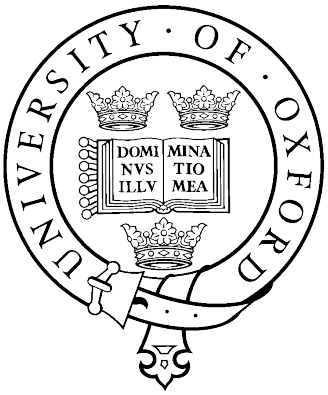
PORTFOLIO OF COMPOSITIONS



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Submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Michaelmas 2021

TABLE OF CONTENT

MARBLES (2015)
for flute and string quartet

Instrumentation: flute / 2 violins / viola / cello
Approximate duration: 5 minutes
First performance: Matteo Cesari (flute), Quartetto Prometeo -
Siena (Italy), Palazzo Chigi Saracini, 25 July 2015
Live recording available on: https://soundcloud.com/giuliamonducci/marbles

ATLAS (2016)
for mixed chamber ensemble

Instrumentation: flute / oboe / bass clarinet in Bb / bassoon / horn in F / trombone / percussion / piano / 2 violins / viola / cello / double bass
Approximate duration: 10 minutes
First performance: ISIS Ensemble, John Traill (conductor) -
Oxford (United Kingdom), Jacqueline du Pré Music Building, 3 November 2017

AVENUES (*2017)
for solo and mixed ensemble

AVENUE #1 | 5 Is Always Empty (2017)
for concertante double bass and ensemble

Instrumentation: flute / clarinet in Bb / bass clarinet in Bb / horn in F / trombone / percussion / piano / violin / viola / cello / double bass
Approximate duration: 12 minutes
First performance: Ukho Ensemble Kyiv, Nazar Stets (double bass), Luigi Gaggero (conductor) -
Organisation (Ukraine), Plivka, 16 April 2017
Live recording available on: https://soundcloud.com/giuliamonducci/avenue-1

AVENUE #2 | Edges of Landscape (2018)
for concertante brass trio and ensemble

Instrumentation: flute / clarinet in Bb / bass clarinet in Bb / horn in F / trombone / percussion / piano / violin / viola / cello / double bass
Approximate duration: 10 minutes
Studio recording: Ukho Ensemble Kyiv, Nazar Stets (double bass), Luigi Gaggero (conductor) -
Kyiv (Ukraine), Plivka, 31 March 2018
Studio recording available on: https://soundcloud.com/giuliamonducci/avenue-2

EARTHSCAPES (*2017)
for bass flute, bass clarinet, violin, viola, cello, piano and percussion

EARTHSCAPE I - WATERMARK (2018 - rev. 2019)
for bass clarinet, cello, piano and percussion

Instrumentation: bass clarinet in Bb / cello / piano / percussion /
Approximate duration: 7 minutes
First performance: Ensemble Norrbotten NEO - Kalv (Sweden), KALV Festival, 10 August 2018
Live recording: United Instruments of Lucilin -
Luxembourg, Neumünster Abbey, Rainy Days Festival, 30 November 2019
Live recording available on: https://soundcloud.com/giuliamonducci/watermark

EARTHSCAPE II - MYCELIA (2019 - rev. 2020)
for bass clarinet, cello, piano and percussion

Instrumentation: bass flute / bass clarinet in Bb / violin / cello / piano
Approximate duration: 8 minutes
First performance: NAMES ensemble -
Salzburg (Austria), Mozarteum, CROSSROADS International Music Festival, 9 November 2019
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Available on: https://soundcloud.com/giuliamonducci/mycelia

EARTHSCAPE III - TOKYO POLAROID (2020 - rev. 2021)
for flute and string trio

Instrumentation: flute / violin / viola / cello
Approximate duration: 8 minutes
First performance: The Riot Ensemble -
Salzburg (Austria), Mozarteum, CROSSROADS International Music Festival, 29 October 2021

AZIMUTH (2020)
for solo French horn

Instrumentation: French horn
Approximate duration: 8 minutes
Commission: Royal Philharmonic Academy
First performance: José Vicente Barcellò -
Bologna (Italy), Royal Philharmonic Academy, Mozart Hall, 13 November 2021

SHINRYOKU (2021)
for solo electric guitar

Instrumentation: electric guitar
Approximate duration: 5 minutes
Commission: Carlo Siega
First performance: Carlo Siega -
Darmstadt (Germany), Darmstädter Ferienkurse für die Neue Musik, 4 August 2021
Live recording available on: https://youtu.be/zOhCpuVY8-g?t=854

APPENDIX

My approach to Sciarrino's works and aesthetics largely mirrors my interest in the concept of space and particularly in how it relates to the micro-material, its nature and physicality. In the earliest works in my portfolio, composed during the years 2014–16, this aspect translated into my compositional thinking mostly as a mapping of spatial parameters onto the micro-formal materials. This is the case, for instance, of *Marbles* (2015) for flute and string quartet, where I deal with materials whose sonority recalls some tactile aspects related to space (e.g. contact, direction, impact), and that formally combines throughout the piece to reflect the accumulation and stratification of memories and experiences.

The research conducted on Sciarrino's materials, particularly with regard to the classification of sound objects and their variations within each piece, further led me to investigate and question my own practice. As a result of this, on the one hand I started developing a practice of selection of compositional materials and preliminary study of its possibilities of variation and articulation over time; on the other hand, it led me to focus on some of my compositional limits, in particularly regarding a certain rigidity of the materials in my early works (e.g. *Marbles*, *Atlas*), both in their contours and in their modality of occurrence over time.

Being able to focus on my compositional limits meant that over the years coinciding with my D.Phil candidacy at Oxford I was able to dedicate time to observe which aspects of my compositional strategies were most responsible for this rigidity, and to overcome them, at least in part. I dedicated some time to the development of time-varying materials in my own works, which I believe have led me to ensure that not only my compositional micro-materials reflect a greater research on sound, but also that the micro- and macro-formal structure is more sophisticated as a result of a clearer focus on the aspects and relationships that make up sound.

This was made possible by the development of preliminary studies on the possibilities of variation and articulation of the micro-formal materials I used, as well as by the deepening of my knowledge of the instrumental techniques of the instruments I wrote for and by working in contact with them as much as possible. This kind of approach was born during the years in which I composed *Avenue # 1* and *Avenue # 2* and has gradually consolidated in subsequent works (e.g. *Mycelia*, *Tokyo Polaroid*, *Azimuth*) even in spite of apparently rather contrasting aesthetics in my latest works.

ABSTRACT

In the pieces included in this Portfolio and written during the years 2014−2021, coinciding with my D.Phil candidacy at Oxford, I have explored different possibilities of thinking about sound material and about how some aspects of it can be amplified by the form of a piece. The research conducted on Sciarrino's music has certainly inspired me to explore issues of time and form in my own work, as well as physical aspects of the material on the other. My interest in spatial properties and how they relate to the development of micro-formal materials and macro-formal structures manifests itself differently in my compositional output. I find it particularly evident in some of my early pieces, where I mostly think of sound in relation to spatial properties and perceptual aspects.

This aspect of metaphorical translation of spatial parameters in the micro-formal material, for instance, is the focus of the earliest composition in my portfolio: *Marbles* (2015) for flute and string quartet. This piece was written over the course of two weeks during my stay in Accademia Chigiana, Siena (Italy) for a workshop with Salvatore Sciarrino, Matteo Cesari and Quartetto Prometeo. Here I deal with the temporal dimension starting from a reflection on window-form, typical of various works by Sciarrino and illustrated extensively in my thesis. I look at time as a layering of past and present in the construction of one's identity, and therefore organize the compositional materials as to reflect the plurality of experiences (tactile, visual, etc.) that contribute to the formation of an identity.

Some aspects of Sciarrino's formal strategies were an inspiring starting point for evaluating my own formal attitudes towards the materials used in my works. In some pieces, such as *Atlas*, the materials are rather archetypal, in the sense that they are largely sound objects - intended as primary units of sonic materials - in all respects. In spite of their rather long duration, the mechanisms of micro-formal development in *Atlas* are mostly multiplication and accumulation processes, aimed at

obtaining a mass of sound that varies in dynamics, register and textural density over time, much like the works discussed in my dissertation.

Over the years I have found working on cycles of pieces very congenial to my way of working and of thinking music: it has driven me to go in depth and to look at the compositional issues that fascinate me from different perspectives, while allowing a reasonable time for the research process to be accomplished. Particularly in the '*Avenues*' and '*Earthscapes*' cycles, I have drawn from the physical world and explored ways to translate physical attributes and dimensions (density, distance, trajectory, shapes) at the level of texture and form.

From personal experience, working on a cycle often presents various difficulties, first of which the search for a partnership with an ensemble that interested in pursuing a collaboration and in carrying out the project together. The two works that currently make up the *Avenues* cycle were each composed respectively at the start of 2017 and 2018, and rendered with great fluidity and precision by Ukho Ensemble Kyiv under Luigi Gaggero during our time in Kyiv (Ukraine).

I have worked with metaphors as the first step of my creative process for several years, however a few years ago this practice became quite limiting, especially for the way this reflected on the finished piece. While composing *Mycelia* I shifted from working on a purely metaphorical level, as the first step of my creative process, to thinking firstly in sound and musical terms, improvising on the instruments I wrote for, whenever possible. *Mycelia* is possibly the most widely performed piece in my portfolio, having been premiered by NAMES Ensemble in Salzburg (Austria) in November 2019, then by Imago Sonora in Rome (Italy) in December 2019 as a finalist in the Franco Evangelisti International Composition Competition, and finally recorded by Schallfeld Ensemble in Graz (Austria) in July 2020.

Many of my pieces include extended techniques as a result of my habit of working with instruments I write for, whenever possible. I do not think of extended techniques as the core of my
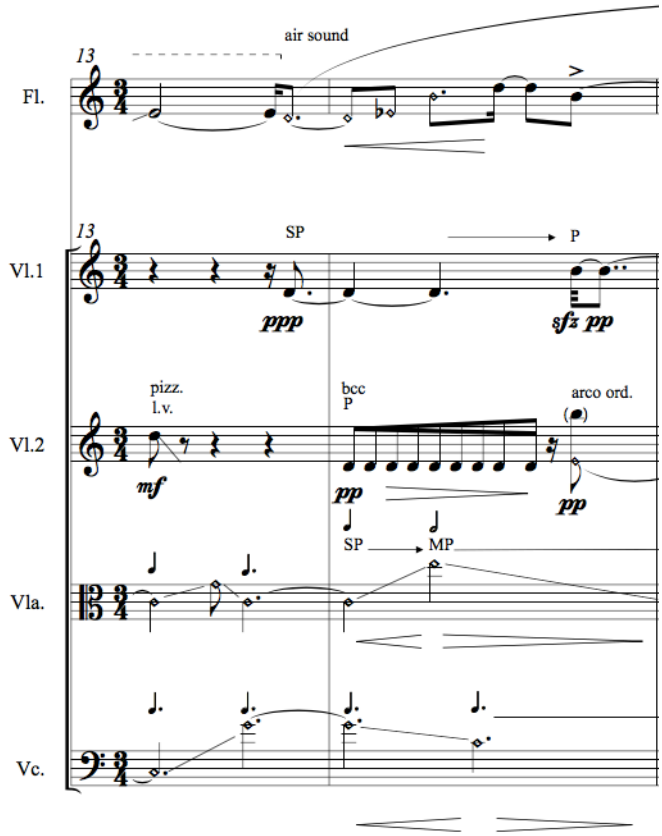
compositional thought, but rather as a result of my habit of working in contact with the instruments I write for and of including boundary materials that find continuity between sound and noise.

With respect to all reflections made on Sciarrino's aesthetics, beyond any distance between my way and his way of thinking compositionally, the one shared aspect undoubtedly remains the desire to aspire to an aesthetic that takes into account our mechanisms of perception and the ability to pay attention to and find beauty in certain quality of sound and articulations that many of us would not immediately think of as musical material.

MARBLES (2015)
for flute and string quartet
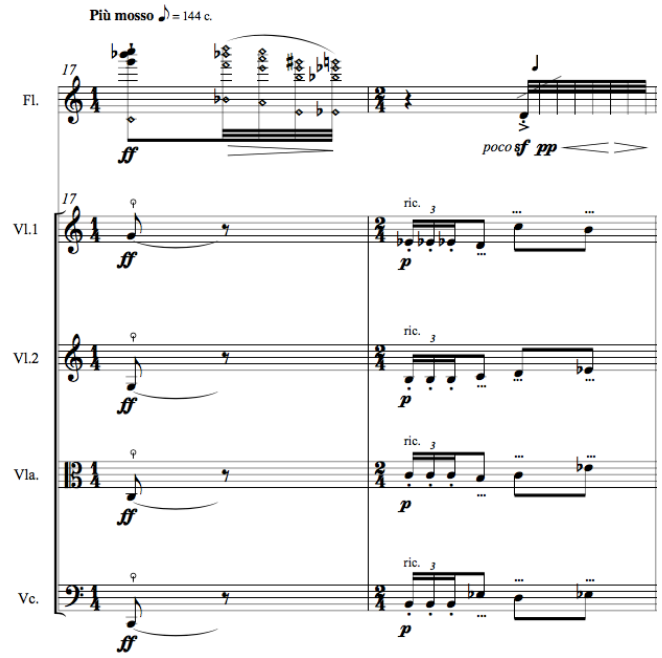
Marbles was composed in Siena (Italy) during a three-week workshop with Salvatore Sciarrino. Here I explore the multidimensionality of an object from the plurality of the experiences associated with it, with special relation to perception (tactile, auditive, visual) and memory. Where I grew up, marbles were the most popular summer game among children. They were, and still are, a symbol of childhood for many generations. In *Marbles* I aimed to portray them as memory triggers, treasure chests evoking memories of places, images, and sounds, attempting to bring together emotional and perceptual experience.

I worked with a variety of materials, each of which associated with a specific aspect of the marbles. From a timbral point of view, I opted for a characterization and differentiation that would reflect the diversity of the perceptual domains. The harmonic glissandos in the strings (e.g. bars 13-14) refer to the visual domain, portraying the act of looking through a marble, as if it were a door to an imaginary universe (see example 1.1). Passages set in motion by the flute, and characterized by harmonic clusters and shadow clusters (e.g. bar 17), represent the abrupt release of potential energy, the initial hit that propels the marbles and starts the play, unleashing dynamics of cause-effect, and therefore pertain to the tactile sphere. The *ricochet* and *col legno battuto* in the strings (e.g. bar 18), as well as key clicks in the flute, are elements peculiar to the auditory sphere, a mimesis of contact between marbles (see example 1.2). At the same time, the structure is punctuated by means of still and lyrical episodes (e.g. bar 37), which represent the emotional experiences and emerging memories (see example 1.3).
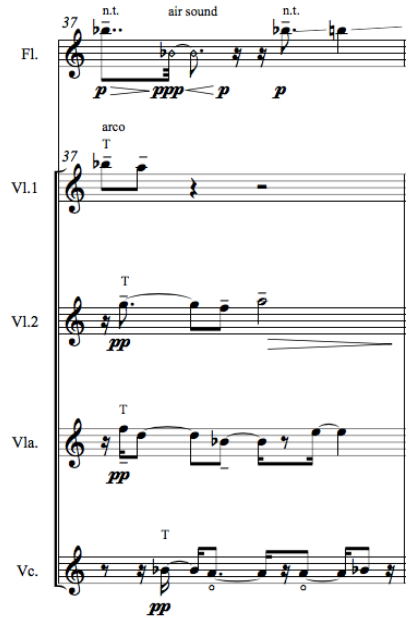


Example 1.1

Marbles, bars 13-14



Example 1.2

Marbles, bars 17-18

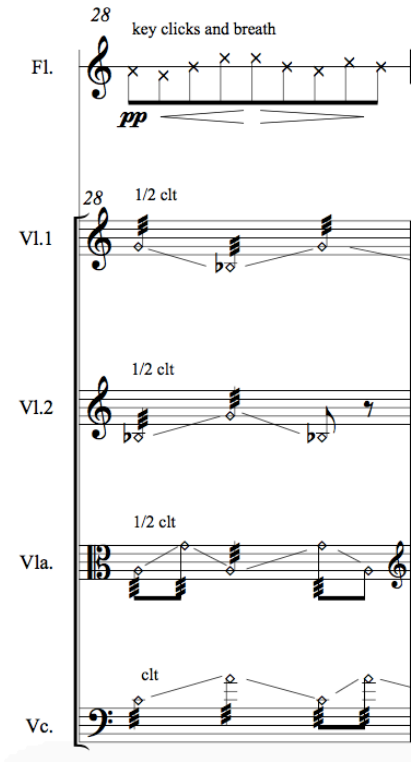


Example 1.3

Marbles, bar 37

In order to render the coexistence of all these aspects, I started from conceiving time as the domain that contains all these experiences, as a stratification of all these dimensions. Therefore, by imagining the materials that these experiences refer to as a continuous stream, my formal strategy was to create a structure in which these materials behave essentially in two ways:

- they flow into each other, creating a form of trigger between one material and another (e.g. bars 17-18, where we see the tactile merge into the auditory domain - see example 1.2);
- they stratify and juxtapose, thus showing the coexistence of different aspects at the same time (e.g. bar 28, where we see key clicks and harmonic glissandos together: a combination of auditory and visual domain - see example 1.4).



Example 1.4

Marbles, bar 28

ATLAS (2016)
for mixed chamber ensemble
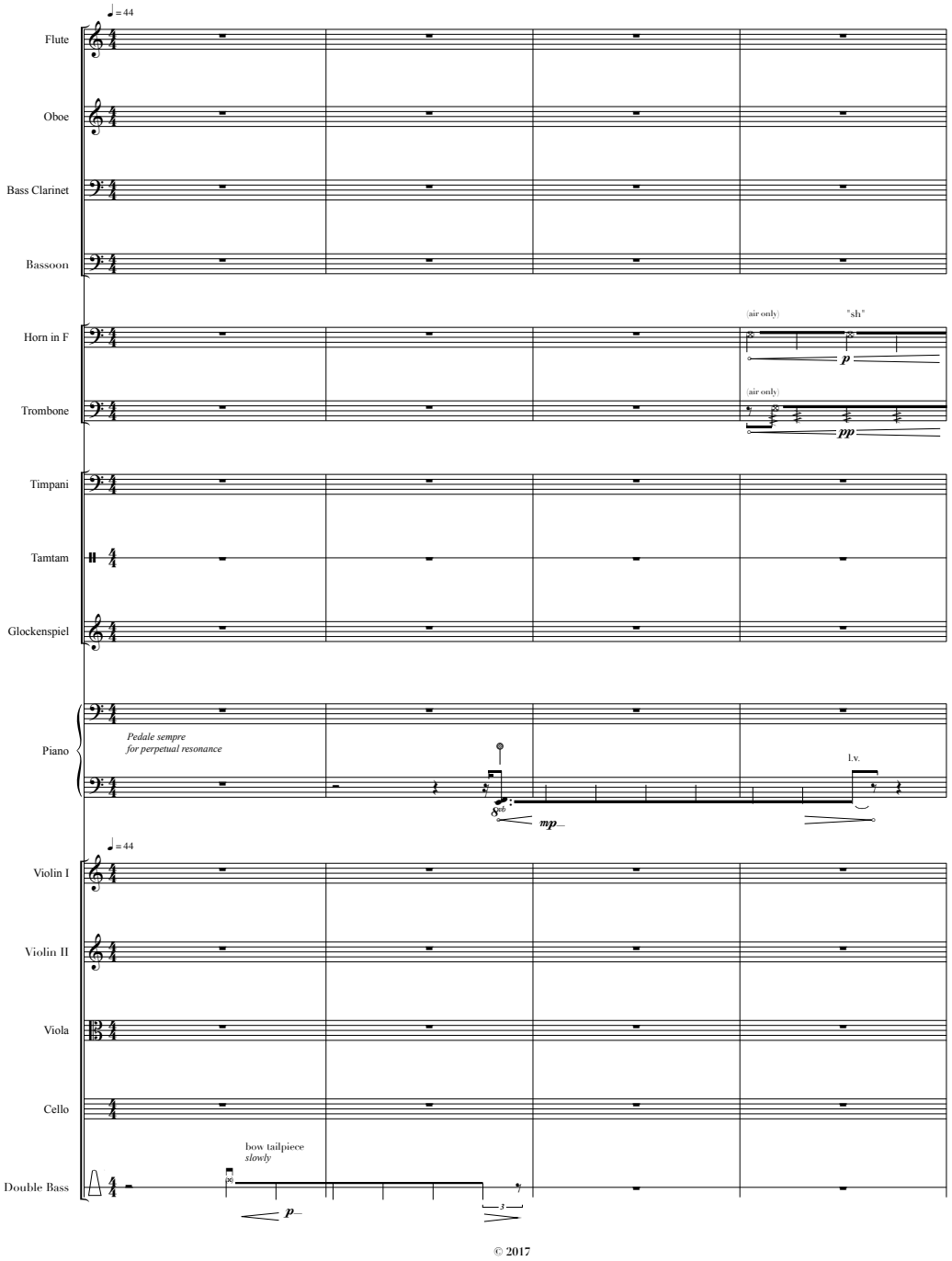
Atlas is the first piece for mixed chamber ensemble that I composed after identifying a new set of materials with which I was interested in working to investigate issues connected to my aesthetic interests, particularly regarding the use of musical materials to establish background-foreground relationships among sound objects and the use of resonance to evoke a sense of spatiality.

Here I deliberately avoided the use of scales and arpeggios, as well as the creation of figures with a strong melodic profile. The criteria for selecting the materials were mainly their articulation and sound quality, which in many ways are almost archetypal and often rather homogeneous. In most cases I deal with linear and continuous sounds, some of which features time-varying elements, and I build contrasting sonorities starting from the lower register (e.g. bars 1-4, see example 2.1), going on to explore the higher register (e.g. bars 81-84, see example 2.2) and everything in between throughout the course of the piece. Finding sounds that respond to my aesthetic needs was for me a new starting point to investigate compositional issues such as how to express spatial properties like the sense of distance, or presence and absence, in ways that do not rely on the mere use of dynamics and orchestration, but rather on the use of the spectrum, the register, of silence between events, etc. For instance, fullness and emptiness are often conveyed by means of contrasting quantities of sound and a saturation of the spectrum, like in bars 65-68.

In some ways *Atlas* anticipates concerns that are focussed more clearly in the *Avenue* pieces, such as the use of timbre to convey a sense of transparency or opacity, and the diversification of duration and directional movement in the various layers within the musical materials to convey a sense of perspective.

ATLAS
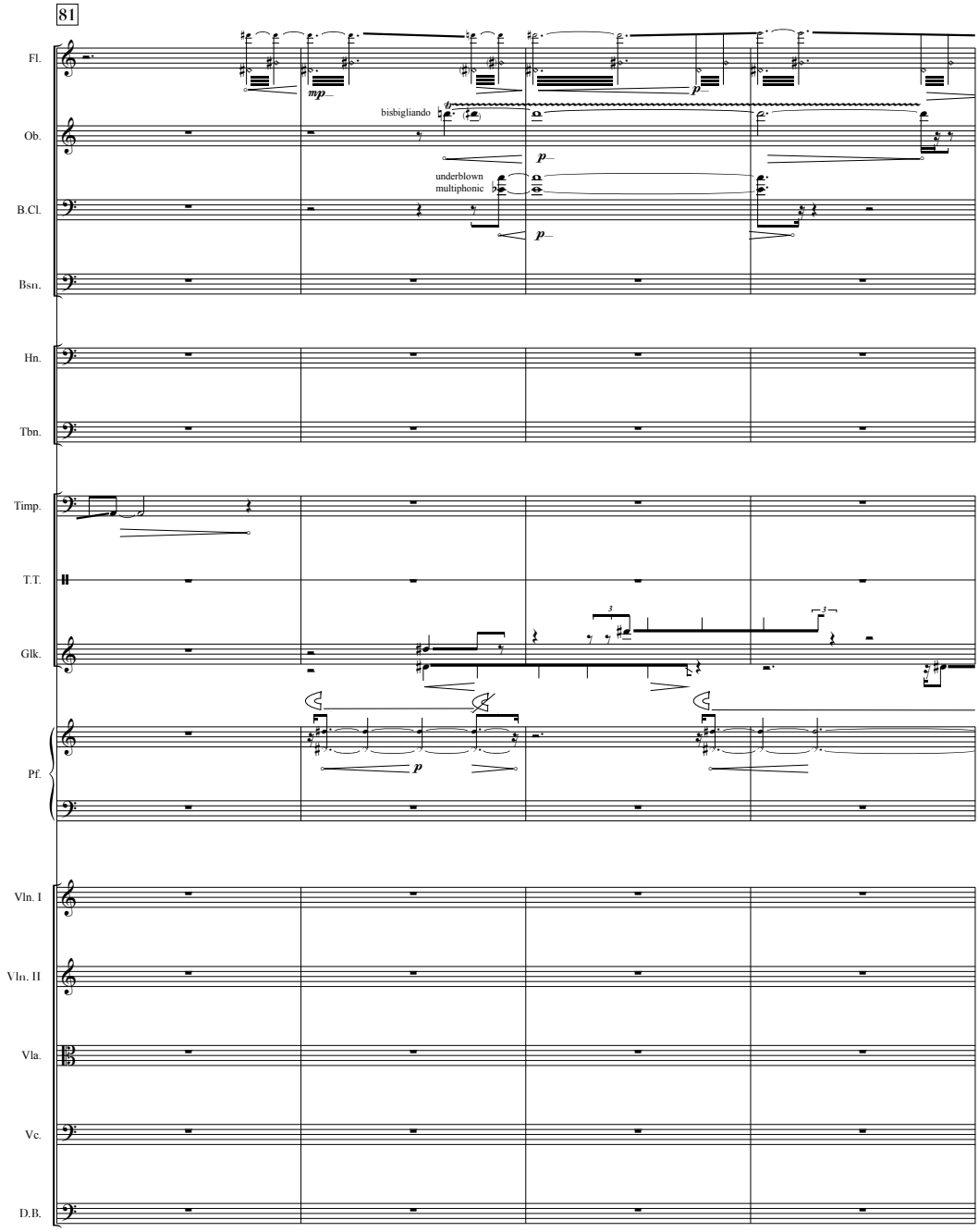
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Example 2.1

Atlas, bars 1-4



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Example 2.2

Atlas, bars 81-84

AVENUES (*2017)

for solo and mixed ensemble

AVENUE #1 | 5 Is Always Empty (2017)

for concertante double bass and ensemble

Avenues is a (large-scale) cycle for ensemble which was born out my interest for a connection between the concept of 'space' and matters of sound and temporality in contemporary music. It is in fact a project where each piece takes 'space' and spatial properties as broad sources of inspiration and explores them from different angles.
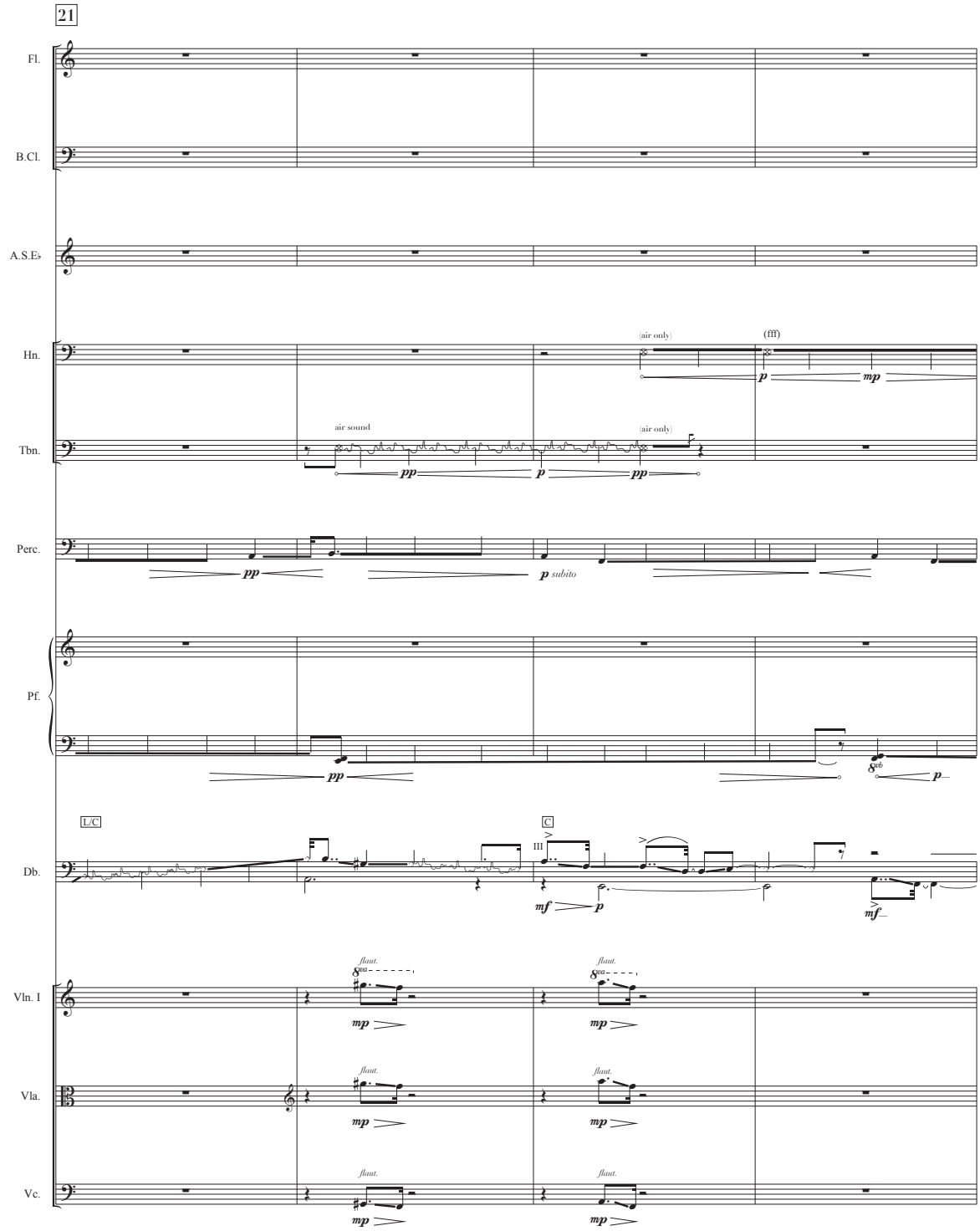
In the first work of this cycle, *Avenue #1 | 5 Is Always Empty,* I explore ways of portraying how energy transmutes through different states of matter and directions (stillness, expansion, stagnation, movement, etc.), drawing from Chinese culture, particularly the concept of Bagua. The Bagua (literally 'eight areas' in Chinese) is a symbol used in Taoist cosmology to represent the fundamental principles of reality (see table 1). Sometimes depicted as an octagon, other times as a square, it consists of eight areas around a centre which are seen as eight interrelated concepts combining Yin and Yang, and generally symbolizing the flows of energy that cross the world. Each area, respectively representing yin or yang energy, is associated to an element and to a number from 1 to 9, except for number 5 (hence the title).

Bagua		
South East 4 Wood / Wind	*South* 9 Fire	*South West* 2 Earth
East 3 Hard wood / Thunder	*Centre* 5	*West* 7 Soft Metal / Lake
North East 8 Earth / Mountain	*North* 1 Water	*North West* 6 Hard Metal / Heaven

Table 1. Bagua map showing a representation of the nine energy areas and their associated numbers and elements

In this piece the elements composing the Bagua (water, earth, wood, metal, fire) are evoked by timbral association. My translation process involves a different set of instruments for each element composing the Bagua. For example, notes played with the bow in the vibraphone and the e-bow in the piano correspond to Lake (7), flatterzunge air sounds in the brass correspond to Thunder (3), harmonic glissandos in the strings and aeolian sounds in the flute correspond to Wind (4), etc. An instance of timbral translation of a passage like 3-1-(5)-9-4 on the Bagua would be thunder rolls (flatterzunge air sound in the brass) announcing water approaching (sounds gradually introduced), after which fire (slaps marking the moment the spark starts the fire) transmutes water into air, as in the passage starting from bar 21 (see example 3).

Formally the piece unwinds by portraying different ways in which energy transmutes from one state to another, at times finding its own balance in time, at other times driving the change for energy to be transformed into something else. Concerning the relationship between soloist and ensemble relationship - as might be evident also from the preliminary diagram showing the overall structure of the piece and the different sets of instrumental groups involved (see figure 1) - the double bass is often the element triggering the processes of change, at times *preceding* the event it triggers, at other times *blending* with the event it triggers, which in turn blends with the triggering of events that follow.



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Example 3

Avenue #1 | 5 Is Always Empty, bars 21-24

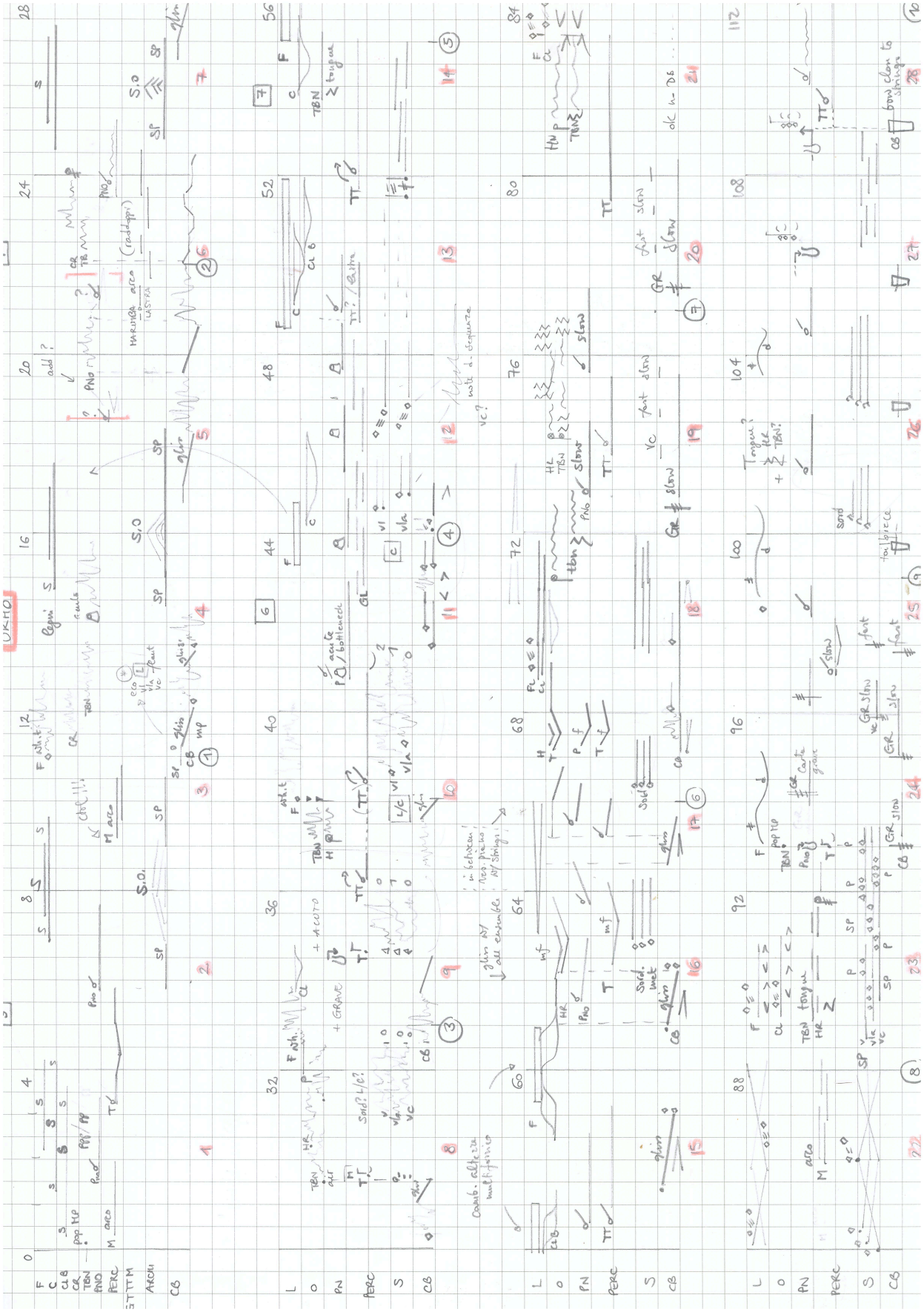


Figure 1

Preliminary diagram for Avenue #1

AVENUE #2 | Edges of Landscape (2018)
for concertante brass trio and ensemble

Similarly, the second work of this cycle, *Avenue #2 | Edges of Landscape*, explores ways of looking at particular spatial properties or, more broadly, physical attributes in relation to sound, and is largely a reflection on the elements that make up boundaries.

Concerning the physical attributes of sound in relation to spatial properties, I focus on the differences that emerge in relation to the placement of a sound in space. Dynamics mark the sense of distance (ppp-p) or proximity (mf-ff) of a given sound, whereas similar and dissimilar features in timbre convey a sense of homogeneity of location parameters, since, given the same intonation and dynamics, it is precisely timbre that allows us to distinguish one sound from another. This focus on the physical properties of sound in relation to space is added to a sense of sound perspective in the material, which has longer or shorter durations in relation to the sense of distance I want to convey: a nearby object will be bigger than a distant one, therefore the first will have a longer duration than the second and vice versa.
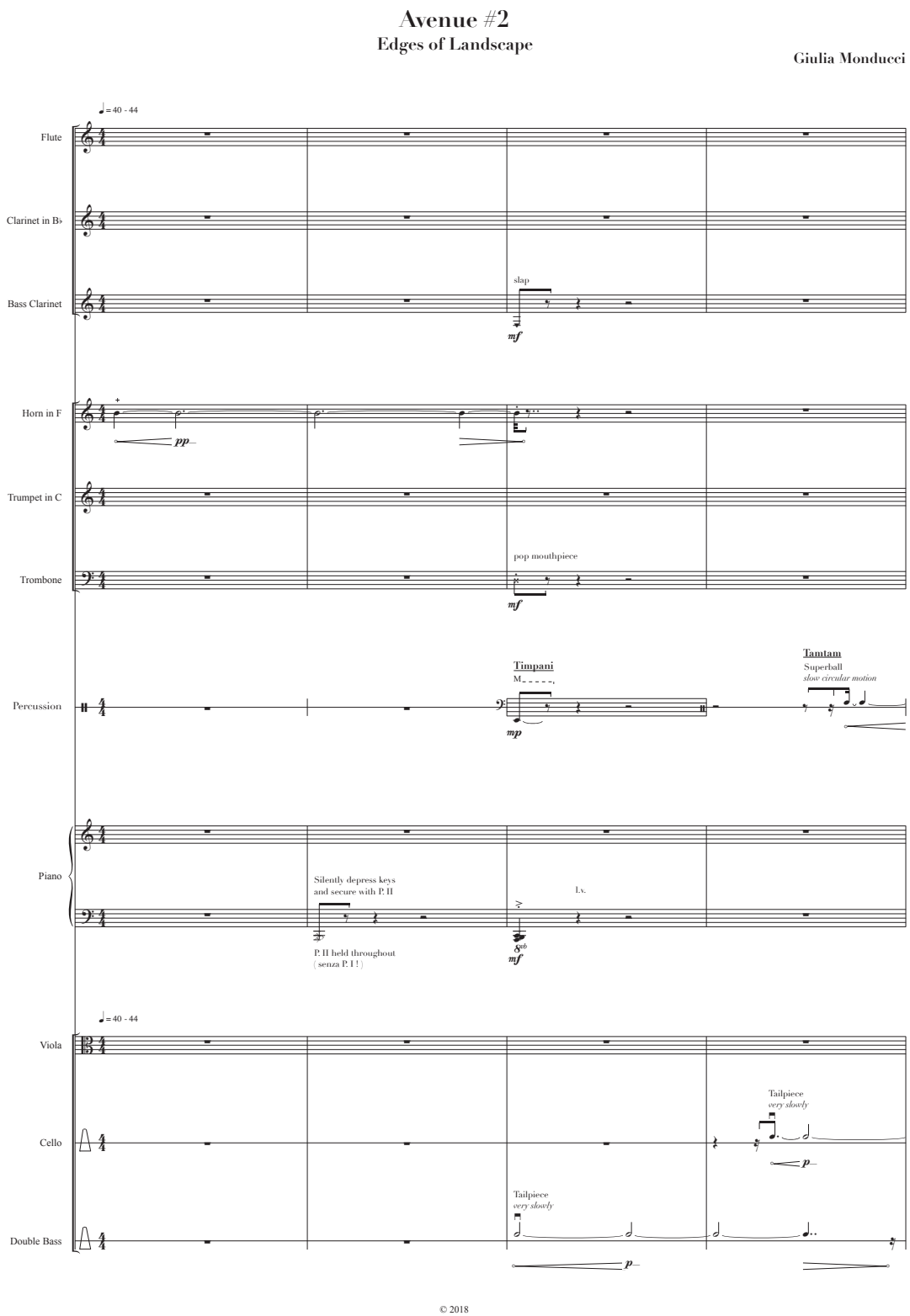
Concerning the idea of boundaries, in this piece I work with a set of discrete, continuous and time-varying elements; the way these elements interact with one another is my personal reflection on the architecture of boundaries. An instance of boundary here can be a simple vertical line of percussive sounds that separates two elements: a continuous sound and its resonance (e.g. bars 1-4). In this case - featuring a continuous sound, followed by an attack and a resonance - the element that, with its verticality, cuts the horizontality of the continuous sound can be seen as the edge of a landscape, or the boundary between space and void (see example 4.1).

In other cases a vertical line will cut through two groups of elements (e.g. bars 19-24), each made respectively of continuous sounds and time-varying objects. In this case the element that, with its verticality, cuts the horizontality of the continuous sounds can be seen as the boundary between two different spaces (see example 4.2). Similarly, these stratifications of time-varying elements, also evident from the preliminary diagram (see figure 2), are for me an instance of landscapes evolving and changing organically in their time of existence.

In contrast to the long and homogeneous sounds that characterize the previous piece for ensemble (*Atlas*), in *Avenue #1* and *Avenue #2* the compositional material is made up of heterogeneous elements, consequently the macro-formal episodes are more noticeable. The overall sound of these pieces could be defined as ‘terraced’, as in terraced dynamics, in the sense that the material builds up in two ways:
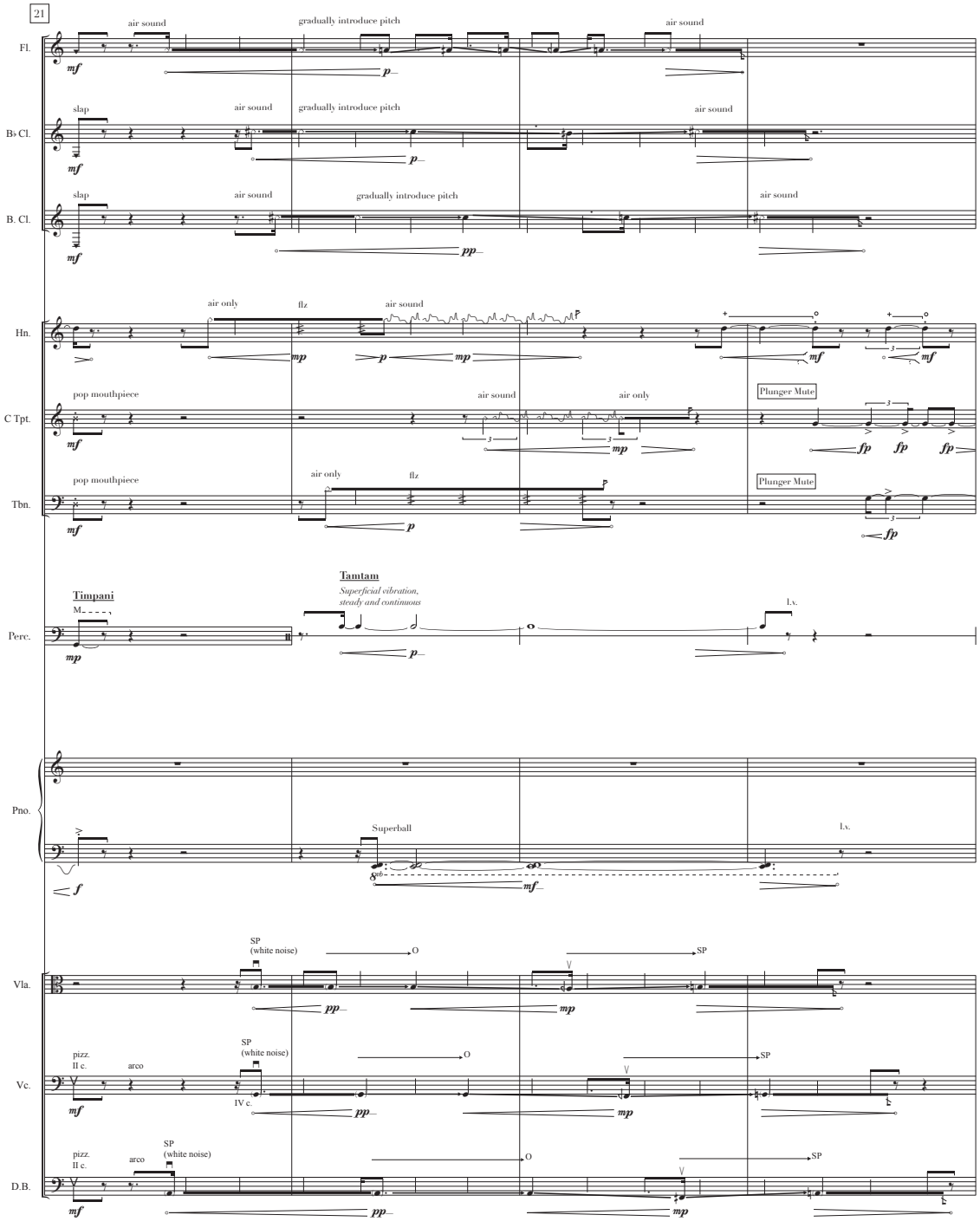
- masses of sound growing by virtue of homogeneous layers being added to other layers (this is especially the case of *Avenue #2*, where boundaries between formal sections are not so noticeable);
- masses of sound transforming into other masses of sound by virtue of juxtaposition of heterogeneous layers, generating timbral contrasts in the transition from one to the other. When this happens, boundaries between formal sections become more noticeable.

As is the case with the chamber works that will follow, in this piece I aim at obtaining a formal structure as fluid as possible despite the use of heterogeneous materials, particularly concerning the short and vertical events that disrupt the sense of formal continuity.



Example 4.1

Avenue #2 | *Edges of Landscape*, bars 1-4



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Example 4.2

Avenue #2 | Edges of Landscape, bars 21-24

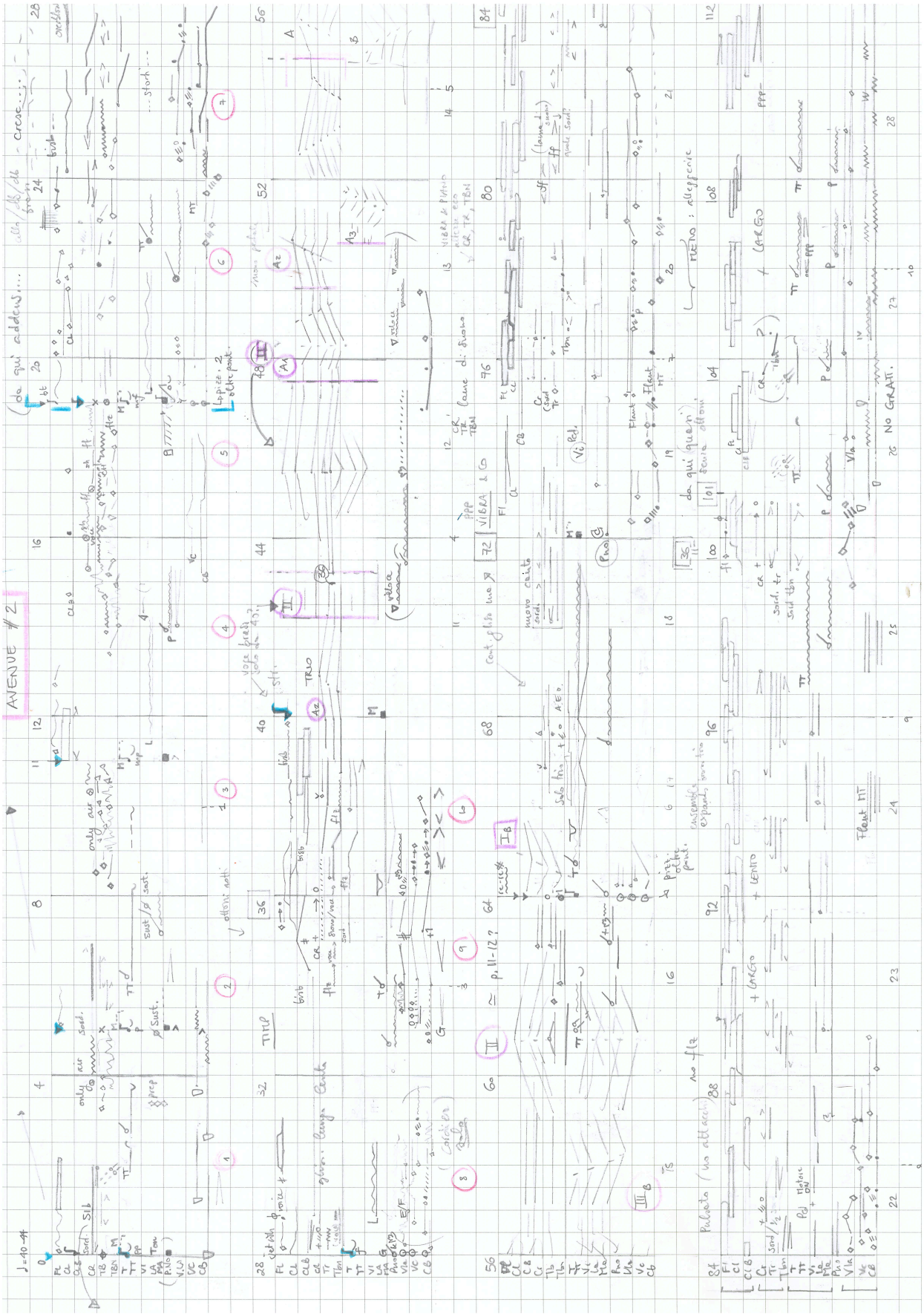


Figure 2
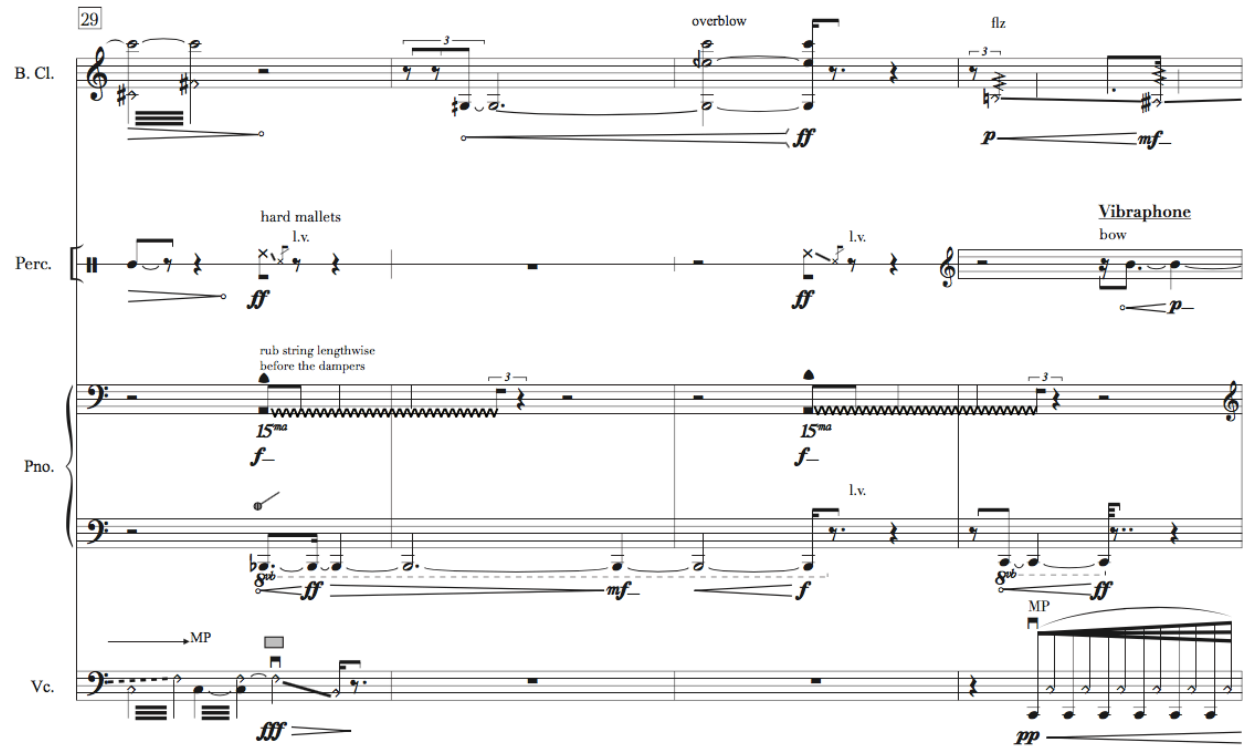
Preliminary diagram for Avenue #2

EARTHSCAPES (*2018)

EARTHSCAPE I - WATERMARK (2018 - rev. 2019)
for bass clarinet, cello, piano and percussion

Earthscapes is a chamber music cycle for 7 performers (flute / bass flute, bass clarinet, violin, viola, cello, percussion and piano). The first piece in this cycle, *Watermark*, is a chamber quartet that features bass clarinet, cello, piano and percussion (bass drum, tam tam and vibraphone). Here I embrace different approaches to explore and stretch the idea of identity, exploring separate and contrasting identities within one larger identity, attempting to portray how we experience our sense of place in the world: at times through a quiet sense of belonging, at other times through disruption and conflict. Through sound every instrument reveals different sides of its own identity, each showcasing, for instance, linear, granular and percussive features. They express their sense of identity and explore their relationships to one another in various ways: sometimes looking for a common ground through resonance or combining into a unified meta instrument, at other times coming into conflict and having one or more instruments emerge and take over the balance of the ensemble.

Formally, the main focus of this piece is that of generating formal events with blurred contours (in the sense of difficult to grasp), as opposed to other previous chamber works in which the form of the piece was made up of episodes with rather rigid and clearly identifiable contours (e.g. *Marbles*). I deliberately work with a set of heterogeneous compositional materials to explore ways of obtaining a formal structure as fluid as possible, despite the contrast among materials. The micro-formal elements I use, in fact, are not necessarily malleable in their nature, not being exclusively horizontal and linear sounds (as was the case with *Atlas*, for instance). Several passages, in fact, employ a combination of sound encompassing all types of articulations: short, percussive, granular, long and linear sounds (e.g. bar 29-32, see example 5). This is because here the micro-materials are combined and put in relation to each other not on the basis of their similarities (short elements with short elements, long with long, granular with granular, percussive with percussive, etc.), but rather on the basis of their ability to form relationships among different acoustic components.



Example 5

Watermark, bars 29-32

EARTHSCAPE II - MYCELIA (2019 - rev. 2020)

for bass flute, bass clarinet, violin, cello and piano

The focus of the second work in this cycle, *Mycelia,* is the process of seamless transformation of one material into another within a formal structure conceived as a series of events and phases of appearance, rather than as a series of formal blocks.

This piece employs three prototypes of compositional materials (*a*, *b*, *c*), two of which are very contrasting: material *a* characterized by soft dynamics, smooth timbral components, and elements of instability and continuity; *b* characterized by strong dynamics, a rough and saturated sound, and the presence of an attack transient; and *c*, with elements in common with the two, acting as a boundary material.



Figure 3

Preliminary sketches for *Mycelia* - material *a*

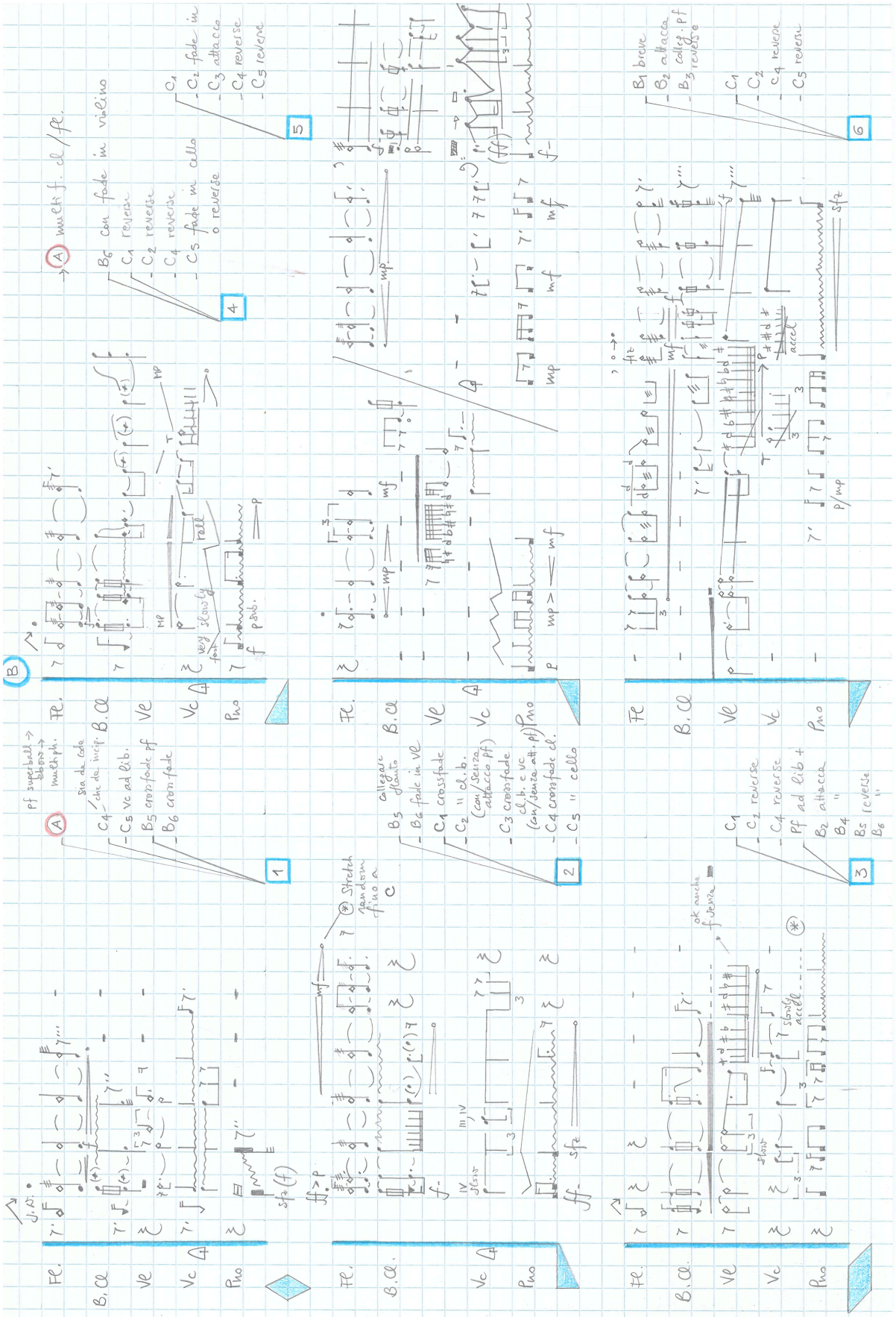


Figure 4

Preliminary sketches for *Mycelia* - material *b*

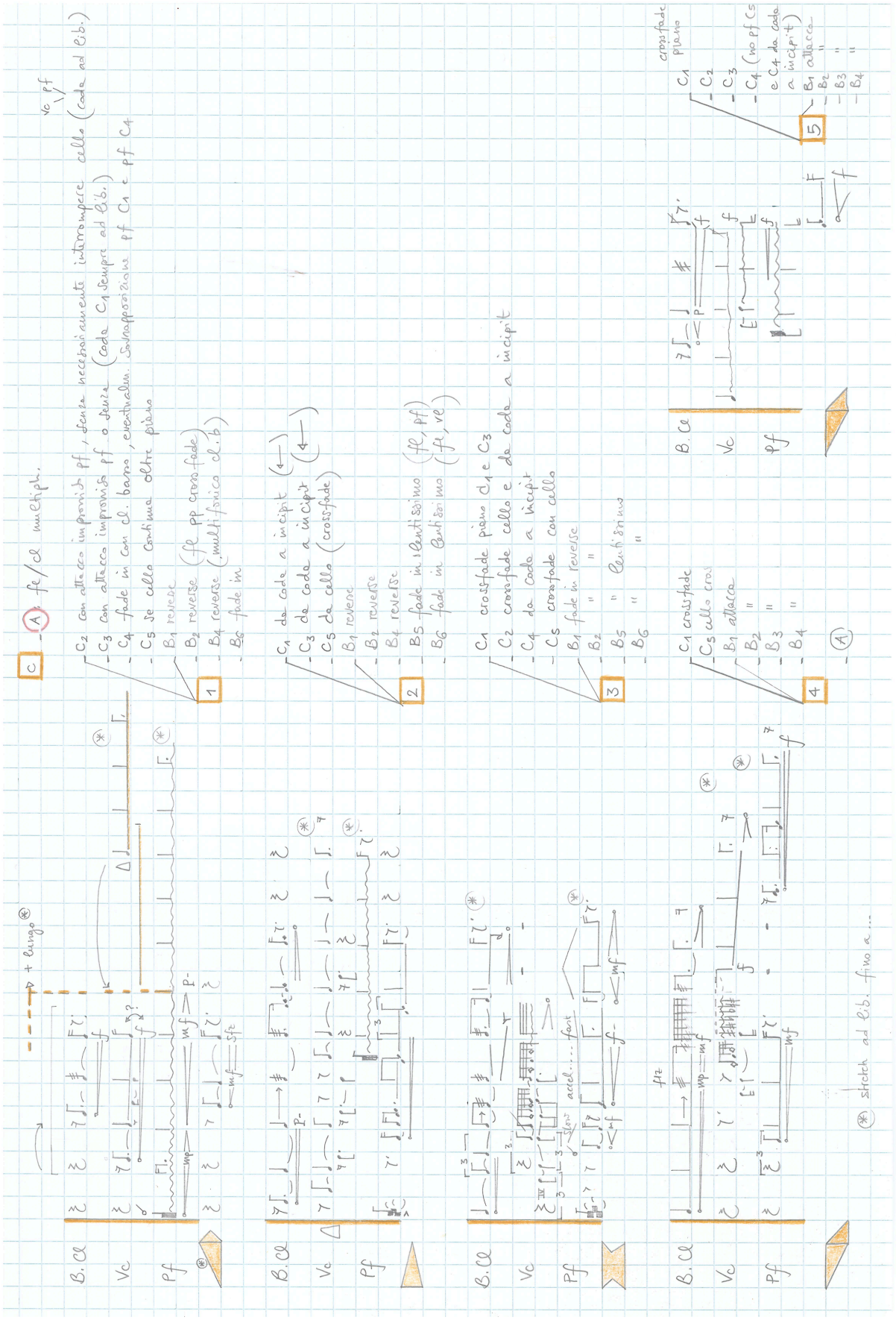


Figure 5

Preliminary sketches for *Mycelia* - material *c*

After identifying the set of acoustic components that could form structural relationships within each prototype (*a*, *b*, and *c*), I then built variations for *a* (a^{I}, a^{II}, a^{III}), *b* (b^{I}, b^{II}, b^{III}) and *c* (c^{I}, c^{II}, c^{III}) in order to showcase that relationships among *a*, *b* and *c* could be thought of as a series of relationships among variations of *a*, *b* and *c* (such as a^{I} - b^{II}, c^{III} - a^{II} , etc.).

By focusing on similarities and contrasts within the three categories, in the piece I showcase the continuous development of relationships springing from the single and combined internal components of *a*, *b* and *c*, conceiving the form as a way of listening to the relationships among contrasting materials. The process of building structural relationships among micro-formal elements, which aggregate to constitute macro-formal events, allows for more fluidity also between macro-events, that is between structures generated intertwining the three groups of materials. This implies that a more sophisticated listening is required to identify the various macro-formal elements. As stated earlier, the piece is not made up of formal blocks but rather from a series of polarizing events, among which the attack transients coming from variations on material material *b* (e.g. bars 25-27, see example 6) become a point of orientation when listening to them. The perception of cycles and returns is thus not tied to a sense of beginning or end of the micro-material, but rather to a sense of consequentiality, that is to say to the perception of a musical event - however archetypal - and its consequences over time.

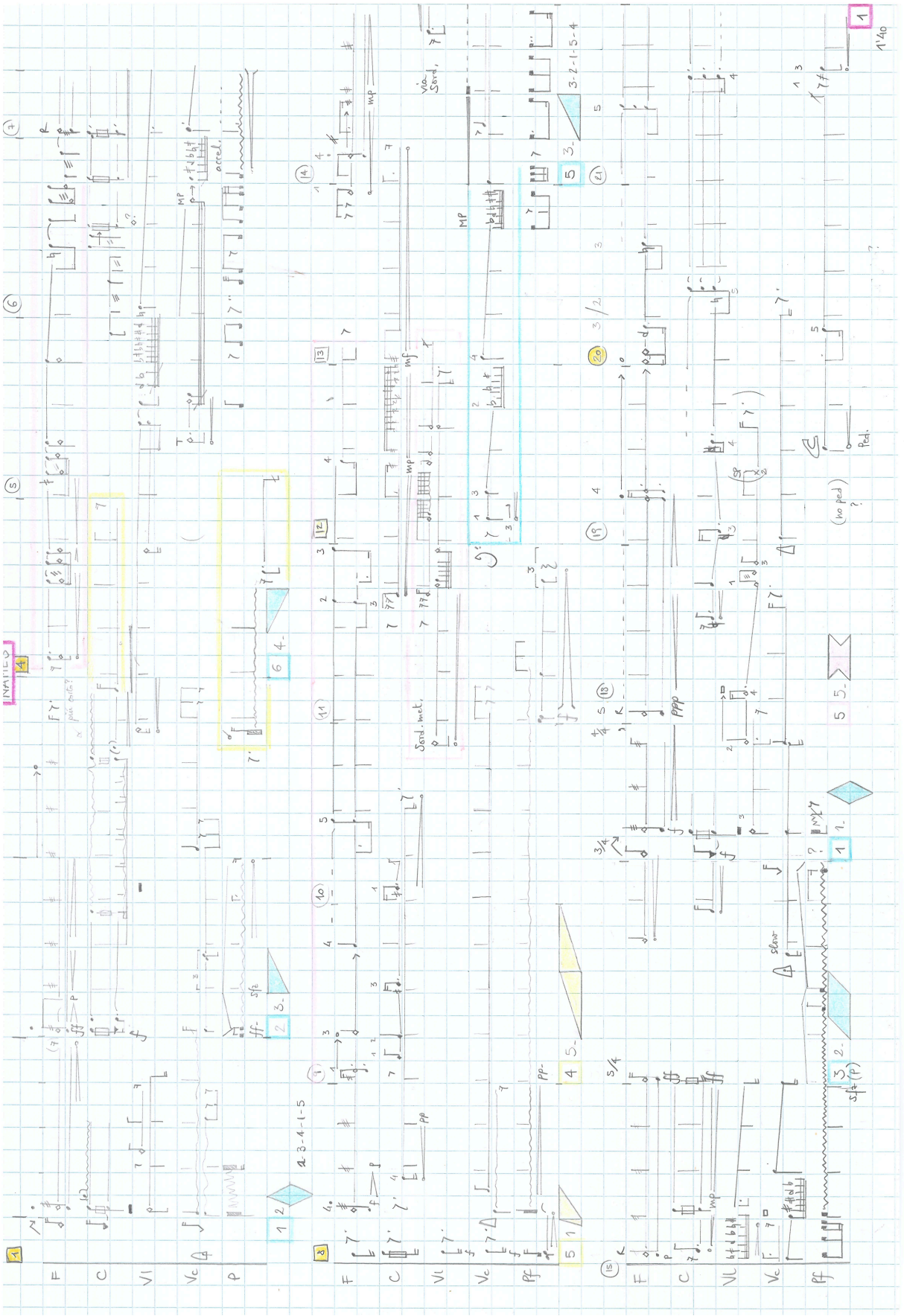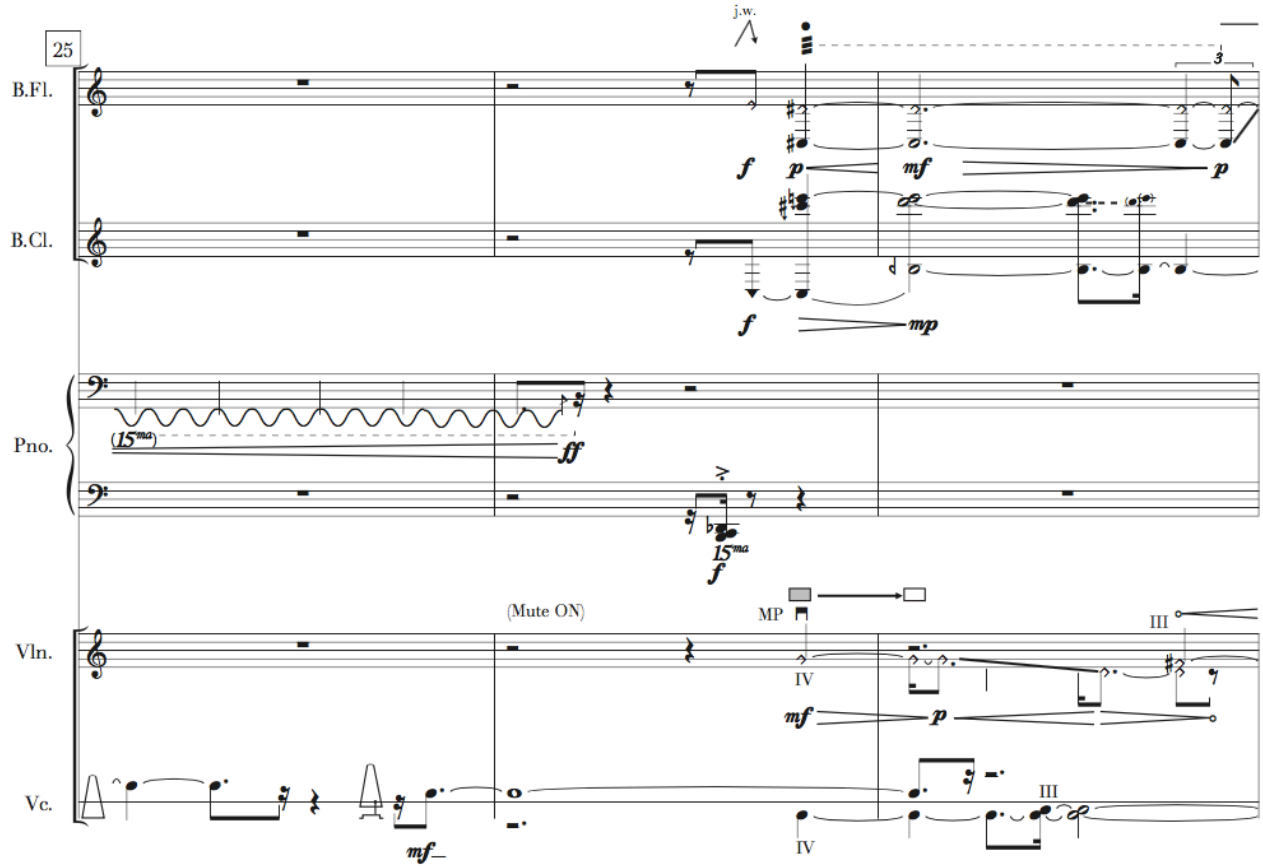


Figure 6

Preliminary diagram for *Mycelia*, page 1



Example 6

Mycelia, bars 25-27

EARTHSCAPE III - TOKYO POLAROID (2020 - rev. 2021)

for flute and string trio

The aesthetic and formal premises of *Tokyo Polaroid* are similar to those of *Mycelia*, in that here as well I used three main prototypes, each of which consisting of several internal components, and worked on these to produce a series of variations, which during the piece I intertwined to create complex structures and to showcase different types of connection among the three groups. Whereas in *Mycelia* the three prototypes used are very well identifiable from one another, in *Tokyo Polaroid* it is more difficult to identify the contours of the micro-formal elements I use. In fact, my focus has been the conception of micro figures as textural components, as opposed to easily isolable sound objects. I therefore tried to make textures out of irregular elements and out of soloists' passages, rather than building contrasts between long and punctual sounds.

In the passages that appear to be harmonically richer (e.g. bars 40-42, see example 7), I borrowed harmonies from the shō, a Japanese free reed mouth organ with seventeen bamboo pipes of different lengths, which has been used in Gagaku (Japanese court music) for over a thousand years. As a chord instrument, the shō can play eleven types of chords, and each chord - in natural tuning - consists of five to six notes (see figure 7). The role of the shō in the Gagaku orchestra is to play chords (called *aitake*) as a continuous textural soundscape for the melodies.
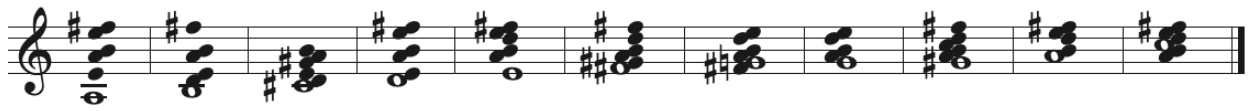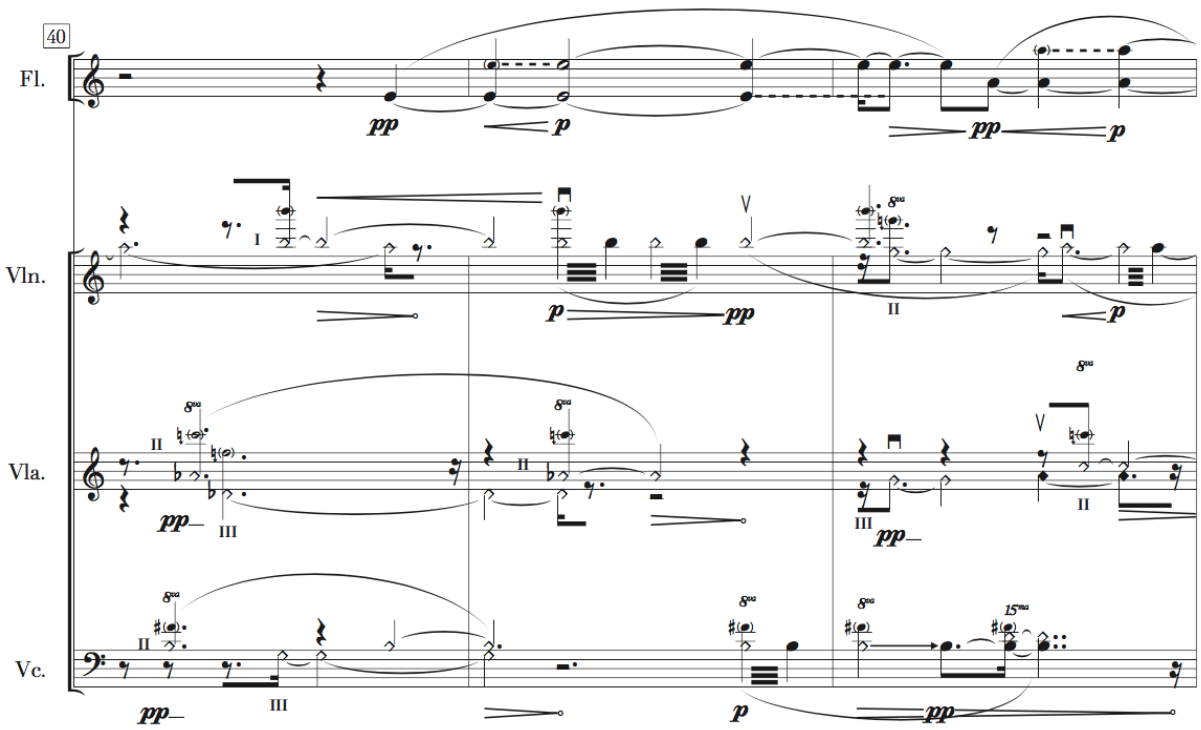


Figure 7

Transcription of the eleven aitake chords used in Gagaku



Example 7

Tokyo Polaroid, bars 40-42

In *Tokyo Polaroid* I only borrowed a few chords from the shō and often used a sub set of each chord each time. Partially imitating the physiology of the instrument, which allows the entry of one sound at a time until the six possible sounds are reached all together, I built a filigree of harmonics which features the simultaneous presence of more or less sounds at the same time. In detail, this filigree of natural and artificial harmonics is made of time-varying elements that organically connect the two types of harmonics by means of changes of pressure (light to ordinary, and vice versa), as well as glissandi and tremolandi between the two.

AZIMUTH (2020)

for solo French horn

The two solo pieces in my portfolio (*Azimuth* and *Shinryoku*) have as their focus the exploration of the instrument. In both cases I have started from what each instrument technically offers to get to understand how to mould it to my expressive needs.

This work for solo French horn is conceived around some of the most characteristic aspects of the instrument. As opposed to the modern-day French horn, its predecessor - the natural horn - had several gaps in its harmonic range which required some adjustments on the player's part in order to produce notes outside of its harmonic series. Pitch changes were made either modulating the lip tension or changing the position of the hand inside the bell. This hand-stopping technique, still in use with modern brass instruments, affects both the pitch and the sound, lowering the former and dampening the latter.

My piece revolves around this particular technique, focusing on it to generate subtle shifts both in pitch and timbre. At the same time this work pursues a formal reflection on the relationship between presence and absence by working on the sound-silence dichotomy to create contrasting formal zones; starting from the alternation of a long silence and a long sound, the piece is structured as to articulate all the possible development of the relationship between sound and silence.

The word *Azimuth* comes from the Arabic السموت (as-sumūt), meaning 'the directions', and it is used in astronomy as a celestial coordinate. It describes an arc of the horizon measured between a fixed point (such as true north) and the vertical circle passing through the centre of an object, usually clockwise from the north point through 360 degrees. Being an angular measurement in a spherical coordinate system, the title recalls the angular movement of the hand changing position inside the bell.

SHINRYOKU (2021)

for solo electric guitar

Since the electric guitar has only limited literature in contemporary music, but not so much in other genres, during the initial phase of research for this piece I made time to be acquainted with contributions to its repertoire made by the djent and progressive rock scenes in particular. Listening to Tosin Abasi (Animals as Leaders), Roopam Garg (DARK/The Surrealist) Tim Henson (Polyphia) and Ichika Nito I found a variety of riff material that seemed very interesting; I was interested in the idea of working with them out of established aesthetic or genre conventions, as is the case with rock music.

Shinryoku employs idiomatic techniques for the electric guitar (tapping, hammer-on, pull-off, harmonics, sweep, etc.) and is conceived to be played without a pick, i.e., with the five fingers. As with any other instrument, the voice of the electric guitar carries its past with it, so I worked to find a timbral dimension that somehow brought the electric guitar back to being as authentic as possible.

In Japanese, the word ‘shin-ryoku’ (新緑) means 'new green' and describes the shade of green by which the new green leaves stand out in the beginning of spring. Similarly, this piece focuses on the relationship between heterogeneity and homogeneity, an aspect that I explore in relation to timbre as well as harmony. The piece opens on the contrast between two gestures: a polarized pitch interspersed with silence and harmonic sweeps. I started from a homogeneity of pitches and dynamics, obtaining the same pitch on different strings and using different techniques, precisely to emphasize the difference in timbre. Initially the sweeps stand out both gesturally and harmonically with respect to the static nature of a single pitch. In the course of the piece, other figures progressively emerge to bridge the gap between the two initial gestures, making it clear how the two are actually linked by harmony as well as timbre.

As for the formal conception, the idea behind *Shinryoku* is that of an instant that reflects the continuous change of seasons and time. On this idea I based my decision to work with a linear conception of time, with micro gestures emerging and returning to silence; an intangible continuum hovers - although a true, through-composed continuum is never actually there in the piece.