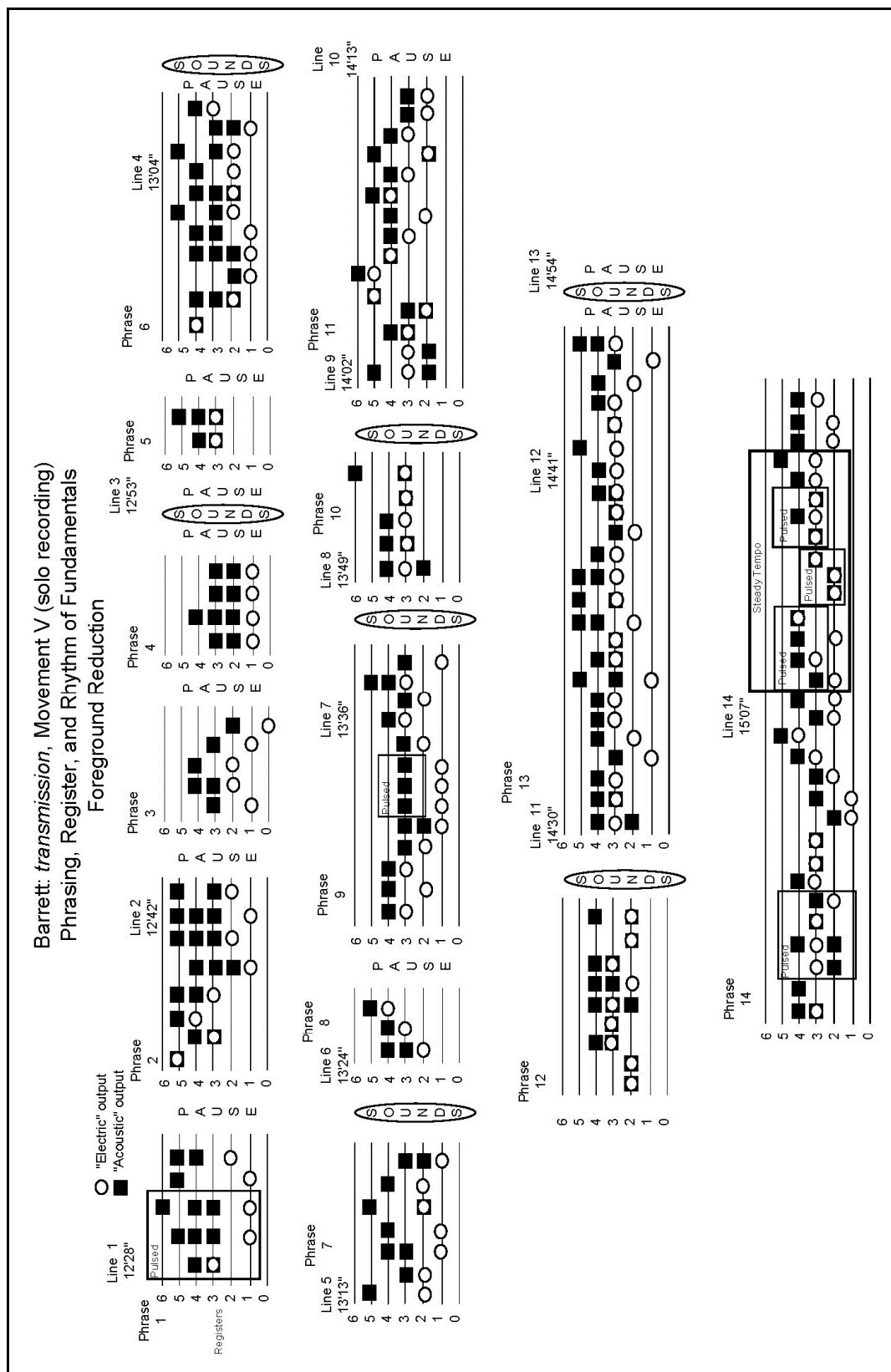


Figure 3. Phrasing, register, and rhythm in Barrett's *transmission V*

- Generally, clearly directional registral formations are not favored. Each phrase delineates a new registral pattern of consistently complex shapes and thus resists further reduction. The phrases with a unidirectional registral shape are special cases. (phrases 5, 8, and 10) These can divide the music into four very unequal parts if heard as points of structural segmentation. These segments are phrases [1-5], [6-8], [9-10], and [11-14].
- There is little sense of steady pulse, thus most rhythms are sensed only as absolute comparisons of onsets, free from a metrical grid (albeit not necessarily absolute in a clock-time sense). The moments of clear pulse are special cases, dividing the piece into three unequal parts when treated as structural markers: [1-8], [9-13], [14]. The effect of ending with the longest stretch of pulse can additionally be taken as a moment of motivic elision with *transmission VI*, the work's final movement, which is much more melodically linear and continuous. This is not the case when the piece is performed as part of *DARK MATTER*, where it is followed by the largely electronic piece *Katasterismoi*, which employs rather different musical textures from either movement of *transmission*.
- Likely due to the limitations of music technology and human hearing, the pitch-shifted material is often higher than one would expect from reading the score, often weaving a similar registral shape to the chords, but sometimes crossing or overlapping voices with the clean guitar sound (4th phrase, 10th phrase, final phrase), and sometimes providing a quasi-drone (second to last phrase). If these moments of overlap are taken as structural markers, we arrive at this segmentation: [1-4], [5-12], [13-14]
- Chords with very large registral gaps appear less frequently, and thus have structural potential. These appear in phrases 1, 2, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14. Phrases 10 and 11

contain the only chords with 2 octave gaps. Phrase 11 has two of these and can be taken as a sort of apex, whereas the remainder of the piece is relatively more saturated with frequent registral gaps. We thus arrive at a two part structure: [1-10], [11-14].

- The “indiscreet” sounds also break up the piece into two parts, one with shorter, more numerous phrases, and one with longer, less numerous phrases: [1-10], [11-14]
- The “electric output” adopts an overall shape of moving towards mostly low registers and to a wider spread over the course of the piece, creating a single, continuous formal arc. Thus we arrive at the “non-segmentation,” [1-14] which can nevertheless characterize the piece as a whole.

Even with the limited focus of the above analysis on register, pulse, and silence, and ignoring the denser version of the movement featured in *DARK MATTER*, we have arrived at no fewer than six distinct formal segmentations of the movement. These are shown in Figure 4. Commonalities between segmentations are indicated with boxes.

Certain segmentations are more convincing (more salient) than others; the placement and frequency of “indiscreet sounds,” for example, is likely more eminently hearable than the progression of registral shapes, and, within the author’s experience of the music, is the primary form-builder of the piece. These more immediate readings are indicated with a larger font size in Figure 4. This analysis also does not attempt to take into account the sonic or psychological evolution of each parameter as the piece progresses. A gapped chord on first hearing, for example, is a very different experience from a return to such a registral configuration. Nevertheless, it would seem that in transmission V, what is at first glance a strikingly singular narrative of textural and dramatic-timbral opposition, and a moment of relative sparseness within the larger *transmission* and *DARK MATTER* works, is actually an exemplar of Barrett’s

Barrett: *transmission*, Movement V (solo recording)

Middle-ground segmentation according to changes in salient parameters

1. Electric output registral shape (non-segmentation)
(phrases) /1-14/

2. Gapped chords

Simultaneity in parametric shifts

/1-10/, /11-14/

3. Frequency of Indiscreet Sounds

/1-10/, /11-14/

4. 1-direction registral shapes

/1-5/, /6-8/, /9-10/, /11-14/

5. Drones and voice crossing

/1-4/, /5-12/, /13-14/

6. Pulsed rhythms

/1-8/, /9-13/, /14/

Figure 4. Middle-ground segmentation of *transmission V*

imperative that his music provide a field for multivariate perceptual experience. Among other factors, the variety of registral formations within phrases and the asynchronicity of change of various musical parameters allow for numerous paths through the music. Radically idiomatic guitar music is thus in part characterized by the degree of freedom it allows in experiencing its structures, and in its resistance to consistent or predictable psychological reactions and interpretations.

Derek Bailey's acoustic improvisation *G* is the third and shortest track from *This Guitar*, a studio recording created in 2002, but not released until 2011, after his death. It is the third and shortest in a series of six solo improvisations titled after the six strings of the guitar. As publically available information on the download-only release is limited to a short blurb on Rectangle's Bandcamp web page, it is difficult to tell if the track titles and ordering were the decisions of Bailey, recording engineer Toby Robinson, or an external producer.⁴⁰ *G* represents one of the most concise musical structures on *This Guitar*, both due to its brevity and the prevalence of at least two immediately apparent dramatic oppositions. The first lies in its use of rhythm, which frequently invokes a long-short metrical character that may be viewed as an oblique and abstracted reference to popular and jazz "swing" rhythm. Bailey rejected the notion that his mature improvisational style and free improvisation at large are directly related to jazz, but as he himself points out, in recalling discussions with drummer John Stevens, this was not necessarily a universally accepted attitude in the free improvisation community:

"One of the things we argued about, endlessly, was the relationship between this kind of playing and jazz – our different views of *Karyobin* [a 1968 record by the Spontaneous Music Ensemble that both musicians played on] are a good illustration of this. For me the connection between this kind of playing and jazz is umbilical: the real possibilities start

⁴⁰ Derek Bailey, *This Guitar*.

once you cut the cord. John's view was diametrically opposed to that. He believed some connection was essential, however tenuous."⁴¹

The connection between the long-short rhythms in *G* to "swing feel" is tenuous. Nevertheless, the prevalence of this musical idea, whether it is a semiotic invocation of jazz, or merely an abstract rhythmic motive, is one of the most salient aspects of the piece's surface, which is set in relief by other, sometimes more and sometimes less regular rhythmic characters.

The second set of musical oppositions that becomes immediately apparent, as in Barrett's *transmission V*, is Bailey's use of extremes of register, both in terms of high and low sounds and in the differing ranges of melodic material, ranging from passages which are restricted to a narrow span of only a few half-steps to passages where the span is beyond the normal range of the guitar frets (using harmonics and behind the bridge playing techniques to achieve extremely high notes). Segmenting the music according to shifting registral spans additionally reveals certain significant note recurrences as a sort of very subtle pitch-centricity. In order to focus on rhythmic motive and melodic ranges, I have begun my analysis with Figure 5, a transcription focusing primarily on rhythm and pitch, but also including major differences of playing technique where they seem to occur. For the sake of brevity, and to maintain a similar analytical scale with the above Barrett analysis, I have transcribed approximately half of the improvisation, although I will look at the entire piece with regards to rhythm.

The transcription reveals Bailey's primary rhythmic techniques in *G*. Unlike *transmission V*, the music is primarily pulsed, with non-pulsed passages occurring less frequently within the improvisation. These passages are notated with unstemmed, approximately proportionally spaced noteheads. What drastically differentiates *G* from conventionally metric music is its constant shifts in tempo. These changes in speed are at times subtle, at times drastic. Beginning with aural

⁴¹ Ben Watson, *The Story of Free Improvisation*, 117.

Transcription

G from *This Guitar* first half

Derek Bailey
transcribed by Aaron Brooks

Acoustic Guitar

5

7

12

96 126 146 167 240

9" 14.89" 20.86" 35.60"

rit. rit. rit.

fz

Figure 5: Transcription of Bailey’s G, first half

15 $\text{♩} = 174$ *accel.* $\text{♩} = 214$ 49.91" 52.24" 53.77" 55.67" $\text{♩} = 200$

19 $\text{♩} = 129$ *ril.* $\text{♩} = 214$ 58.08" 59.26" $\text{♩} = 136$ $\text{♩} = 203$ 1' 1'02.09" 1'04.42"

23 $\text{♩} = 231$ 1'04.71" $\text{♩} = 200$ 1'06" 1'08.19" *ril.*

26 1'20.16" $\text{♩} = 231$

Figure 5: Transcription of Bailey's *G*, first half (continued)

identification of changes in speed, and using *Sonic Visualizer* as a measuring tool, I have reflected these tempo shifts with metronome markings. Such shifts are combined with a high degree of metrical freedom, where any number of pulses could occur before a rhythmic shift. My transcription omits time-signatures in order to reflect this freedom.

To begin my analysis proper, I have created a segmentation which accounts for four distinctive rhythmic profiles. The first, which occurs early and prominently in the improvisation, is the long-short “swing” motive, which is occasionally flattened out into a non-repeated note straight-pulse. I have labelled this profile ‘A’. The second, labelled ‘B’, is a repeated note gesture, which frequently shifts in tempo, the third, ‘C’, is a sparser, non-pulsed texture, and the last, ‘D’, which slightly breaks this segmentation’s rules and includes pitch-contour, is an extremely brief but distinctive, rhythmically square sequence, which occurs only once, towards the end of the improvisation. Figure 6 shows a segmentation of the complete piece according to these rhythmic characters. It places their occurrences on a clock-time ruler to show proportion, and divides the four profiles into alternate forms, indicated with numbers and lower-case letters, and similar-sounding developments of earlier material, labelled with apostrophes. The following observations can be made from this chart:

- The ‘A’ material dominates in its varying forms of development with respect to duration. The ‘B’ material, which is also primarily a pulse-based music, provides the most significant contrast, despite only briefly recurring after its first major episode. The ‘C’ and ‘D’ profiles appear much more briefly, although, perhaps significantly, the ‘C’ material occurs where a climax might normally take place in other musical styles.
- The rate of change increases significantly in the piece’s second half.
- The final synthesis of ‘B’ and ‘C’ functions as a sort of coda, or final punctuation.

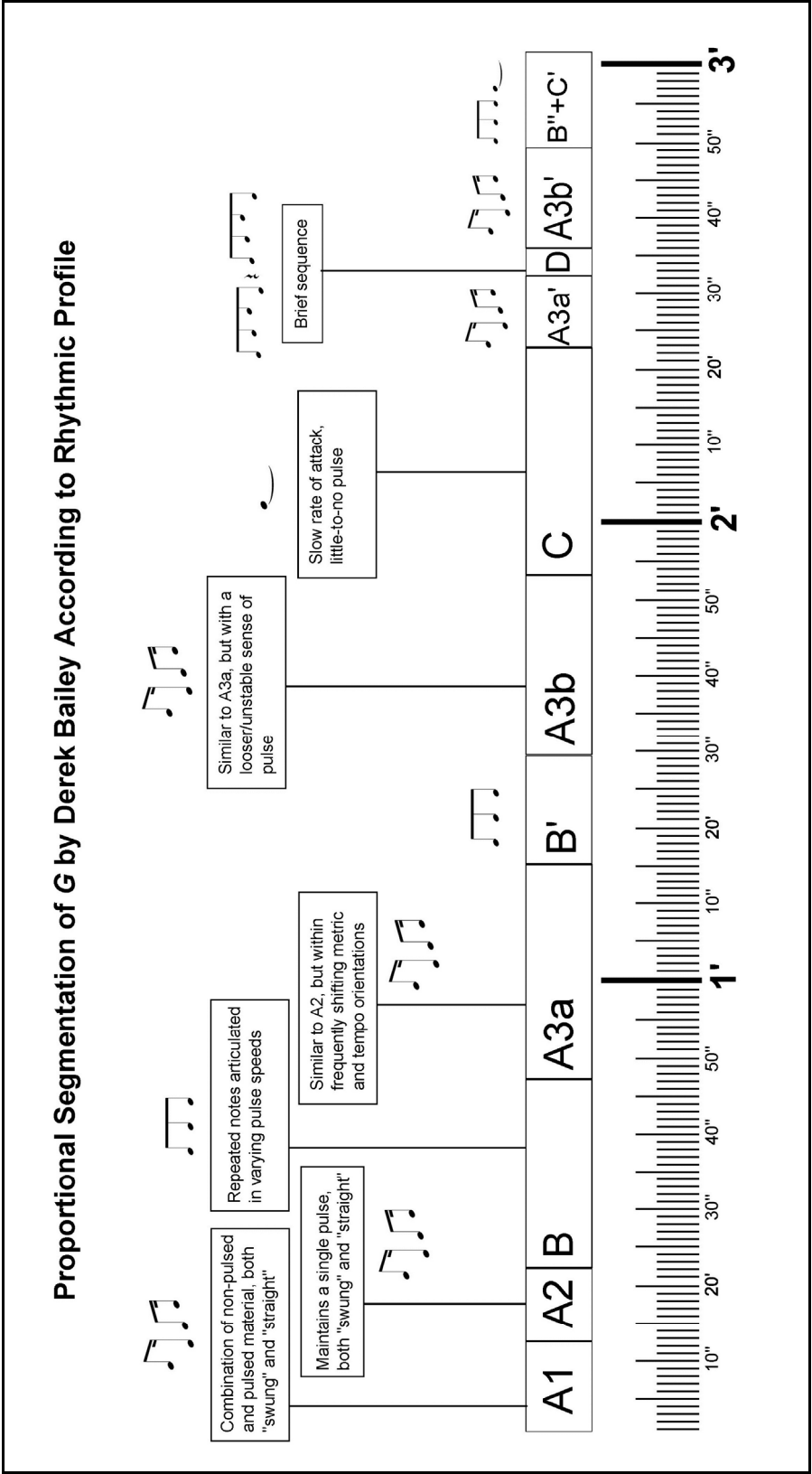


Figure 6: Rhythmic segmentation of Bailey's *G*

- The affective proportions of the material very likely differ from their clock-time proportions, with the highly salient ‘D’ being the most extreme example of this.

The second salient feature that I have used to segment *G*’s first half is its use of melodic range and pitch extremes. Figure 7 divides the first half of the improvisation into 10 sections, each demarcated by a noticeable change in either absolute register, and/or registral spread. Notes that begin and end these sections are shown in conjunction with highest and lowest pitches, which are stemmed. The large numbers indicate the interval, in number of half-steps, between highest and lowest pitch, for each section. Recurring high and low points are connected with slurs. The following analytical observations are made:

- The excerpt’s first third is generally more registrally narrow than its remaining material. The end of this opening segment, a passage with a melodic range of only 2 semi-tones, centering around A4, represents an extreme contrast to the piece’s tendency towards wide registral spans. It also again demonstrates Bailey’s occasional use of local tonics in his improvisations.
- The registrally widest material immediately follows the narrowest, then narrows somewhat as the excerpt ends.
- Highest pitches are exclusively produced with non-standard playing techniques, such as harmonics and behind-the-bridge notes. Lowest pitches are exclusively conventionally plucked notes, but are never open strings.
- The low F2 (sounding octave) anchors the music, recurring three times. This pitch is the lowest non-open-string pitch available in standard tuning.
- The high C6 (sounding octave) recurs 4 times as either a high point or starting point of a section, creating a subtle, upper voice pedal.

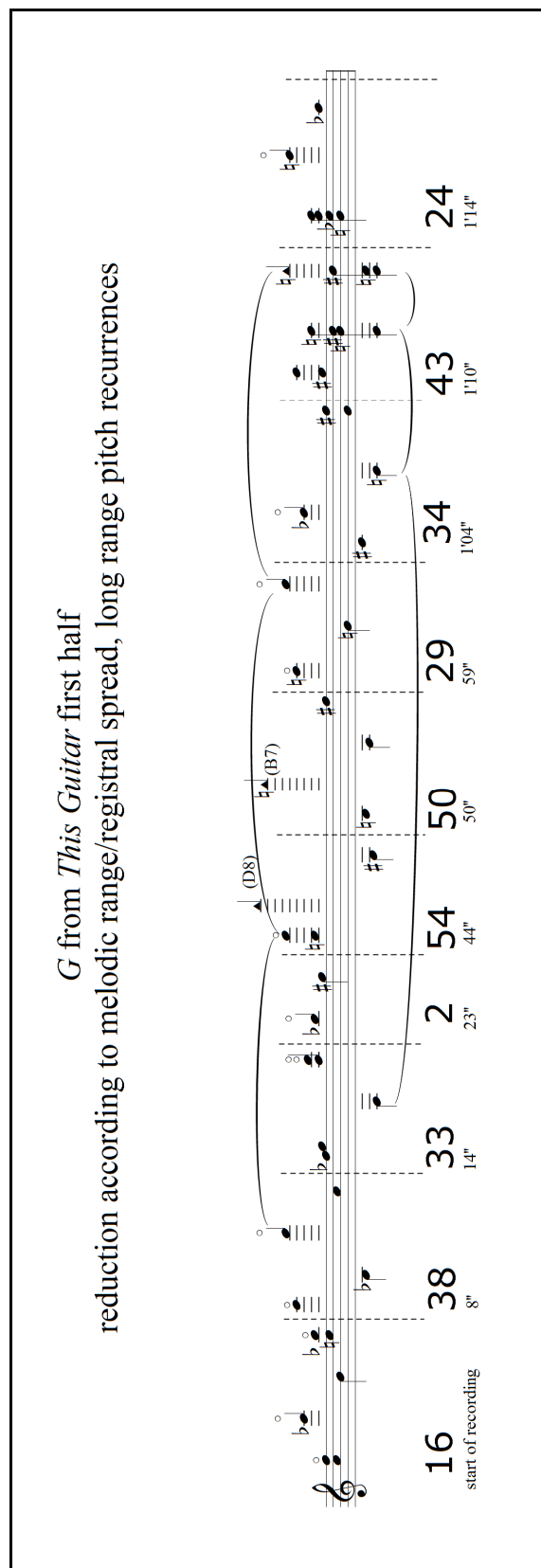


Figure 7: Melodic range, registral spread, and long range pitch recurrences in Bailey's *G*

As with Barrett's *transmission V*, we have focused on a small number of salient musical parameters, including rhythmic profile and melodic range, to produce two distinct segmentations of Derek Bailey's *G*. In this case, there is more overlap between the two segmentations than in the previous analyses of *transmission V*, with the correlation between narrow melodic range and the tempo-shifting, repeated note rhythmic profile providing the clearest example. This is likely the result of Bailey's real-time structural thinking, as opposed to Barrett's multi-parameter pre-compositional planning. Nevertheless, the above analyses point towards different aspects of the music that may create an engaging musical narrative when isolated or focused on. In the case of both pieces, the music presents not only an abstract, parametrically rich argument that may be experienced on its own terms, but also a sound world that vaguely, perhaps unintentionally, makes semiotic connections with more familiar guitar-based musical styles.

3.2 *TRANSMISSION IV AND ODANGDOH*

G and *transmission V* are both very short excerpts from two musicians who often enact musical structures of great length. The following section will examine two slightly longer musical examples, both in the five minute range. The first is Barrett's *transmission IV*, which, as briefly mentioned above, functions as a sort of apex of energy, density, and activity level in both *transmission* as a solo piece, and the larger *DARK MATTER* cycle. *transmission IV* also represents a point of most variability from performance to performance, both in its use of signal processing, and in the pivotal role improvisation plays in the movement. It can thus only be understood as a truly collaborative piece. We will then analyze *Odangdoh*, a trio improvisation of Derek Bailey with Yoshida Tatsuya and Masuda Ryuichi of Ruins, from their record of

collaborative improvisations *Saisoro*, discussed briefly at the beginning of the present study. Whereas we have previously focused on details of rhythm, register, and melody, for these longer examples we will examine Barrett, Bailey, and their collaborators' use of timbre and timbral oppositions. To do this we will use spectrograms of sections of these pieces, produced in *Sonic Visualizer*, along with Robert Cogan's application of the theory of spectral oppositions. Cogan's theory allows for detailed comparisons of a number of specific timbral characteristics. Despite the digital analytical tools involved in this process, there is a great deal of subjectivity in producing these analyses, beginning with decisions about which sonic excerpts to focus on (i.e. segmentation), and continuing with decisions about frequency sensitivity, horizontal and vertical visual scale, color scheme, and many other variables that may be customized within the software. Cogan points out the dual nature of spectral analysis:

"Democritus, however, in his polemical enthusiasm countered one extreme with its opposite. Reality is neither exclusively the "psychological" attributes of color, sweetness, and bitterness nor the "physical" attributes of spectra and space. Reality, musical reality above all, is composed of many interacting levels and layers. Indeed, much of the essence of musical reality lies in the very meeting ground where spectra and space (as they manifest themselves in any given context) participate in forming our perceptions of musical color and music's expressive qualities - its "sweetness" and "bitterness."⁴²

The analytical process will thus continue to be a creative act as we examine visual images of the spectral makeup of radically idiomatic guitar music.

transmission IV is constructed around 36 fragments of notated guitar music and 36 fragments of pre-recorded electronic sounds, which were themselves created from a recording of guitar material.⁴³ The guitar is played only through a heavily distorted tone and through a pitch shifter pedal set to slide an octave up, with notation for constant fluctuations in the degree of

⁴² Rober Cogan, *New Images of Musical Sound*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 4.

⁴³ Richard Barrett, *transmission*, (Essex: United Music Publishers, 1999), introductory notes, and author's e-mail interview with Barrett.

pitch shifting. The notated fragments are interspersed with gaps in the score. The guitarist is asked to fill these “lacunae” with improvised material. Barrett writes the following about this material:

“The lacunae may be occupied by silence and/or improvisation. Improvisations may or may not be extrapolated from the notated material (or the notated or improvisational playing of the other performer, or even material from outside the work, though the latter option should be approached with the utmost care and sensitivity), and are completely free with respect to timbre, dynamic and so forth.”⁴⁴

Barrett’s cautious openness to the presence of musical material not native to the piece is perhaps significant. Although radically idiomatic guitar music strives for a degree of abstract purity, it is not entirely closed off to the musical world around it and the possibility for referentiality that may result from such awareness. The electronic part additionally allows for improvisation. In addition to the 36 main samples, triggered by a MIDI keyboard, the remaining keys allow the electronics performer to both trigger and manipulate related sound files, altering sample length, starting and ending points, and pitch in real time. The resulting musical sound is in constant flux in almost every regard, from moment to moment and from performance to performance.

Different recordings sound drastically different. To begin with, Daryl Buckley’s 2006 interpretation, which will be the primary focus of the present analysis, runs just over five minutes. His later performance as part of the *DARK MATTER* cycle leaves considerably more space for the expanded instrumentation and often features relatively slower improvising, resulting in a duration that is a full 3 and a half minutes longer. Seth Josel’s recording, by contrast, is the only one of the three that approximates Barrett’s suggested maximum length of 3 minutes and 40 seconds. Furthermore, the sound world of each is quite different. Buckley’s 2006

⁴⁴ Richard Barrett, *transmission*, (Essex: United Music Publishers, 1999), introductory notes.

recording is the most sonically claustrophobic, maintaining a peak level of intensity for most of its duration, while Josel's recording takes Barrett's guitar volume control indications to a much greater extreme, resulting in a much more dynamic performance, where the guitar is often in the background of the texture. When asked about the relationship between the rigor of Barrett's compositional systems and the subjectivity in experiencing the music, he explained:

"I would say that my compositional rigour is the principal condition under which the free use of the listener's imagination is encouraged. The purpose of systematic compositional techniques, as far as I'm concerned, is to enable simultaneously the realisation of my musical "vision" and the discovery of implications and corollaries of it which I hadn't anticipated and which might indeed take over the foreground for themselves, and it's this sense of discovery I'd like the music to project and to engender in listeners. Exploring the nature and limits of the imagination and perception is somehow a constant feature of what I do, or at least I try to make it one."⁴⁵

transmission IV encourages this opportunity for discovery to an even greater degree than the other, through-composed, movements of *transmission*, creating new sonic structures, and thus new opportunities for discovery at each realization in performance and in recording.

To begin to understand Buckley's 2006 recording of the piece I have segmented the piece according to one of many highly salient parameters, namely the occurrence of brief, highly repetitive, and highly "clipped" sounds in the electronics part. Sustained/clipped is one of Robert Cogan's 13 spectral oppositions. A sustained sound finds its overtone complex proceeding uninterrupted, whereas a clipped sound has significant gaps in its rhythmic structure.⁴⁶ These moments of *transmission IV* present an intense, mechanical freezing of time that always immediately jumps to the surface. Using these events as markers, we arrive at the following segmentation, using timing information from Buckley's complete recording of *transmission*:

[7:26, 8:16, 9:06, 9:25, 9:49, 10:03, 10:25, 10:40, 11:39, 12:13]

⁴⁵ Richard Barrett, e-mail interview with the author.

⁴⁶ Robert Cogan, *New Images of Musical Sound*, 138.

Taking this segmentation as a starting point, we will now examine characteristic spectrograms of three of these segments, using the sustained/clipped opposition, along with three of Cogan's other oppositions that are particularly relevant to *transmission IV's* sonic character: compact/diffuse (the relative purity or noisiness of the spectral bands), sparse/rich (the relative density level of sonic activity), and level/oblique (whether sonic elements are primarily at a steady pitch or sliding up and down).⁴⁷ We will additionally examine an excerpt from *transmission I* in order to provide a point of comparison with other parts of *transmission* as a larger work. Spectrograms, shown in Figures 8 through 11, will be followed by tables of oppositions, shown in Table 1, following Cogan's system of cataloguing positive and negative (higher or lower energy) sides of the chosen oppositions and comparing changes within excerpts.⁴⁸

The spectrogram presented in Figure 8 demonstrates the primary musical relationship between the guitar and the electronics. The guitar frequently pauses, allowing the electronics to come to the foreground, and creating a sense of rapid dialogue between the two parts. The guitar's sound is truncated around 5000 Hz, likely as a result of the compressed distortion sound used, which, as we saw earlier in Chapter 2.0, has a tendency to fill out the sonic spectrum between partials. The electronics part occupies much more of the frequency spectrum, but is highly active above 5000 Hz. The two parts thus have distinctive formant regions throughout the movement.⁴⁹ These formants allow the two musical voices to speak clearly, even in highly dense textures. This spectrogram highlights 4 events, demarcated by these pauses in the guitar playing. 1A, where the guitar dominates, is strongly positive (high energy) in all but the

⁴⁷ IBID, 133-140.

⁴⁸ IBID, 123-132.

⁴⁹ Michael Gardiner, conversation with author.

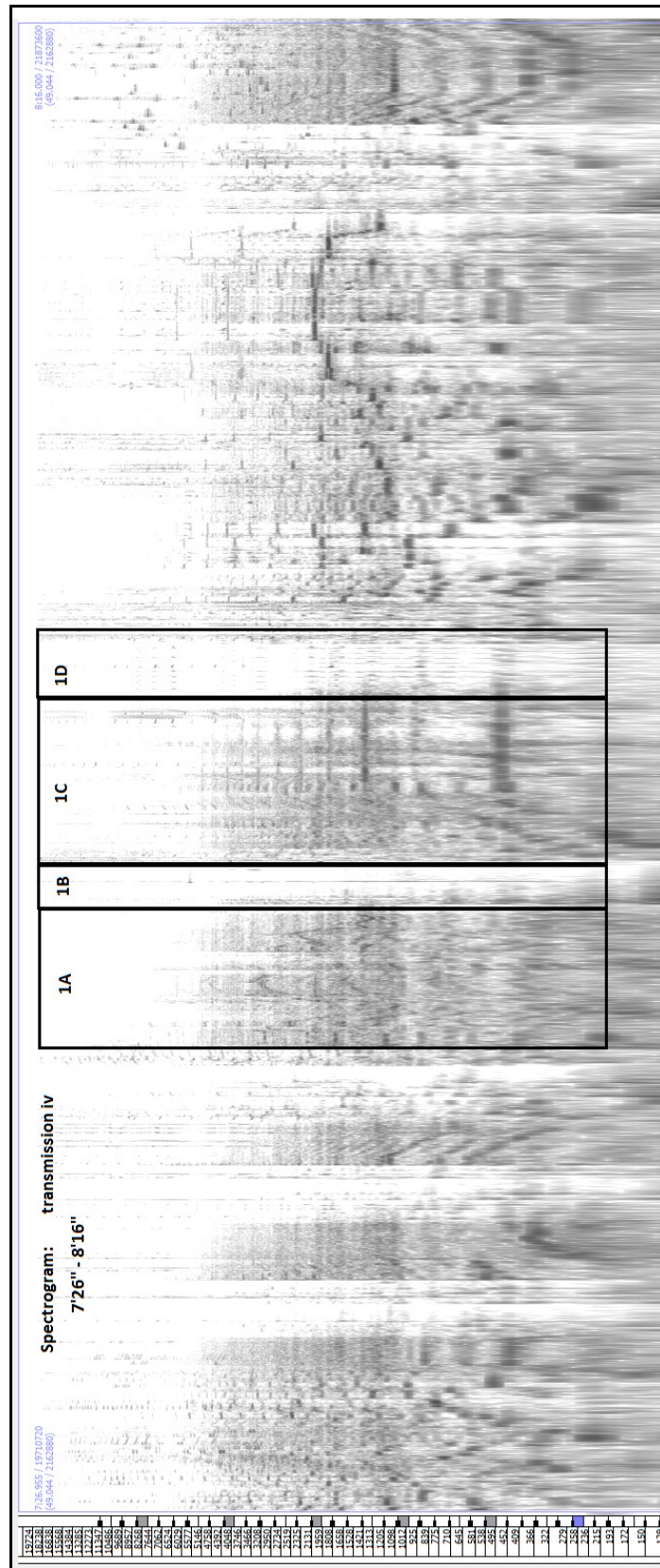


Figure 8: Spectrogram: *transmission IV*, 7'26''-8'16''

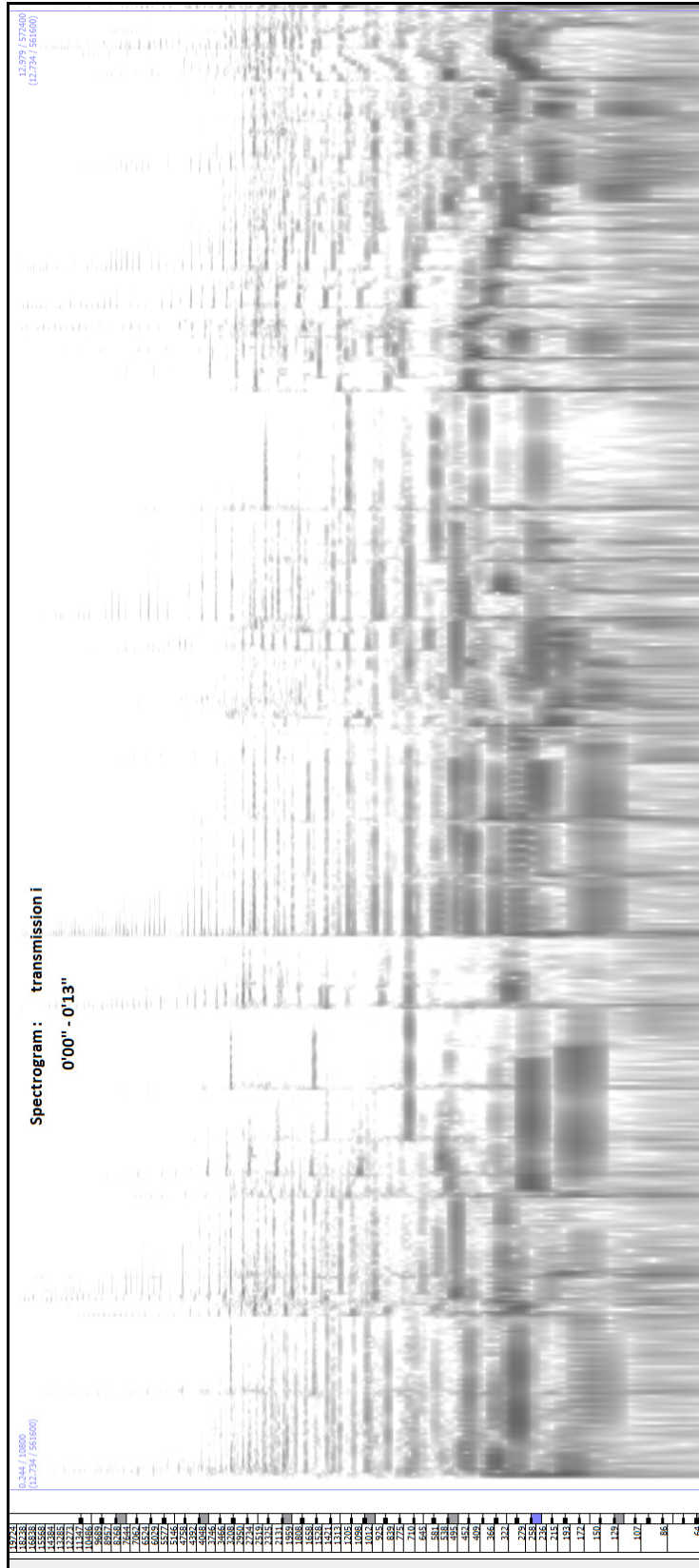


Figure 11: Spectrogram: *transmission I*, 0'00''-0'12''

Table 1: Tables of Oppositions for *transmission IV* (with comparison to *transmission I*)

| <i>transmission IV</i> : 7'26" to 8'16" segment | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| - + | a | b | c | d |
| compact/diffuse | + | ± | + | - |
| sparse/rich | + | - | + | - |
| level/oblique | ± | - | ± | - |
| sustained/clipped | - | ∅ | - | + |
| Totals | (-2 | (-3 | (-2 | (-3 |
| | +3) | +1) | +3) | +1) |
| | +1 | -2 | +1 | -2 |
| ratio of change | | 4/4 | 4/8 | 10/12 |

| <i>transmission IV</i> : 9'06" to 9'26" segment | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|------|
| - + | a | b | c | d |
| compact/diffuse | - | + | ± | + |
| sparse/rich | ∅ | + | - | + |
| level/oblique | - | + | - | + |
| sustained/clipped | + | - | ∅ | ± |
| Totals | (-2 | (-1 | (-3 | (+4 |
| | +1) | +3) | +1) | -1) |
| | -1 | +2 | -2 | +3 |
| ratio of change | | 4/4 | 7/8 | 9/12 |

| <i>transmission IV</i> : 12'06" to 12'25" segment | | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|------|-------|
| - + | a | b | c | d | e |
| compact/diffuse | ± | - | ± | - | |
| sparse/rich | ± | ∅ | + | ∅ | + |
| level/oblique | ± | - | - | - | + |
| sustained/clipped | ± | - | ± | - | ± |
| Totals | (-4 | (-3 | (-3 | (-3 | (+4 |
| | +4) | +0) | +3) | +0) | -1) |
| | 0 | -3 | 0 | -3 | +3 |
| ratio of change | | 4/4 | 5/8 | 7/12 | 13/16 |

| <i>transmission I</i> : 0'00" to 0'13" segment | |
|--|-----|
| - + | |
| compact/diffuse | - |
| sparse/rich | ∅ |
| level/oblique | - |
| sustained/clipped | ± |
| Totals | (-3 |
| | +1) |
| | -2 |

“sustained/clipped” oppositions, presenting a sound that is noisy, dense, and constantly gliding up and down. As we will see, the high energy “clipped” designation is primarily the domain of the electronic part, which exhibits more negative (low energy) characteristics in 1B and 1D. The electronics here are spectrally tighter, sparser in overall sound, and more level. The introduction of the first highly clipped sound of the piece however produces one strongly positive characteristic. The ratio of change between 1A, 1B, 1C, and 1D, is rapid, with the rate of change ratio between adjacent blocks and between earlier blocks always at least half. The clipped electronic sound is highly differentiated from all that has come before, with a rate of change of 10/12 variables.

As *transmission IV* progresses, shorter segments become more prevalent. Figure 9 represents a significantly shorter time frame (20 seconds), and can be parsed entirely into four blocks. 2A is another clipped electronic sound, this time slightly more positive in energy, due to a somewhat denser texture than the clipped sound that was examined in Spectrogram 1. The guitar once again favors more positive energy states, presenting a texture that is noisy, rich, and oblique, but not clipped, in 2B and 2D. The material once again employs a rapid degree of change, with the significant difference that the two passages of purely electronic sounds (2A and 2C) are more differentiated from one another than in Figure 8.

Although extreme clipped sounds are primarily a characteristic of the electronics part, there is one moment at 10:03 where the guitar attempts to emulate this characteristic, presenting a series of staccato repeated chords. The timbre is not literally clipped to the same extreme degree as such moments in the electronics part, but it nonetheless briefly attempts to emulate the sonic characteristic of its musical partner.

Figure 10 occurs at the end of the piece, and features the most extremely clipped sound heard thus far in the piece, which proceeds throughout the excerpt, and culminates in a superimposition of two layers of clipped electronic sounds, creating an approximate 2 against 3 polyrhythm. Similarly, the guitar presents some of its most extreme oblique slides, particularly at the dramatic rise and fall at 3A. The high rate of change continues, with the final guitar gesture at 3E being the most extremely differentiated block we have seen thus far.

transmission IV features a constant rotation of these four spectral oppositions.

Concerning sonic variety, Robert Cogan states:

“The greatest constancy occurs when both perspectives [local and global] show little change. In that case, there is change in relatively few sonic features in adjacent morphologies, and a low ratio of change in the global perspective. The greatest change occurs when it is present to a large extent in both perspectives. In that case, there is change in relatively many sonic features in adjacent morphologies, and a high ratio of change in the global perspective.”⁵⁰

transmission IV features an extreme degree of change at the local level, but represents a sort of flat line in its rate of change at the level of the movement (i.e. its rate of change of its rate of change). However, this does not hold true for *transmission* in its entirety. Figure 11 shows the opening of *transmission I*, a texture consisting only of lightly processed guitar. Perhaps most strikingly, the high frequency content previously only occupied by the electronics is now present as a consistent part of the clean guitar sound’s attack noise.⁵¹ Furthermore, not only is the sonic character of the chosen oppositions significantly more in the negative direction, but the variable’s values remain relatively consistent throughout the movement, effecting a major contrast with *transmission IV*, both in timbral quality and rate of change of timbre.

⁵⁰ Robert Cogan, *New Images of Musical Sound*, 150.

⁵¹ Michael Gardiner, conversation with author.

transmission IV's dizzying sonic variety and intensity stem from its conception as music not only based around specific frets and hand positions, but as a particular set of possibilities stemming from processing the guitar's signal electronically. It is thus "radically idiomatic" in taking a basic facet of the electric guitar's physical nature and presenting it in a stylistically non-traditional light. The indeterminacy of the sonic result of this processing, combined with the interpretive freedom of the improvising performers, creates a musical structure that is extremely malleable, and that invites new musical discoveries at each encounter.

The 1995 Tzadik record *Saisoro* is credited to *Derek and The Ruins*, with the article "the" added to Japanese avant-rock band Ruins' name to create a slightly absurd reference to Eric Clapton's *Derek and the Dominoes*. The album is one in a series of recordings, curated by John Zorn, featuring Derek Bailey with drums and bass rhythm sections.⁵² The recording, which features generally high energy, heavily amplified performances, is an exemplar of what Derek Bailey calls "semi ad-hoc" practice, where improvised collaborations develop over a very brief, temporary period of time. Bailey and Ruins had never recorded before the *Saisoro* session, but would later briefly perform and record together again on the now out-of-print disc *Tohjinbo*.⁵³ Bailey describes this ideal as follows:

"Personally, I've always thought there's a kind of fine balance between the amorphous situation and the fixed groups which produces the best playing. Semi ad-hoc, is how I've tried to describe it, which doesn't say much but it's not a well-defined position: a degree of familiarity but retaining the shock of the strange. You know: "WHAT'S THAT???"⁵⁴

Odangdoh is the fourth track on *Saisoro*, featuring a run time of 5 minutes and 34 seconds. The improvisation features an alternation between sparser, lightly over-driven guitar oriented textures with aggressive, hyperactive ensemble interactions between the guitar, heavily

⁵² Ben Watson, *Derek Bailey and the Story of Free Improvisation*, 336-338.

⁵³ Derek and Ruins, *Tohjinbo*, Paratactile, PLE 1101-2, 1998, compact disc.

⁵⁴ Ben Watson, *Derek Bailey and the Story of Free Improvisation*, 116.

amplified electric bass guitar, and generally very loud drums. Drummer Yoshida Tatsuya additionally engages in some expressive vocalizations at the improvisation's middle point.

In order to analyze *Odangdoh*, we will slightly modify the set of spectral opposition used above. Compact/diffuse, level/oblique, and sparse/rich are also salient parameters, but spectral clipping and plays a somewhat less important role. Instead, we will add a new opposition: slow beats/fast beats (referring to the speed of interference patterns created by very close spectral bands).⁵⁵ As we saw above, Bailey's style often produces very fast acoustic beating, not only because of his consistent use of dissonant harmonic configurations, but also as a result of overlapping, microtonally close intervals created by combining harmonics with fretted pitches. I have segmented the improvisation according to a small number of salient musical events, namely occurrences of major shifts in density from primarily guitar-based textures to the full ensemble, and entrances of spectrally differentiated sounds, such as high frequency hi-hat attacks, Tatsuya's vocalizations, and noisy electronic squalls from Ryuichi's processed bass guitar. The following segmentation is produced:

[0'00'', 0'23'', 1'05'', 1'37'', 2'24'', 2'48'', 4'55'', 5'09]

Similar to *transmission IV*, spectrograms have been created from four of these segments, shown in Figures 12 through 15, with subsequent tables of oppositions shown in Table 2. Unlike the Barrett, *Odangdoh* frequently employs longer stretches of a single timbral complex. Thus the tables at times only feature one block of variables.

Figure 12 shows the opening of the piece. The texture is similar to that of *transmission V*, discussed above, featuring quick chordal stabs, reinforced by similar playing from the rhythm section. The improvisation, with its slightly distorted guitar and only occasional interjections

⁵⁵ Robert Cogan, *New Images of Musical Sound*, 134-139.

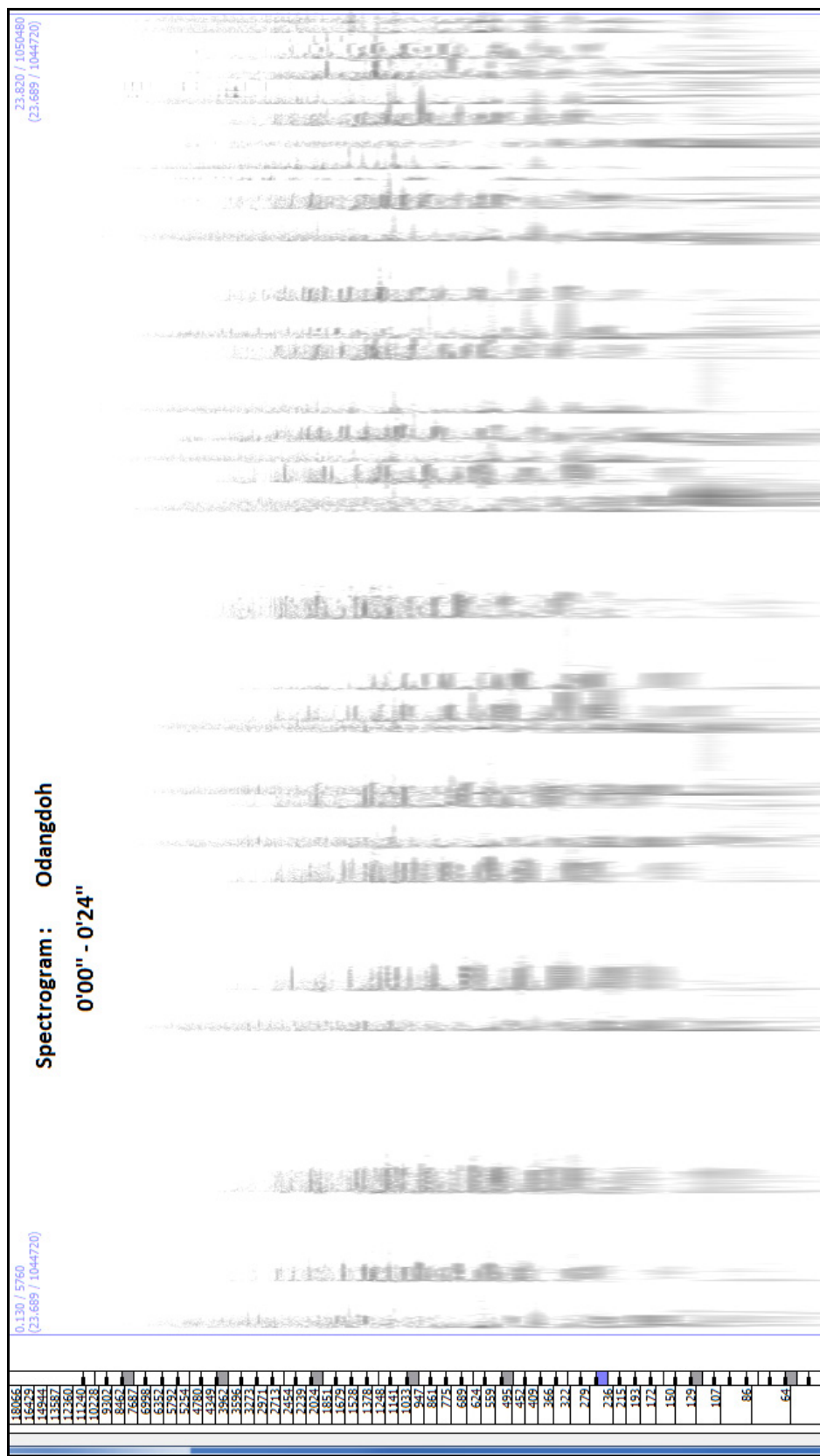


Figure 12: Spectrogram: *Odangdoh*, 0'00''-0'24''

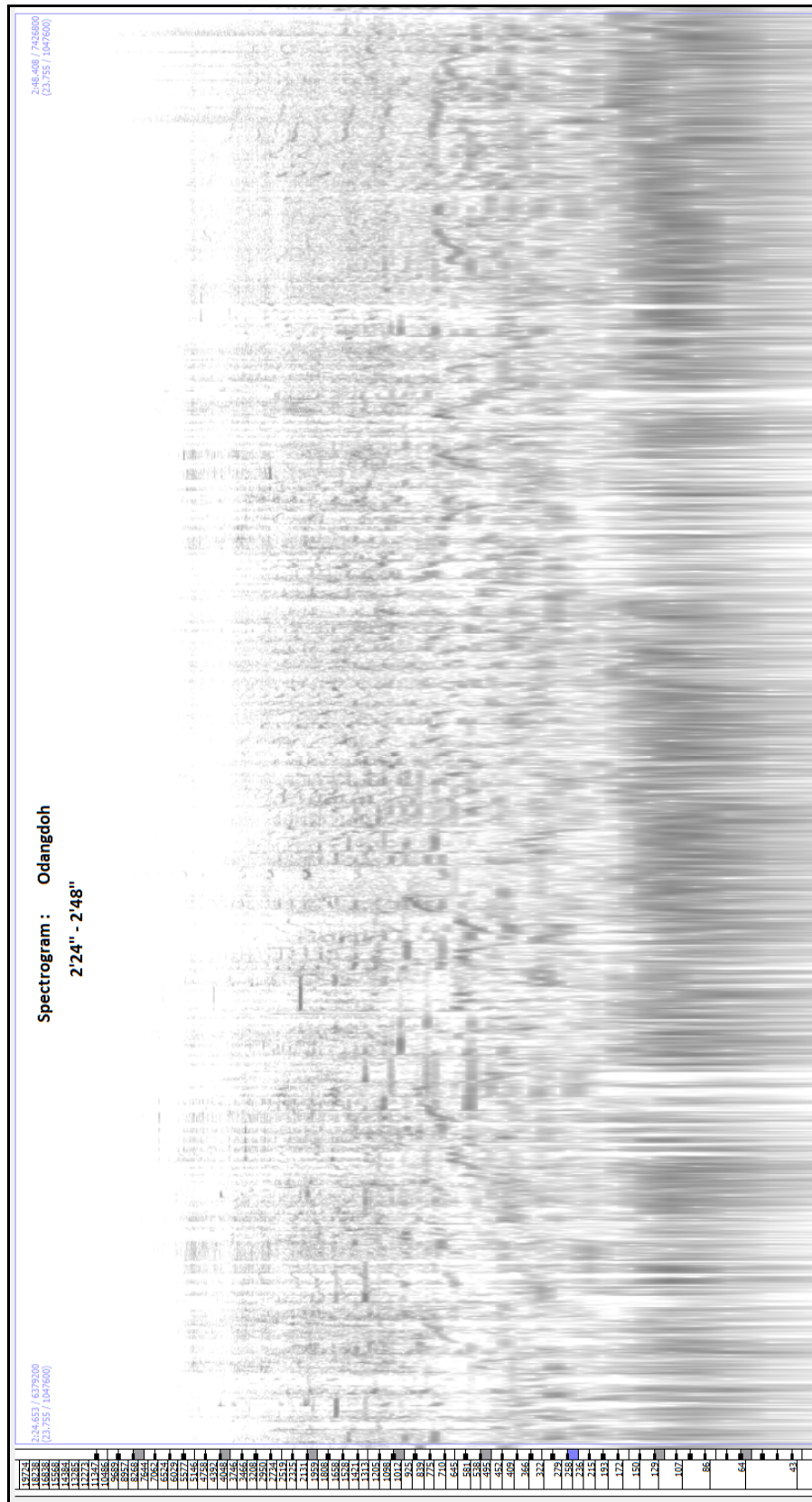


Figure 13: Spectrogram: *Odangdoh*, 2'24''-2'48''

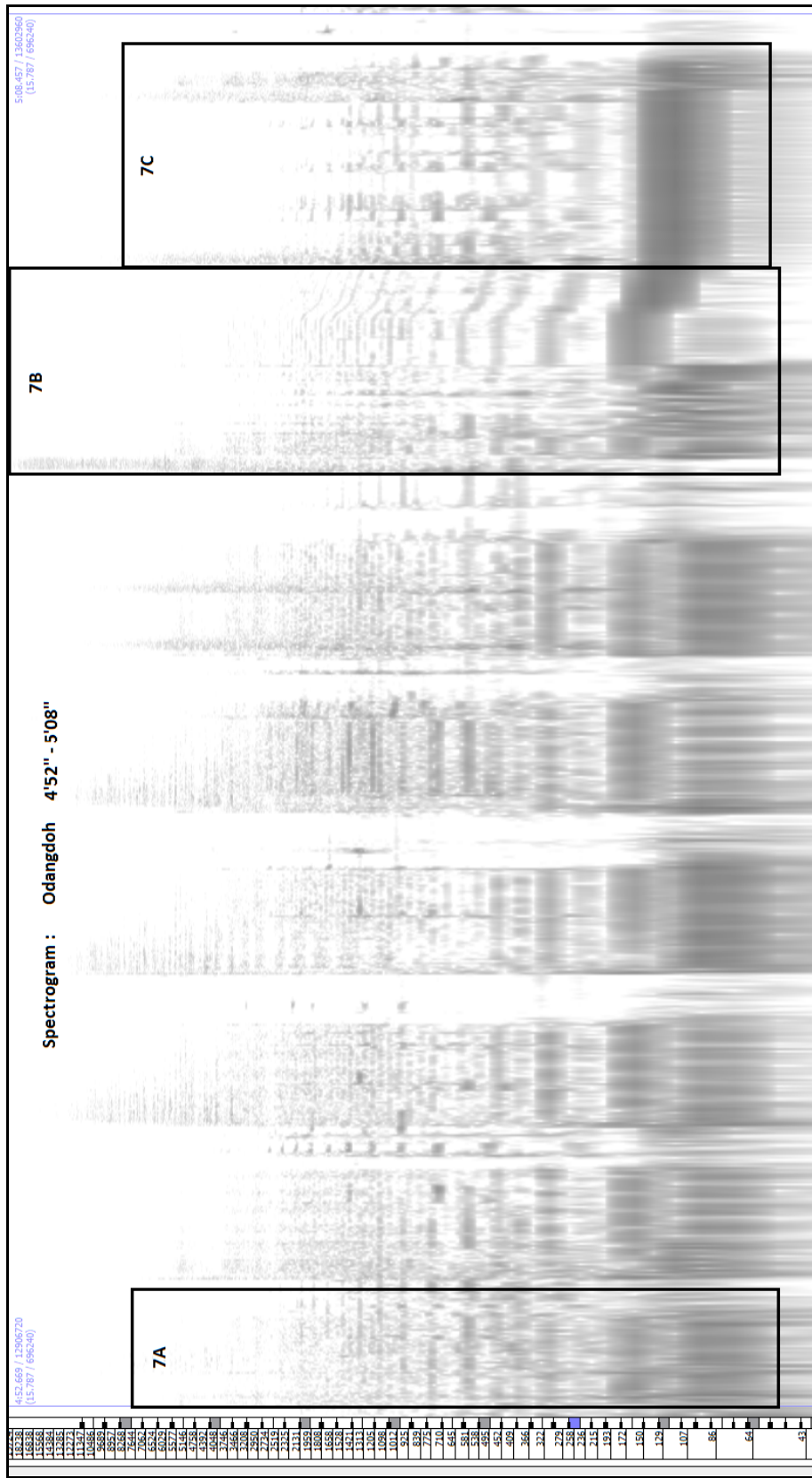


Figure 14: Spectrogram: *Odangdoh*, 4'52''-5'08''

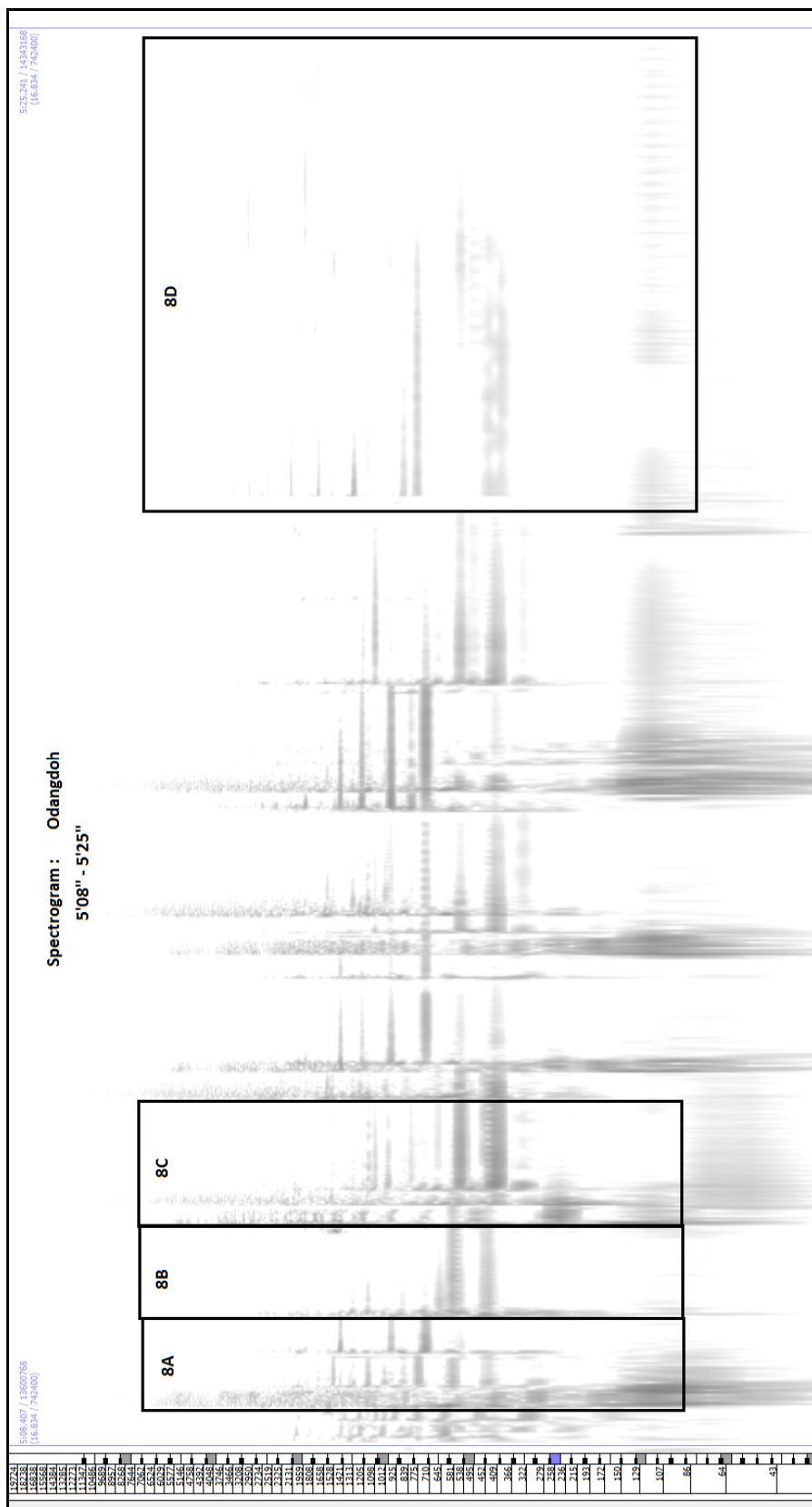


Figure 15: Spectrogram: *Odangdoh*, 5'08''-5'25''

Table 2: Tables of Oppositions for *Odangdoh*

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>Odangdoh</i> : 0'00" to 0'23" segment | |
| - + | a |
| compact/diffuse | ∅ |
| sparse/rich | ± |
| level/oblique | - |
| slow beats/fast beats | ∅ |
| Totals | (-2 |
| | +1) |
| | -1 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>Odangdoh</i> : 2'24" to 2'48" segment | |
| - + | a |
| compact/diffuse | + |
| sparse/rich | + |
| level/oblique | ± |
| slow beats/fast beats | - |
| Totals | (-2 |
| | +3) |
| | +1 |

| | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|
| <i>Odangdoh</i> : 4'52" to 5'08" segment | | | |
| - + | a | b | c |
| compact/diffuse | ∅ | ± | - |
| sparse/rich | ∅ | ± | ± |
| level/oblique | - | + | - |
| slow beats/fast beats | ∅ | - | ∅ |
| Totals | (-1 | (-3 | (-3 |
| | +0) | +3) | +1) |
| | -1 | 0 | -2 |
| ratio of change | | 4/4 | 5/8 |

| | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|------|
| <i>Odangdoh</i> : 5'08" to 5'25" segment | | | | |
| - + | a | b | c | d |
| compact/diffuse | ± | - | ± | - |
| sparse/rich | ± | - | ± | - |
| level/oblique | - | - | - | - |
| slow beats/fast beats | ∅ | + | + | - |
| Totals | (-3 | (-3 | (-3 | (-4 |
| | +2) | +1) | +3) | +0) |
| | -1 | -2 | 0 | -4 |
| ratio of change | | 3/4 | 3/8 | 7/12 |

from the spectrally diffuse percussion, results in a neutral impression of the compact/diffuse opposition. The passage sets up an opposition of extremes of the sparse/rich parameter; the percussion and bass stabs present dense sonic complexes, while the guitar produces chords and pitches with much sparser sonic content. Oblique sounds are not present, and beating is generally of the slower variety generated by Bailey's basic harmonic language.

Figure 13 shows a very different timbral make-up. The guitar continues to provide essentially harmonic sounds, but these are subsumed within the spectrally rich rhythm section, with the bass alternating between low pitches and squealing high electronic sounds, and the drums filling out the high end of the frequency spectrum. Tatsuya's vocals are highly oblique in comparison with Bailey's mostly level style of playing. There is thus both strongly negative and strongly positive spectral characteristics occurring simultaneously, creating a saturated, high intensity sound.

Figure 14 occurs close to the end of the piece, and, unlike the previous two examples, features a number of sonic contrasts. 7A finds the ensemble playing pounding, rhythmic stabs in unison with the very low bass pitches, overall favoring negative energy states, while still presenting an envelope that begins spectrally rich and ends sparsely. 7B superimposes material that is both strongly positive and negative, presenting one of the only instances in the improvisation of oblique pitched playing in the bass. The hi-hat creates an extremely spectrally wide attack which quickly dissipates. The excerpt ends with 7C arriving at a low energy state. As with *transmission*, when there is change in the music it is drastic, with both ratios of change being over half.

The final image, Figure 15, returns to a texture that approximates the improvisation's opening. However, contrasts in the speed of acoustic beats now become a major characteristic of

this ending. 8A is not unlike the pounding stabs of the previous segment, while 8B, which is characterized by spectrally compact, fast-beating material in the guitar, brings the music to a more negative energy state. 8C and 8D gradually end the piece in a space that briefly presents positive and negative states, before ending on the most negative material we have seen thus far, moving from fast beating guitar-harmonics gestures to a ghostly resonance whose source is difficult to identify. Again, the rate of change is mostly very high, with 8C providing an exception. As with Barrett, such exceptions, where the music remains sonically consistent on the small and large scale, prevent the music from affectively flat-lining. Significantly, the record's sixth track, *Manugan Melpp*, contrasts with much of the record's high energy level and sonic saturation, slowly unfolding its gentle guitar-oriented texture with Tatsuya limiting himself primarily to a glockenspiel and occasional vocalizations. Ryuichi is the most restrained of all, only occasionally playing various novel bass guitar sounds with a prominent delay effect.

As with *transmission IV*, Bailey and Ruins' trio improvisation demonstrates both the prevalence of extreme timbral flux and sonic activity level, along with the creative flexibility of radically idiomatic guitar music. Bailey's semi ad-hoc approach allows the trio to create a fusion of his own abstract, rigorous style with Ruins' aggressive, noisy radicalization of their instruments and of the rock and punk idioms, producing a record that is spontaneous, surprising, and cohesive.

Thus far we have examined Barrett and Bailey's radically idiomatic guitar music in terms of its ideological and technical conception, its micro-level sonic surface, and its larger scale musical characteristics. We will conclude the present study by examining the political and cultural implications of the style by looking at concrete political viewpoints that have been

attached to it, briefly exploring its critical reception, and attempting to understanding how it might function in contemporary society.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS: SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT AND MEANING

Richard Barrett and Derek Bailey, in their guitar music, often seek to abstract themselves from conventional stylistic and instrumental idioms through a radicalization of the musical and tactile languages of guitar playing. However, Barrett and Bailey's radical idiom does not exist only as pure musical structures. Far from it, both musicians' music has been charged with explicit socio-political subtexts. Barrett has made explicit his desire for his music to enact a progressive socialist political program. In a 2005 interview with *The Guardian*, concerning his orchestral work *NO*, he states:

"It's important to me that NO is not judged in the terms of the great classical and romantic icons, but that it has something to say for itself. And that's the only way new orchestral music remains viable. I don't sit around complaining that the world's a pile of shit and there's nothing we can do about it. As a socialist, I also have an idea of where we could take it, and a vision of the possibility of a society where something like human dignity is taken seriously."⁵⁶

Furthermore, his large scale text-based works often deal with explicitly social topics, such as humanity's understanding of its environment through religion, science, and art in *DARK MATTER*, the often brutal contrasts between imagined utopias and actual society in *CONSTRUCTION*, and the atrocities of 20th century war in *Opening of the Mouth*.⁵⁷ For Barrett,

⁵⁶ Tom Service, Richard Barrett, "Just Say No," *The Guardian*, 2005, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2005/feb/10/classicalmusicandopera1>.

⁵⁷ See Richard Barrett, *Construction of CONSTRUCTION*, 2011, <http://richardbarrettmusic.com/CONSTRUCTIONessay.pdf>, Richard Barrett, liner notes to *Dark Matter*, and Peter McCallum, liner notes to *Opening of the Mouth*, Richard Barrett, Elision, ABC Classics 465 268-2, compact disc, 1999/2008.

radical musical idiom and radical politics go hand in hand. When asked about the political implications of the term “radically idiomatic” by the author, Barrett elaborated as follows:

“I wasn’t thinking of the term in an explicitly political way. Nevertheless, the idea implies the kind of questioning attitude towards received assumptions which I think is axiomatic to many aspects of my work. Also, the term “non-idiomatic” tends to imply that the music is based on a strategy of avoidance, and I prefer to think in terms of doing what I want to do, what I feel is important to do, or what the music wants to do, rather than focusing on the things I don’t want to do - I’m not interested in a critique unless it offers a way forward, which is one reason Marx is so important, in not just analysing the nature and history of class structures but also proposing a way to go beyond them (“resistance AND vision”) [*Resistance and Vision* is the title of a large group of works including both *NO* and *CONSTRUCTION*, among others]. For me, deconstructing instrumentalism is only the first phase in a process which then goes further, to propose a “re-construction” whose precise nature is coextensive with the musical identity of the eventual composition.”⁵⁸

Radicalizing the electric guitar and its associated idioms, as discussed above, is thus only the first step in creating a music outside of a market-based commodification of culture. Barrett is fully aware of the difficulties inherent in attaching musical resistance to political resistance. He states the following about the late works of Cornelius Cardew:

“It is not good enough to assume that people who are expected to make rational and informed political decisions are at the same time incapable of being rational and informed about the culture of their projected society. It is unfortunate that most people are not in a position to come into contact, let alone sympathize, with radical musical ideas.”⁵⁹

The above, taken out of context, does not accurately represent the great influence of Cardew on Barrett’s thinking, a composer Barrett has expressed admiration for. It is not that Barrett lacks sympathy with Cardew’s turn towards a more populist style, but that he disagrees with the basic premise of such an action. Barrett’s approach to the politicization of his music is thus an idealized one. He attempts to make a music that he feels represents a better world, where human imagination and artistic intelligence are allowed to develop free

⁵⁸ Richard Barrett, e-mail interview with the author.

⁵⁹ Richard Barrett, “Cornelius Cardew,” 32.

from the confines of oppressive socio-economic structures. In a 2000 interview for *Masthead* he states:

“As far as I am concerned, music (creating *and* listening) is one of the most highly-evolved functions of which the human mind is capable, and is therefore a token of a more highly-evolved society than the one we presently endure. While everything I have stated and speculated upon here might tend to give the impression that I am resigned to appealing to an extremely limited audience, this is a question neither of resignation nor of élitism. This music is for anyone. Anyone can understand it. Whether they wish to *engage* with it to the requisite depth should be up to them. The fact that it is *not* is a symptom of the stultification practised by late capitalism.”⁶⁰

Barrett’s ideal finds resonance in Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch’s notion that music should create its own social ideals, its own utopia:

“What is far more important here is to construct for every truly great composer an individual house where he can live for himself as a particular “state” even beyond his talents. In here he is free, brings in only his own soul. This is self-evidently something different again from what circulates among people, what unites them in mere contemporaneity.”⁶¹

In later writing, Bloch paradoxically emphasizes the influence of society on music, stating that “composers turn music not only into an expression of themselves but also into an expression of the age and society in which it originates.”⁶² Thus the social relevance of music and its capacity to express alternative ideals are not mutually exclusive. Demonstrating Bloch’s imperative, Barrett is striving to both recognize and reflect the society that he exists within, while simultaneously striving for something better: a new, evolved “state” that we are free to inhabit as we experience the music.

⁶⁰ Rachel Campbell, Richard Barrett, “Richard Barrett: Interview,” *Masthead* issue 6, 2001, <http://www.masthead.net.au/issue6/barrett.html>.

⁶¹ Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, trans. Anthony A. Nassar, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 40.

⁶² Ernst Bloch, *Essays on the Philosophy of Music*, trans. Peter Palmer, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

Barrett is aware of the difficulties of communicating his social message from within the contemporary composition world. In a generally scathing 1995 article Barrett describes an artistic environment in the United Kingdom hostile or indifferent to radical political content:

“At the time of Cardew’s death the Thatcher government had already begun the process of stifling conflict and opposition in British society while increasing the material divisions within it, leading to a general sense of disillusion and hopelessness on the Left. This was reflected in a further depoliticisation of artistic activity, with an alibi in the form of postmodernist ideas which represent a convenient *rapprochement* between artists and the ‘overconsumptionist’ dynamic of capitalism in the Reagan/Thatcher era.”⁶³

Barrett makes his suspicions towards attempts at accessibility through reference to popular style explicit later in the same essay:

“...the sight of composers trying desperately to achieve credibility by imitating the cultural ‘vernacular’ of pop music is usually disheartening, undignified for the composer and embarrassing for the listener. One of the axioms of leftist thought is, after all, that very nearly all people are capable of far more, have far more cognitive resources than the alienation of their living conditions enables them to express – surely it is the responsibility of the committed artist to attempt to bring out those resources, to have more respect for listeners than to ape the manipulations practiced by commercial music.”⁶⁴

It is tempting to interpret such a statement as a condemnation of all musical reference to popular and folk styles, but the defamiliarized sonic referentiality of *transmission*, discussed above, and Barrett’s own list of guitarist influences, including rock and heavy metal musicians such as Robert Fripp and Vernon Reid, would seem to require a more nuanced reading. In Barrett’s view, the danger in incorporating popular music references in one’s compositional style is in adopting the values ascribed to such music by its manipulation at the hands of market forces and corporate interests. From this, we can conclude that the issue is not that vernacular musics are lacking in artistic merit and social power, but that there is a danger in misappropriating those styles through the potentially damaging lens of marketing when approaching from outside.

⁶³ Richard Barrett, “Avant-Garde and Ideology in the United Kingdom since Cardew,” in *New Music, Aesthetics and Ideology*, ed. Mark Delaere, (Germany: Florian Noetzel, 1995), 170.

⁶⁴ *IBID*, 175.

Radically idiomatic guitar music, intentionally or not, subverts in two directions. Its imposition of amorphous, non-hierarchical sonic material and the perceptual subjectivity of its multi-layered structural processes radicalize the familiar non-classical guitar for those expectations stemming from conventional guitar idioms. At the same time, the messy employment of and cross-pollination with the sonic and stylistic signifiers of rock, jazz, and other guitar-based idioms prevent the music from being wholly contained within a cloistered avant-garde tradition.

Barrett's musical message has proved polarizing among music critics. In a 1994 article for *The Musical Times*, Ivan Hewett finds no hint of the idealized society of musical exploration that Barrett intends. He writes:

"But the briefest acquaintance with Barrett's music soon dispels any notion that affirmation is his goal. It presents a bafflingly intricate surface, made-up of fidgeting, buzzing, hopping lines which pursue their microtonal flutterings in apparent ignorance of each other. It's a texture we cannot read as a whole. The parts remain stubbornly separate, both vertically and horizontally. In the short term it sounds frenzied. In the long term, the effect flattens into an overall desultoriness, punctuated by mysterious, and apparently unmotivated, silences and violent outbursts. We become aware of an uncomfortable discrepancy between the objective facts of the musical texture - the evidence of huge mental and physical effort that went into its composition and performance - and the interest we can summon up for it - tepid and intermittent."⁶⁵

For Hewett, the horizontal and vertical density of Barrett's music does not imply an invitation to discovery, but an incomprehensibility that humiliates both performers and audience.

Arnold Whittall's 2005 essay, also published in *The Musical Times*, confronts Hewett directly, siding with Barrett in his appraisal of Cardew, agreeing that such music should be politically involved, but functions best when avoiding clear, familiar affirmations. Concerning Barrett he states:

"...he can hardly be accused of indifference to matters affecting the role of art in the modern world. Rather, it is very much the opposite case of a kind of Utopian idealism

⁶⁵ Ivan Hewett, "Fail Worse, Fail Better," *The Musical Times* Vol. 135, No. 1813 (1994): 148.

which is generated by convictions about the need for artists to respond without compromise to fundamental matters affecting politics and society.”⁶⁶

Although Whittall acknowledges the challenging nature of Barrett’s music and its often dark subject matter and affect, in the end he does find the music to be accessible and ultimately an act of optimism.

Finally, James Harley’s article “The New Nihilism – L’Objet Sonore and the Music of Richard Barrett,” published in *Musicworks* 72 in 1998 presents a more ambiguous interpretation of Barrett’s music. For Harley, there is indeed the possibility of negativity and failure in Barrett’s music, in part encouraged by the frequent Samuel Beckett references in Barrett’s scores, but contrasting with Hewett’s view, such aesthetic difficulty is not without its merits:

“For the audience too, then, this music provides an occasion for re-evaluation, for questioning. One is able to find new ways to listen, new ways to engage in the ritual of music performance.”⁶⁷

For Harley then, Barrett’s music is not so much an optimistic vision of a better society, but a resilient artistic struggle in the face of bleakness.

Unlike Barrett, Derek Bailey’s publically expressed attitudes towards music making are far less overtly political. However, his music has been “charged” with radical politics by those he has worked with, including some of his fellow improvisers, and his biographer, Ben Watson. Watson summarizes the different attitudes of biographer and subject as follows:

“...though I believe that Bailey’s position is ultimately compatible with my own Musical Marxism (a confluence of punk, Zappa and Adorno), I don’t expect to hear him say so. Theory and abstraction are immediately suspicious to Bailey: they freeze the moment, generalize the instant, abuse the actuality, bully the musician.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Arnold Whittall, “Resistance and reflection: Richard Barrett in the 21st century,” *The Musical Times* Vol. 146, No. 1892 (2005): 61.

⁶⁷ James Harley, “The New Nihilism – L’Objet Sonore and the Music of Richard Barrett,” *Musicworks* 72 (1998): 29.

⁶⁸ Ben Watson, *Derek Bailey and the Story of Free Improvisation*, 9.

Although his writing style and cultural perspective are rather different from Richard Barrett's, Watson is similarly adamant in his opposition to capitalist economic and political structures. He states the following in praise of Bailey's aesthetic:

"Free improvisation is not simply another 'avant excess' which Marxists can indulge or not as it suits them (or as it suits their concept of the conceptual limits of the working class): it is the manifestation of socialist revolution in music – practical, collective, anti-ideological and humanist."⁶⁹

In surveying Bailey's vast recorded output, Watson favorably reviews a record entitled *Iskra 1903*, a group consisting of Bailey, bassist Barry Guy, and trombonist Paul Rutherford.⁷⁰ The name of the album refers to the year and newspaper of the debate, spurred by Vladimir Lenin, that would lead to the formation of the Bolsheviks party. The inner album art additionally consists of both photographic references to revolutionary Russia and a collage of various politically confrontational quotes. The connection with socialist politics was Rutherford's design. Nevertheless, this was music that was intimately informed by Bailey's playing. Watson embraces the link made between the music and album art, declaring that the musicians on *Iskra 1903* "were musical revolutionaries: unsentimental, principled, and vanguardist."⁷¹

Where Bailey himself has been more vocal are in the social implications of free improvisation. He presents a nuanced take on the relationship between the improviser and the audience. In attempting to rectify the seeming disparity between avoiding the temptation to always gain an immediate positive reaction from an audience, and still connecting with them in a significant way, he states:

"And yet, to improvise and not to be responsive to one's surroundings is a contradiction if not an impossibility. So a lot of questions can be asked about improvising before an audience and apparently answering them is not easy. Undeniably, the audience for

⁶⁹ IBID, 145.

⁷⁰ Derek Bailey, Barry Guy, Paul Rutherford, *Iskra 1903*, Incus, 1972, vinyl record.

⁷¹ Ben Watson, *Derek Bailey and the Story of Free Improvisation*, 158.

improvisation, good or bad, active or passive, sympathetic or hostile, has a power that no other audience has. It can affect the creation of that which is being witnessed. And perhaps because of that possibility the audience for improvisation has a degree of intimacy with the music that is not achieved in any other situation.”⁷²

When Bailey expresses concerns about the detrimental effects of mass production on music it takes on a more cynical tone than was the case in Barrett or Watson:

“To play in a manner which excludes the larger audience or, worse, to prefer to play before a small audience, is taken as an indication that the music is pretentious, elitist, ‘uncommunicative’, self-absorbed and probably many other disgusting things too. So what can an improviser say about audiences? The propaganda of the entertainment industry and the strenuous, if futile, efforts of the art world to compete with it, combine to turn the audience into a body of mystical omnipotence. And what it seems to demand above all else is lip-service.”⁷³

The more positive message to be found in the above quote is that radically idiomatic guitar music defines success in ways other than large audiences and commercial appeal. An intimate connection with a small audience can have a greater impact than a large scale public pronouncement. Furthermore, Bailey considers the practice of free improvisation neither a recent invention nor the solo purview of specialists:

“Historically, it pre-dates any other music – mankind’s first musical performance couldn’t have been anything other than a free improvisation – and I think that it is a reasonable speculation that at most times since then there will have been some music-making most aptly described as free improvisation. Its accessibility to the performer is, in fact, something which appears to offend both its supporters and detractors. Free improvisation, in addition to being a highly skilled musical craft, is open to use by almost anyone – beginners, children and non-musicians.”⁷⁴

Certainly Barrett and Bailey’s guitar music falls into the “highly skilled” category, but that the music can point towards a practice that is open to musicians of all ages and abilities can be read as consistent with a socio-political program that would dismantle disproportionate power structures in favor of equality of resources and opportunities.

⁷² Derek Bailey, *Improvisation*, 44.

⁷³ *IBID*, 47.

⁷⁴ *IBID*, 83.

These related ideological desires, that radically idiomatic guitar music, whether it is improvised or pre-composed, might both resist dominant power structures and the effects of mass-marketing on music, while providing a musical counter-narrative, both in sonic structure and in social function, emerged from a stylistic connection that was at times tense. Both Watson and Bailey display ambivalent feelings concerning the contemporary composition world. Towards the beginning of his biography, Watson states:

“Unlike the seventies ‘experimental composers’ who now adopt the role – and lucrative commissions – of the bourgeois composer, Derek Bailey has adumbrated a genuine counter-theory: improvisation.”⁷⁵

Despite whatever sonic similarities arise, Watson immediately sets up an oppositional tone in discussing these two streams of musical culture. However, Watson at times speaks with sympathy towards the music of composers such as Luigi Nono and Brian Ferneyhough.⁷⁶ The former could perhaps be explained in terms of similar political ideologies, but the latter’s music is largely apolitical in character (curiously, despite introducing FURT as pioneers of live electronic free improvisation, Richard Barrett’s notated works are never mentioned in Watson’s text).⁷⁷ Derek Bailey’s own ambiguous attitude to the contemporary composition world is perhaps summed in the following anecdote, again demonstrating his wry sense of humor:

“That’s when I found out I’d better improvise, because I couldn’t read these bloody scores anyway. Some of them were monstrous things. I found relating the performance to the score...I felt I was playing a minor part in some major absurdity. Either the composer was having me on, or he wanted me and him to have someone else on. I didn’t doubt the musical intent or sincerity, I just thought that this way of achieving it was ridiculous. At least it was for me, because I couldn’t actually read the scores in any musical way. I could admire the scores, and I did. When I lived in Islington, I had this basement flat, and the wall was covered with them.”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Ben Watson, *Derek Bailey and the Story of Free Improvisation*, 2.

⁷⁶ *IBID*, 170.

⁷⁷ *IBID*, 261.

⁷⁸ *IBID*, 127.

By contrast, Richard Barrett, benefiting from at least two decades of hindsight from the initial development of Bailey's style, has incorporated both improvisation and notated composition into his musical output for most of his career. He does not consider there to be a significant ideological or aesthetic break between the two; improvisation is simply one type of composition. Barrett made this point clear when asked about the use of improvisation in his music:

"I would say however that I don't think of the development in my work as "incorporating improvisation into notated works" any more or less than as incorporating notated material into free improvisation. In other words I don't begin (as most of the composers of "open-form" music from the 1960s onward tended to do) from the notated score as a basic paradigm which I then depart from or insert something else into, but from a view of structural and expressive potential which encompasses all of the possibilities of compositional thinking from precise notation to free improvisation (the "improvisational method of composition" as Evan Parker calls it)." ⁷⁹

Barrett's simultaneous explorations of improvised and notated music have not been immune to the cultural tensions discussed above. The anecdote discussed in chapter 1, where Barrett was unable to find other college music students interested in improvising, would later culminate in a move from the United Kingdom to Amsterdam in 1993, where he found a more open and collaborative dialogue between practitioners of notated and improvised music.⁸⁰ In correspondence with the author, Barrett optimistically expressed that he believes these barriers are beginning to break down, in part due to the internet's ability to enable a broader communication and exchange of artistic ideas:

"I have the feeling that the phenomenon of playing to different audiences is much less prevalent than it used to be say ten years ago, and that one reason for this is the way that social media can create networks of interpersonal connections across the boundaries which previously separated practitioners and audiences into seemingly exclusive communities." ⁸¹

⁷⁹ Richard Barrett, e-mail interview with the author.

⁸⁰ Bob Gilmore, Richard Barrett, "Richard Barrett."

⁸¹ Richard Barrett, e-mail interview with the author.

The increasing ease of such cross-over is additionally corroborated by other music scenes where musicians successfully navigate between pre-composed and improvised music, with the careers of New York based musicians such as John Zorn and Zeena Parkins providing clear examples.⁸²

In dealing with radically idiomatic guitar music as a politically charged socio-cultural phenomenon, it is useful to appropriate a framework put forth by Jaques Attali in his *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Attali considers music to be not only indicative of larger political and economic structures, but a “herald” of future changes in society. He divides musical history into four “networks.” Music’s pre-history begins with “sacrifice,” where music is the carrier of ritual, myths, and social codes. With the advent of early capitalism comes “representation,” where individual musical events become monetized. The 20th century is characterized by “repetition,” where mass-production begins to erode meaning and ritual, with the stockpiling of recordings taking the place of actual in-time musical experience. He finally proposes “composition” as a way out of the destructive repetition of mass-produced consumerism.⁸³

Writing in the late 1970s, Attali’s analysis of this repetitive capitalism is bleak, seemingly indicting most contemporary western music as participants or victims. The “classical” avant-garde which Barrett and to some extent Bailey draw from are not free from this system. Attali portrays the music of composers such as Iannis Xenakis as a pseudoscientific negative image to mass produced popular musics. For Attali, this music can only signify a highly educated elite who have retreated into meaningless abstraction.⁸⁴ If both popular and avant-garde styles are unable to escape from “repetition,” then the future of music and society would seem to

⁸² See the Tzadik catalogue for evidence of their experience in both fields.

⁸³ Jaques Attali, “Noise: The Political Economy of Music,” *Theory and History of Literature* Vol. 16 (1985): 33.

⁸⁴ *IBID*, 116.

be lost to the brutal control of marketing and big-business. However, it is possible to reject the dismal all-inclusiveness of Attali's "repetition," if we consider radically idiomatic guitar music as an exemplar of Attali's "composition," a less detailed, yet much more optimistic ending point of his theory. According to Attali, "composition" is the act of making music for the individual's own pleasure in creating and in exploring differences, and of rejecting the cultural standardizations of "repetition."⁸⁵ Attali gives free jazz as one of the only concrete examples of music that might have, if only briefly, achieved "composition."⁸⁶ Attali ultimately found failure in certain free jazz collectives' inability to break through to mainstream musical awareness, but he did not foresee the continuing impact of the idiom nearly three decades after writing *Noise*. Although, as we have seen above, free improvisation's link with free jazz is tenuous, it is nonetheless connected in its history and sonic result. If we extend Attali's notion of immediate personal pleasure to Bailey and Barrett's pleasure in musical exploration and discovery, and the related pleasures of the amorphous and small musical communities that they inhabit, we can view radically idiomatic guitar music as predicting a less repetitive future, where differences and exploration coexist with intelligence and rewarding instrumental labor. Significantly, both Barrett and Bailey have demonstrated an ambiguous relationship with the world of commercial recordings. As seen above, Bailey was skeptical of the recorded format, yet his recorded catalogue is enormous. Barrett's work exists on several commercially available recordings, but he has also recently severed ties with the publisher of his scores, making new scores available for free on his website, and has uploaded vast amounts of audio recordings of his music to the SoundCloud free digital music sharing website. He has communicated to the author that he finds such dissemination of his music through social media to be a positive force for the destruction of

⁸⁵ IBID, 142.

⁸⁶ IBID, 138.

barriers to experiencing music that navigates both the improvisational and contemporary composition worlds.⁸⁷ For Attali, such resistance to the technological means of “repetition” (i.e. mass-produced recordings) is a prerequisite for a truly “compositional” society.⁸⁸ Furthermore, radically idiomatic guitar music resists retreat into formalistic meaninglessness through its structuring of the tactile, bodily interface with the instrument, its defamiliarized relationship with traditional guitar idioms, and through a high degree of social awareness and political engagement.

Radically idiomatic guitar music is not a style limited only to Derek Bailey and Richard Barrett’s music. The concept is ripe for expansion to others who have created music for guitar with similar sonic qualities and cultural associations. For example, the electric and classical guitar works of composer Brian Ferneyhough, and the improvisations and compositions of Fred Frith come to mind. Radically idiomatic guitar music can also be treated as a category flexible enough to incorporate guitar music with rather different sonic characteristics than those shared by Barrett and Bailey. For example, the music of improviser Sandy Ewen, and the guitar writing of composer Helmet Lachenmann can both be viewed as radicalizing and abstracting the guitar by focusing primarily on noise and on sounds and techniques generally pushed to the margins of other guitar styles. Much additional work would need to be done to develop a comprehensive view of this musical approach. However, it can be stated, albeit provisionally and tentatively, that the guitar music of Derek Bailey and Richard Barrett exhibits an explicit desire to resist assimilation into capitalist market-based socio-political structures. Furthermore, it attempts to express a socialistic message where human artistic expression and imagination exist free and uninhibited by top-down power structures. As we have seen in the varied reactions to the style,

⁸⁷ Richard Barrett, e-mail interview with the author.

⁸⁸ Jaques Attali, “Noise: The Political Economy of Music,” 137.

there is no guarantee that this message will transmit clearly to audiences. Radically idiomatic guitar music, through its musical abstractions from conventional styles, through its multi-layered musical structures which resist any single aural or analytical reading, and through its problematization of familiar instrumental vocabulary, is constantly in danger of incomprehension. However, for those willing to accept its ambiguities and difficulties, it provides an exciting example of how music might be experienced without clear hierarchies or normalized sets of expectations, inviting us to play an active role in structuring its affect. It is a music of rigorous thought and craft, offering a sound-world of sonic freedom and exploration.

APPENDIX A

E-MAIL INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD BARRETT BY THE AUTHOR

1. AB: Often in discussing your music, you have emphasized the importance of creating a situation where a listener may exercise their own creativity in constructing a path of experience through a piece. The musical relationships in a given work are thus a sort of vast constellation of possible interpretations, rather than a monolithic, fixed form. You have also at times discussed in some detail your compositional processes and their resultant structures. (i.e. the article on *Vanity*) The relationship between the two tendencies would seem to be paradoxical, although highly fruitful artistically. You used the metaphor of “scattering seeds” in regards to pre-composition in the context of FURT, which I find very evocative in this regard. I wonder if you might further discuss the value in creating such a subjective music, and the relationship between compositional rigor and specificity to this type of freedom in listening.

RB: I would say that my compositional rigour is the principal condition under which the free use of the listener’s imagination is encouraged. The purpose of systematic compositional techniques, as far as I’m concerned, is to enable simultaneously the realisation of my musical “vision” and the discovery of implications and corollaries of it which I hadn’t anticipated and which might indeed take over the foreground for themselves, and it’s this sense of discovery I’d like the music to project and to engender in listeners. Exploring the nature and limits of the imagination and perception is somehow a constant feature of what I do, or at least I try to make it one.

2. AB: In dealing with instruments and instrumental sounds that may be semiotically “loaded” in the contexts that your music is presented (i.e. the non-western instruments in *Negatives* and other pieces, the processed electric guitar in *transmission*, *CONSTRUCTION*, etc) you have expressed a desire to minimize or subvert the types of familiar genre/style associations that can accompany these sounds. In my personal experience of hearing “Transmission,” I have difficulty disassociating certain sounds and gestures from the rock contexts that they also exist within. For example, the compressed, heavily-overdriven distortion sound of the “electric output,” combined with vaguely idiomatic gestures like whammy-bar “dive bombs” on groups of fast notes in the final

movement can be evocative of certain types of heavy-metal guitar heroics. The e-bow/pitch shifter combination in the second movement immediately reminded me of some of Robert Fripp's playing from the 80s. For me, these associations don't hurt the piece, but rather add an additional reference point that is set into dialogue with other musical parameters, shaped, and often subverted throughout the course of the piece. A non-normative use of normative musical materials can be a powerful experience (which isn't to say that all of the sounds in the piece are familiar from rock music. Certainly this is not the case). To what degree do you perceive these sorts of cultural sign-posts, particularly in regards to the electric guitar, as significant to your music (or not), both in its creation and reception?

RB: When I was writing the piano piece *Tract*, whose primary material is based on variations of handspan and register with the two hands of the pianist generally moving in parallel, I noticed that different configurations of the fingers might occasionally fall into those familiar from the harmonic morphology of the music of improvising pianists with whose work I was familiar: Thelonious Monk, Bill Evans, Cecil Taylor... and this reminded me of Stockhausen speaking of his composition *Mantra* and his fascination for the way the systematically-composed intervallic expansions of his basic material might seem to refer to jazz voicings (which are often not far from the surface in Stockhausen's music anyway), gamelan music and so on. Given the comparably systematic way that the pitch-organisation of *transmission* works, one might imagine that similar phenomena might occur. But, over and above that, the seemingly referential examples you mention are part of the instrument's historical vocabulary in a similar way to the shadow cast over the technique of "classical" instruments by their past repertoire. And, in the case of the electric guitar, the historical vocabulary is not a product merely of what the player does with his/her hands but also of the way the sound of the instrument is conceived and set up. So for example the way everything is set up in part 2 is going to be reminiscent of some of Fripp's work whatever else happens, and, as an admirer (and, in my young days as an electric guitar player, occasional attempted imitator) of his work, when something like that occurs I'm not motivated to avoid it. I think that if music does have its own individual personality it can display its influences without seeming to be ashamed of them or sounding superficially derivative. In this connection I would mention not just obvious examples like Fripp, Derek Bailey and Hans Reichel, but also less obvious ones like Frank Zappa, Vernon Reid, Bill Frisell and Steve Howe, and guitarists I've worked with personally such as Gunnar Geisse, Han-earl Park, John Russell and of course Daryl Buckley and Seth Josel. But at the same time the music doesn't "refer" to their work any more than the use of the sitar in *negatives* refers to Indian music.

3. AB: You have modified Derek Bailey's term "non-idiomatic improvisation" into an approach to instrumental writing that is "radically idiomatic." You've described this approach as often stemming from the physical interactions and realities that a player navigates in playing their instrument, and making this interaction the basic materials that the music may be built from. "Radical idiom" also has a stronger political connotation than Bailey's term, perhaps implying a resistance to dominant power structures through a

musical approach. How does “radically idiomatic” playing/writing relate to the political aspects of your work?

RB: I should point out that Derek Bailey is using “idiomatic” in a somewhat different sense from the one I’m using. He is talking about styles of playing: jazz, flamenco, rock & roll and so on (to take a few guitar-related examples) and so for him “non-idiomatic” denotes a music which doesn’t situate itself within preexistent styles of that kind but which (ideally) generates its own “style” as it comes into being. On the other hand, I’m using “idiomatic” to mean something which, in terms of notated composition for instruments, is written in an ergonomic way, so as to “fall under the fingers”, a particularly important issue when it comes to composition for guitar of course. Now, “idiomatic” in this sense generally means indeed conforming to traditional ideas and limits regarding instrumentalism, and the idea behind “radicalising” this situation is to try and rethink instrumentalism from first principles, while at the same time acknowledging the history of the performer-instrument relationship (see my answer to question 2). Derek Bailey’s music is therefore “radically idiomatic” in my sense, although in the case of non-notated music that’s a fairly trivial observation. I wasn’t thinking of the term in an explicitly political way. Nevertheless, the idea implies the kind of questioning attitude towards received assumptions which I think is axiomatic to many aspects of my work. Also, the term “non-idiomatic” tends to imply that the music is based on a strategy of avoidance, and I prefer to think in terms of doing what I want to do, what I feel is important to do, or what the music wants to do, rather than focusing on the things I don’t want to do - I’m not interested in a critique unless it offers a way forward, which is one reason Marx is so important, in not just analysing the nature and history of class structures but also proposing a way to go beyond them (“resistance AND vision”). For me, deconstructing instrumentalism is only the first phase in a process which then goes further, to propose a “re-construction” whose precise nature is coextensive with the musical identity of the eventual composition.

4. AB: You have expressed frustration with the lack of communication between creative musical approaches in the improvisation and contemporary composition world. (playing to different audiences between FURT and your notated pieces, etc) I have also experienced frustration with the ways in which one sub-culture of challenging music can close itself off or be closed off to others, even when the intentions and results of the music are similar. How might a listener or creator of such music go about breaking down such barriers? What has the experience of incorporating free and mostly free improvisation into your notated works been like? (As in the fourth movement of *transmission*, and the final movement of *CONSTRUCTION* Elision seems to be a remarkable ensemble in this regard?

RB: My evolution as a composer is very closely intertwined with ELISION’s evolution as an ensemble. The path from the fourth part of *transmission* to the last part (and several others) of *CONSTRUCTION* involved us in developing a collective improvisational identity for the group, for example through performing *codex I, IV, IX and XI* among other projects involving non-notated music - what’s “remarkable” in fact is the way that we worked consistently and more or

less systematically on these things over a period of twelve years (while our collaboration overall is now approaching 25 years in duration, during which time about half of all the compositions I've written have been connected with the ensemble in one way or another). I have the feeling that the phenomenon of playing to different audiences is much less prevalent than it used to be say ten years ago, and that one reason for this is the way that social media can create networks of interpersonal connections across the boundaries which previously separated practitioners and audiences into seemingly exclusive communities.

One way in which I've gone about addressing the issue of the "barriers" you mention is therefore, since 2011, taking over myself the publication of my scores and making them freely available from my website; and, since earlier this year, building up a Soundcloud page which currently contains almost 70 items comprising both improvised and scored music. Another way is to encourage, as far as I can, the activity of other ensembles which are serious about exploring the spectrum between freely-improvised and precisely-notated music, like for example Ensemble Studio6 in Belgrade with whom I've been working since April of this year and for whom I've started work on an hour-long cycle of compositions which traverse that spectrum rather systematically.

I would say however that I don't think of the development in my work as "incorporating improvisation into notated works any more or less than as incorporating notated material into free improvisation. In other words I don't begin (as most of the composers of "open-form" music from the 1960s onward tended to do) from the notated score as a basic paradigm which I then depart from or insert something else into, but from a view of structural and expressive potential which encompasses all of the possibilities of compositional thinking from precise notation to free improvisation (the "improvisational method of composition" as Evan Parker calls it). It's no coincidence therefore that I refer to "seeded improvisation" in the many further developments of the situation found in part 4 of *transmission* - free improvisation is the point of departure, which is then influenced by scattering notated events through it. I've treated this subject more extensively in an essay entitled "Notation as Liberation", which will be published in April by the British journal *Tempo*.

5. AB: Extending question 1, I am very interesting in creating an approach to musical analyses that accounts for these sorts of subjectivities/multiplicities of experience. I would like to create a number of differing analyses of different portions of *transmission*, overlaying them to show a number of paths through the piece, rather than a single interpretation. I am also interested in incorporating your compositional process as part of this fabric. You have mentioned that the piece, along with much of the larger *DARK MATTER* cycle, is constructed around 6 movements across the guitar, relating to its six strings. The ending of *transmission* seems to reveal a type of generative material, but not one that is clearly parsed into six groups. I find this very poetically compelling, a sort of revealing of the behind-the-scenes secrets of the music, but one where we are left unsure if this revelation is truth, or only an illusion or misdirection. I wonder if you would be able to share what constitutes these 6 "movements" with me, along with some aspects of

your compositional process in employing them, not to establish an authoritative authorial interpretation of the piece, but to incorporate your process into a multivariant realm of experiences latent in the music.

RB: Perhaps it would help if I explained the process of composition in more detail. The basis of the pitch-material is six strands of pitches which were constructed in the following way. Firstly a span of 120 rhythmical units was divided into “phrases” of between 2 and 7 units. Then, the beginning of each phrase was assigned a pitch on the 1st string, with these pitches gradually progressing up and down the range of the string. Then the remaining pitches of each phrase were filled in, using the pitch of the first string as a guide to left-hand position and creating constantly-changing harmonic fields including the use of harmonics and open strings. The resulting strand of pitches could therefore be played at high speed with each phrase *legato* since each phrase can be played without a shift of left-hand position, and the shifts between phrases are generally very small. This process was then repeated using traversals of the other five strings in turn, to give the six strands of 120 pitches from which everything in the piece is derived. At this stage, Daryl recorded the six strands separately. This recorded material was used as the basis of all the electronic sounds that feature in *transmission*, and is particularly clear in part 6 where the strands are heard simultaneously with very little transformation: at the time when the basic material of the piece is finally “exposed”, it is compacted into a dense and chaotic texture where individual strands are very difficult to disentangle aurally.

The six strands are then projected onto the duration of all six parts of the piece, each part making its own trajectory between the strands. I think it’s possible to hear this to varying extents through the piece, especially in the relationship between parts 1 and 3 since these use more of the pitch-strands than the others, while in part 2 so few pitches are used that the original material has basically been erased. The degree to which this material is “transmitted” to the surface of the music is the basis of the title.

Other components of *DARK MATTER* reuse the six pitch-strands from *transmission* in different ways. An obvious example is the duo for acoustic guitar and flowerpots in *De vita coelitus comparanda*, where the guitar material uses the *transmission* pitch systems in reverse while the six flowerpots also do but using only the string-assignments. Elsewhere, the ensemble material of *sounds* is all derived from those same strands but using various degrees of intervallic compression. There are numerous other examples.

6. AB: Thank you so much for your time and your music. Please let me know if you would be interested in doing a follow up!

RB: Of course, please let me know if anything is unclear or if further questions occur to you.

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