

Artistic Practice in the Academy:

Creative Freedom and the Research Agenda

Keynote Lecture

Professor Stephen Goss

Director of Research

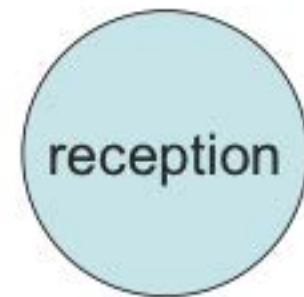
Professor of Composition

Director of the International Guitar Research Centre

School of Arts, University of Surrey

Overview

- 1 Introduction
- 2 my Compositional Process
- 3 Landscape and Music
- 4 the Collaborative Process
- 5 Practice and Research
- 6 Questions



1 - Introduction

What interests me as a composer?

- Collaboration (composition as a social activity)
- Working towards a satisfactory end-point
(not away from an urtext)
- Evoking a sense of time and place (landscape and memory)
- Quotation and reference (intertextuality)
- Research and the evolving of a process
- Performance practice and virtuosity
- Music that is engaging and moving

An example

All example

Precipitato

5th movement from *Caught Between* (2011) for cello and piano

- Two regular collaborators
Graham Caskie and Thomas Carroll
- All movements are interventionist
- The piano part is the finale from Prokofiev's 7th Piano Sonata (1942) - Graham's idea.
- Obligato cello part added as a free counterpoint to the Prokofiev

The Creative Process

The Creative Process



Serendipity and Research

Accidental Discoveries

penicillin

the microwave oven

Superglue

radiation

the pacemaker

Viagra

2 - My Compositional Process

- 1 Impetus
- 2 Ideas
- 3 Design
- 4 Finding good notes
- 5 Refinement

Impetus

initial decision-making

- Examples of an impetus might be: a text to be sung, a narrative, something visual, a place or an object, or a musical idea.
- The impetus drives the compositional process on every architectonic level. A 'good' impetus should act as a consistent link between form, method and materials.
- The impetus then usually leads to research where the main ideas of the piece are developed and shaped.

Ideas

insight

- A strong impetus often leads to a wealth of ideas
- Ideas are not difficult, most people have creative and inventive ideas every day
- The difficult part comes in taking those ideas, honing them and realising them in a satisfactory way

Design

creating structure for spontaneity

- Design might include deciding on a form or structure, on where to use particular instrumental colours, registers, textures, densities, harmonies, and so on: In the design phase the framework is defined.
- Here the composer can think in terms of a hierarchy of musical parameters.

Finding good notes

intuition, improvisation and tacit knowledge

- Mark Anthony Turnage once said that most important thing in composition is 'finding good notes'

composition is finding good notes.

- This is the part composers rarely talk about – the part where we actually choose which notes to use on the musical surface
- We use ‘tacit’ or ‘embodied’ knowledge, built up over thousands of hours of experience, in order to work intuitively
- Jonathan W. Schooler warns of ‘verbal overshadowing’ ‘paralysis through analysis’
- This part of the process can take the longest and goes through many drafts and stages of refinement.

Verbal overshadowing

‘When you start becoming reflective about the process, it undermines your ability. You lose the flow. There are

certain kinds of fluid, intuitive nonverbal kinds of experience that are vulnerable to this process’.

Jonathan W. Schooler

see Schooler, Ohlson, & Brooks - *Thoughts Beyond Words: When Language Overshadows Insight* Journal of Experimental Psychology, 122, No. 2 (1993)

The storytelling problem

‘The reason we talk about choosing notes so little is because it’s done largely intuitively. One note is selected over another simply because we think it sounds better. How do we know when we’ve made a good

decision? We don't know, we can only feel it. How can we talk or write about intuitive decision-making? Recent research into the adaptive unconscious suggests there is a locked door between what we can do with our unconscious minds and how we try to explain it – the storytelling problem, as psychologist Timothy Wilson calls it.

Stephen Goss

Soundboard, the Journal of the Guitar Foundation of America, Vol. 39, No. 3 (2013)

see *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious* (Harvard University Press, 2002)

Refinement

the editing process

- The refining includes fixing many musical parameters into place: pitch, rhythm, orchestration, dynamics.

into place: pitch, rhythm, articulation, dynamics, articulation etc.

- Then there's editing. This is where a piece can really come to life. Many important decisions about the musical surface are left to the editing stage.

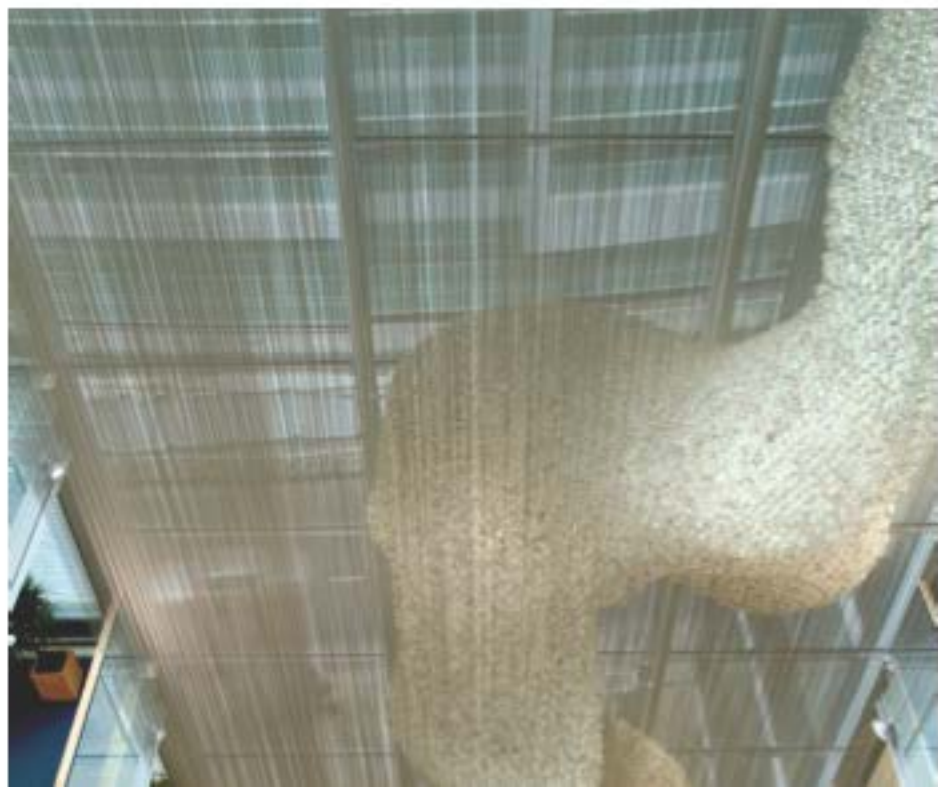
3 - Landscape and Music

Piano Concerto (2013)

- 1 - Fantare
- 2 - Moto Perpetuo
- 3 - Adagio
- 4 - Finale

Bleigiessen – Heatherwick Studio







Thomas Heatherwick

Bleigiessen

Impetus

The design work of the Heatherwick Studio

Ideas

To recreate the atmosphere, feel, character and conception of Heatherwick's Bleigiessen sculpture in musical form

Design

Structural and harmonic template mapped from the

sculpture

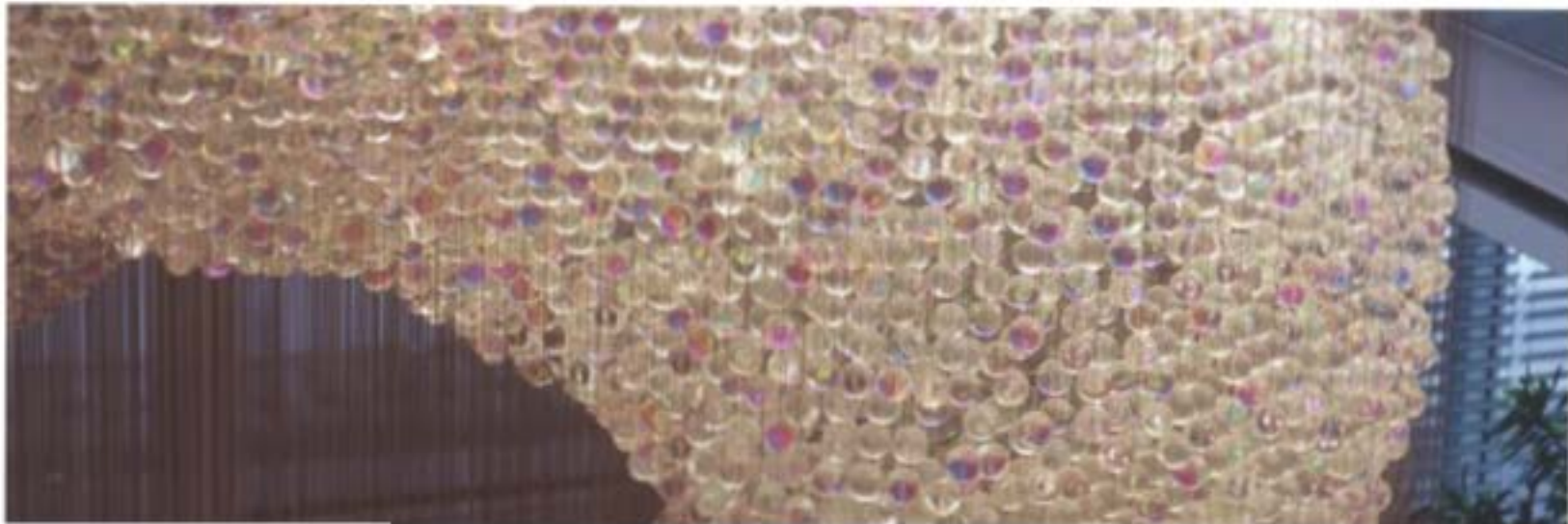
Finding
good notes

Making the most of the material generated by the
design

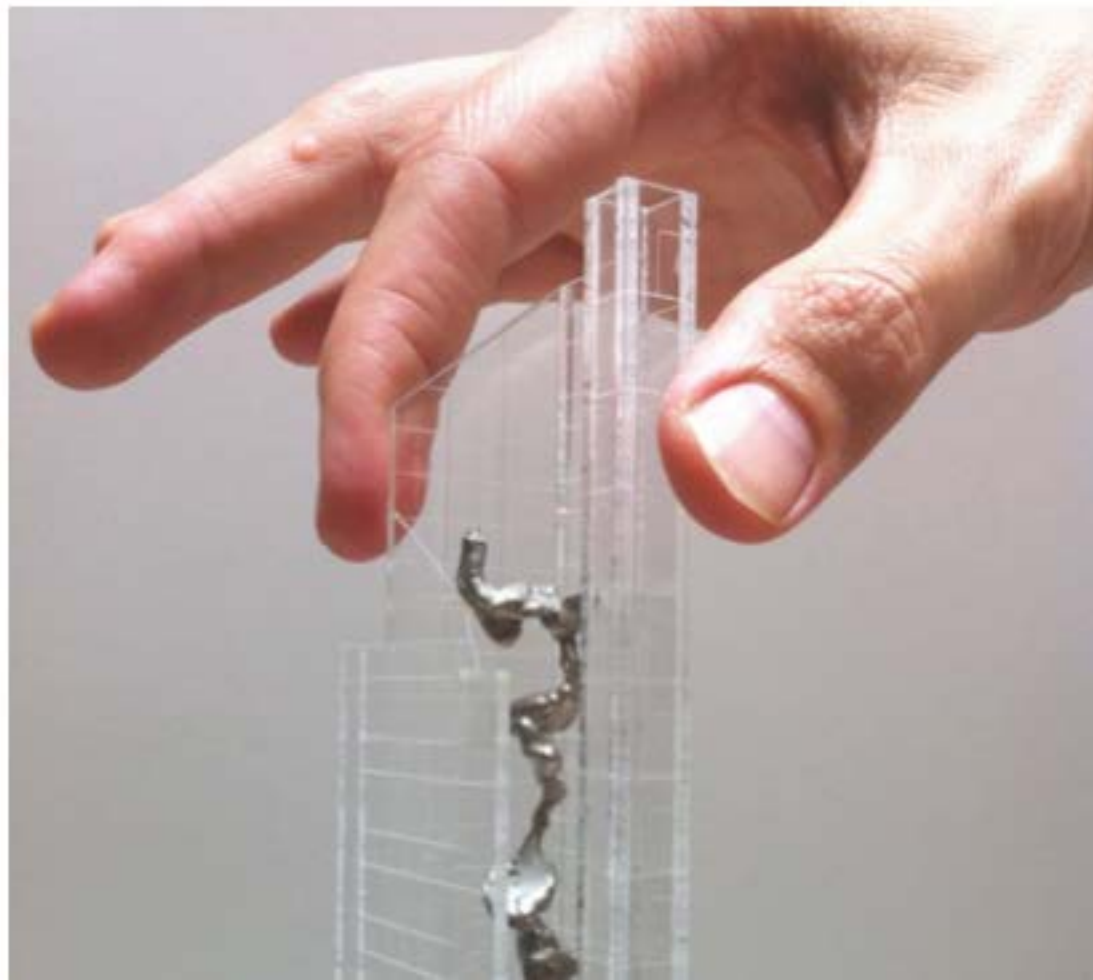
Refinement

Orchestrating and editing

Close up

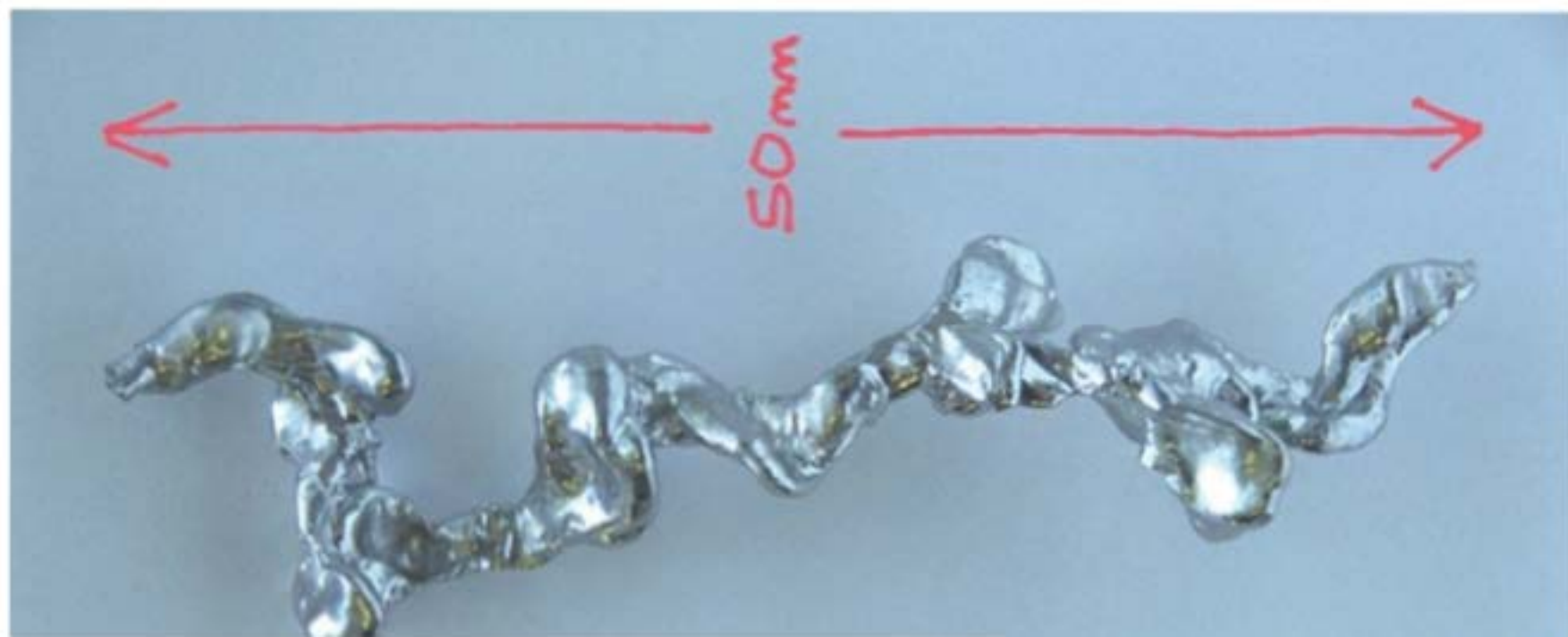




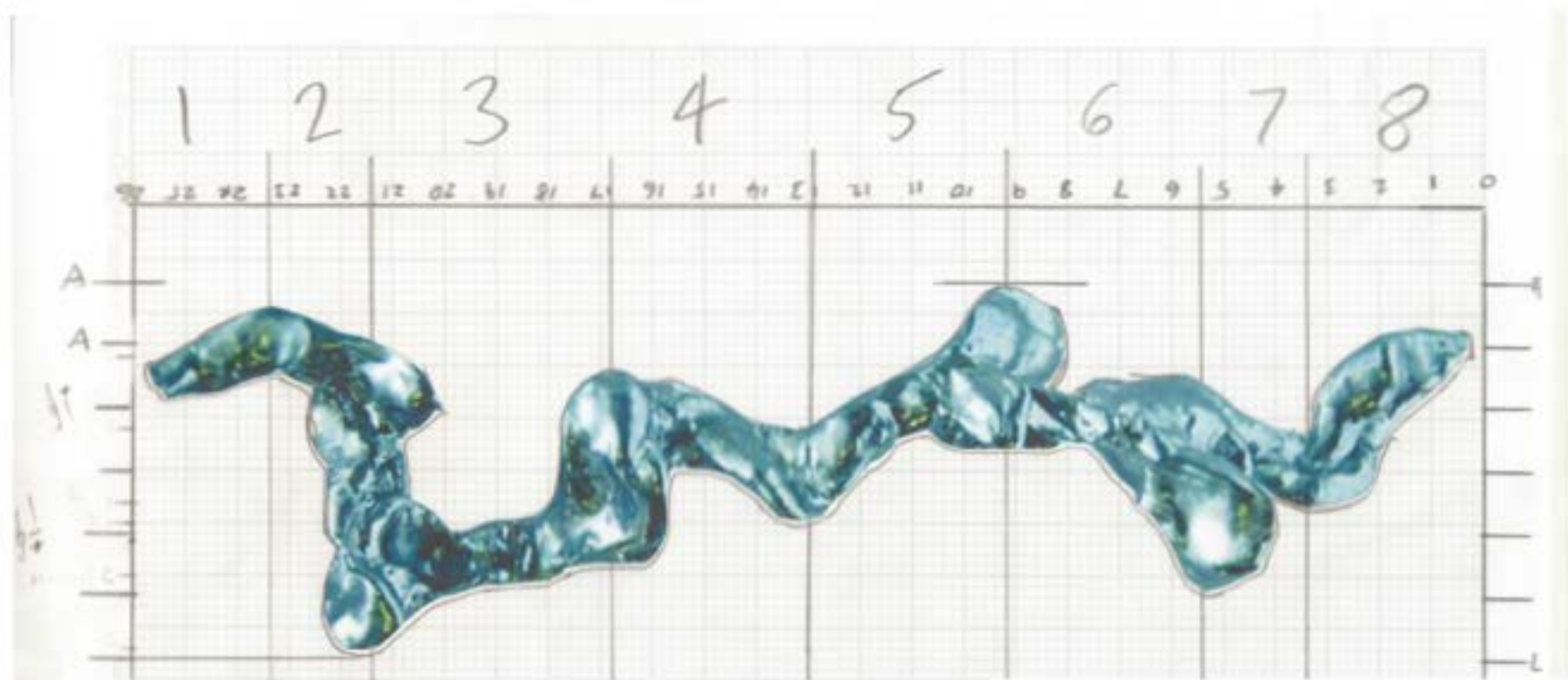




Lead model



Bleigiessen Design





Harmonic Fields for Bleigiessen

November 2012

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of two systems of two staves each. The sections are numbered 1 through 8:

- Section 1:** Treble clef, two notes (G4, A4) with a fermata. Bass clef, two notes (G3, A3).
- Section 2:** Treble clef, two notes (B4, C5) with a flat sign over the first note. Bass clef, two notes (B2, C3) with a flat sign over the first note.
- Section 3:** Treble clef, two notes (D5, E5) with a sharp sign over the first note. Bass clef, two notes (D2, E2) with a sharp sign over the first note.
- Section 4:** Treble clef, two notes (F5, G5) with a sharp sign over the first note. Bass clef, two notes (F2, G2) with a flat sign over the first note.
- Section 5:** Treble clef, two notes (A5, B5) with a sharp sign over the first note. Bass clef, two notes (A1, B1).
- Section 6:** Treble clef, two notes (C5, D5) with a flat sign over the first note. Bass clef, two notes (C2, D2) with a flat sign over the first note.
- Section 7:** Treble clef, two notes (E5, F5) with a flat sign over the first note. Bass clef, two notes (E2, F2) with a flat sign over the first note.
- Section 8:** Treble clef, two notes (G5, A5). Bass clef, two notes (G2, A2).

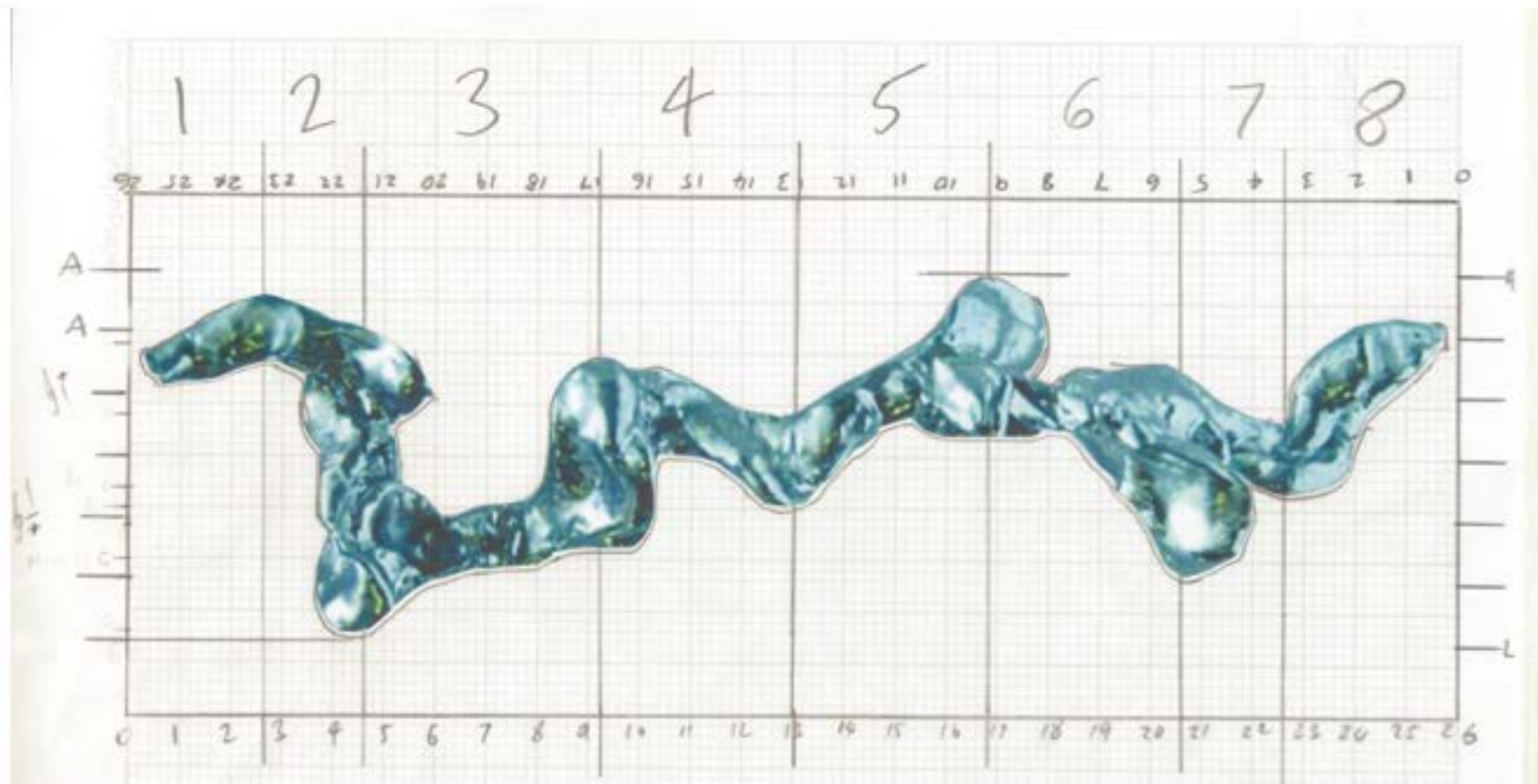


Harmonic Fields

- In Bleigiessen each harmonic field has 5 core pitches and 2 subsidiary pitches (the remaining 5 pitches are orbital and sparingly used)
- From these pitches a number of chords and pitch gamuts are created
- The harmonic fields change at key structural moments,

governed by the shape of the sculpture

Bleigiessen Design





4 - The Collaborative Process

Where, in the compositional process, does collaboration take place?

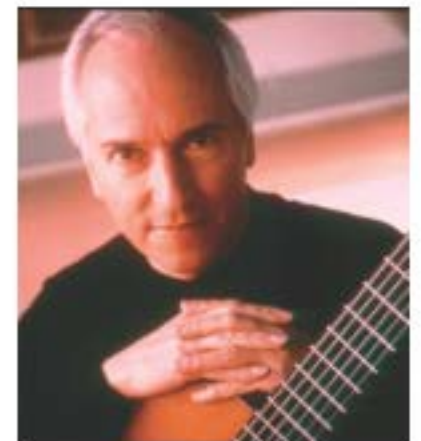
- Impetus
- Ideas
- Design
- Finding good notes
- Refinement

Degrees of collaborative intervention

Low	Emmanuel Despax	<i>Piano Concerto</i> (2013)
	John Williams	<i>The Flower of Cities</i> (2012)
↓	Graham Roberts	<i>Guitar Concerto</i> (2012)
	Jonathan Leathwood	<i>Oxen of the Sun</i> (2003/4)
High	Graham Caskie	<i>Concerto for Five</i> (2013)

Minor collaborative intervention

- Emmanuel Despax – *Piano Concerto* (2013)
 - Very little close collaborative work - some initial ideas were discussed, but basically I wrote the piece and delivered it. There were a few minor refinements made in the rehearsal process
- John Williams – *The Flower of Cities* (2012)
 - John wanted the piece to be about the open spaces in the City of London, he even made some suggestions of specific sites. We discussed the overall plan in detail and then he left me to it. Again there were some minor refinements in the rehearsal process.



Major collaborative intervention

- Graham Caskie – *Concerto for Five* (2013)
 - Graham came up with almost all the ideas and material. I was more a project manager/arranger/facilitator of his ideas. I wanted to share authorship of the piece with Graham, but he wouldn't let me.



An example of collaboration

- Graham Roberts – *Guitar Concerto* (2012)
 - Close discussion and collaboration at all stages of the compositional process
 - Chords, rasgueado patterns and right hand figurations for the Finale
 - I came up with a lexicon of chords derived from music from the 1930s
 - Graham selected his favourite ones
 - He used them as a basis for improvisation and played me suggestions
 - I adapted this material and used it in the finale of the concerto



Guitar Concerto - Chords for doodling

Pennies from Heaven **Alabama Song** **I got rhythm**

Guitar

This section contains the first three pieces of the 'Guitar Concerto'. Each piece is represented by a system of three staves: a single staff for the guitar and a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) for the piano accompaniment. The guitar part for 'Pennies from Heaven' features a complex chord structure with many naturals and sharps. 'Alabama Song' has a simpler chord structure with a few naturals. 'I got rhythm' features a chord with a flat and a natural. The piano accompaniment includes melodic lines in the right hand and bass lines in the left hand.

20th Century Blues **Caravan** **Fascinating Rhythm**

Gtr.

This section contains the last three pieces of the 'Guitar Concerto'. Each piece is represented by a system of three staves: a single staff for the guitar and a grand staff for the piano accompaniment. The guitar part for '20th Century Blues' starts with a '6' above the staff and features a complex chord structure. 'Caravan' has a chord with a flat. 'Fascinating Rhythm' has a chord with a sharp and a flat. The piano accompaniment includes melodic lines in the right hand and bass lines in the left hand.

12 **Small Hotel** **Brazil** **De-lovely**

Gtr.

La Creation **After you've gone** **18 - Zing went the strings of my heart**

16 Gtr.

21 **Britten Romance** **S Johnny**

Gtr.

The image shows a musical score for guitar and piano. The score is divided into two sections: "Britten Romance" and "S Johnny". The guitar part (Gtr.) is on a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The piano part is on two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The "Britten Romance" section starts at measure 21 and ends at measure 24. The "S Johnny" section starts at measure 25 and ends at measure 28. The guitar part has a double bar line at the end of measure 24 and another at the end of measure 28. The piano part has a double bar line at the end of measure 24 and another at the end of measure 28.

Guitar Concerto collaboration

- Early get together with Graham Roberts
- Final section of the Finale
John Williams and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra,
conducted by Paul Daniel

5 - Practice and Research

But where's the research?
Isn't this just artistic practice?

contextualisation

documentation

textual analysis

critical reflection

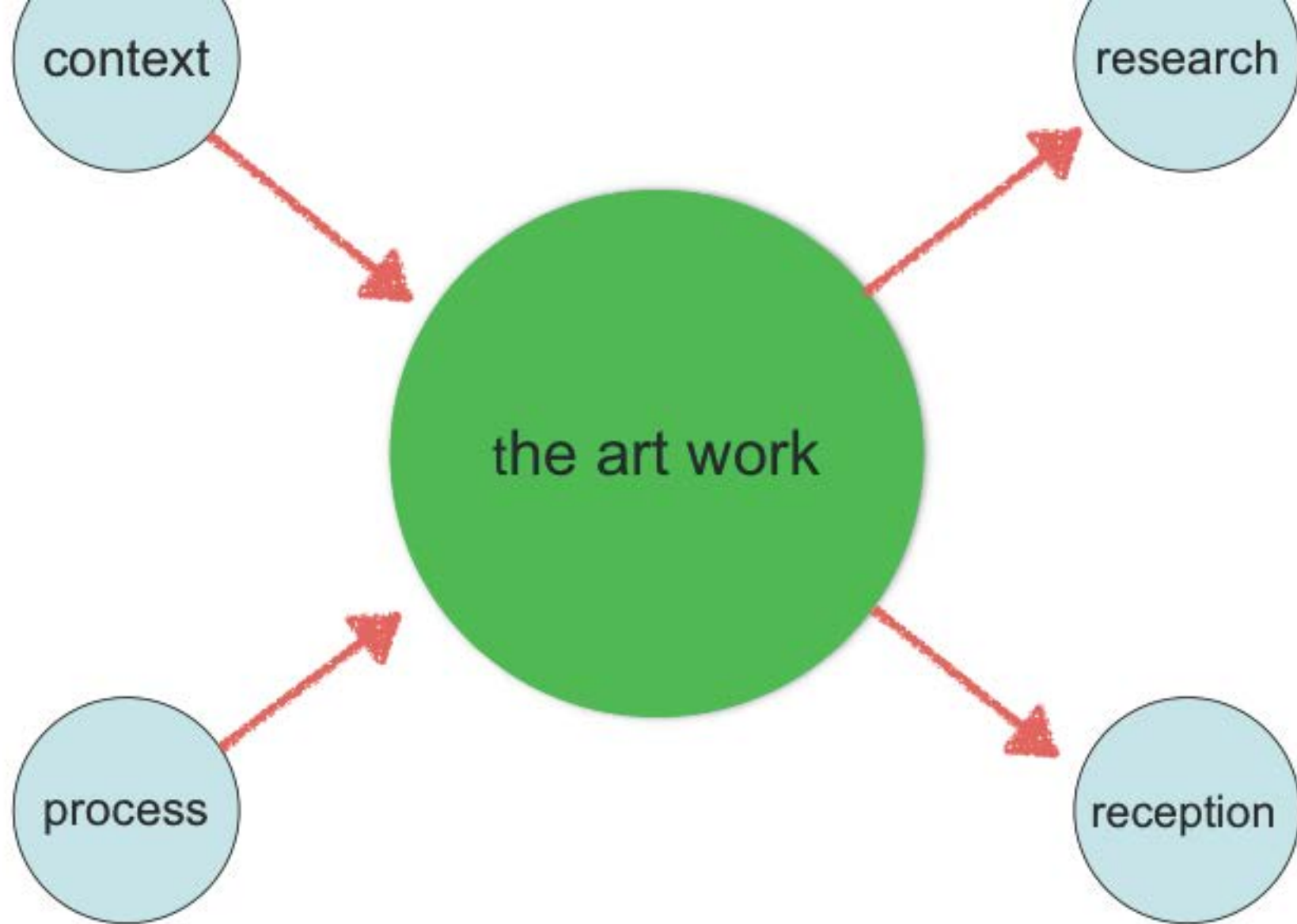
Arts and Humanities Research Council

Creative output can be produced, or practice undertaken, as an integral part of a research process.

The Council would expect, however, this practice to be accompanied by some form of documentation of the research process, as well as some form of textual analysis or explanation to support its position and as a record of your critical reflection.

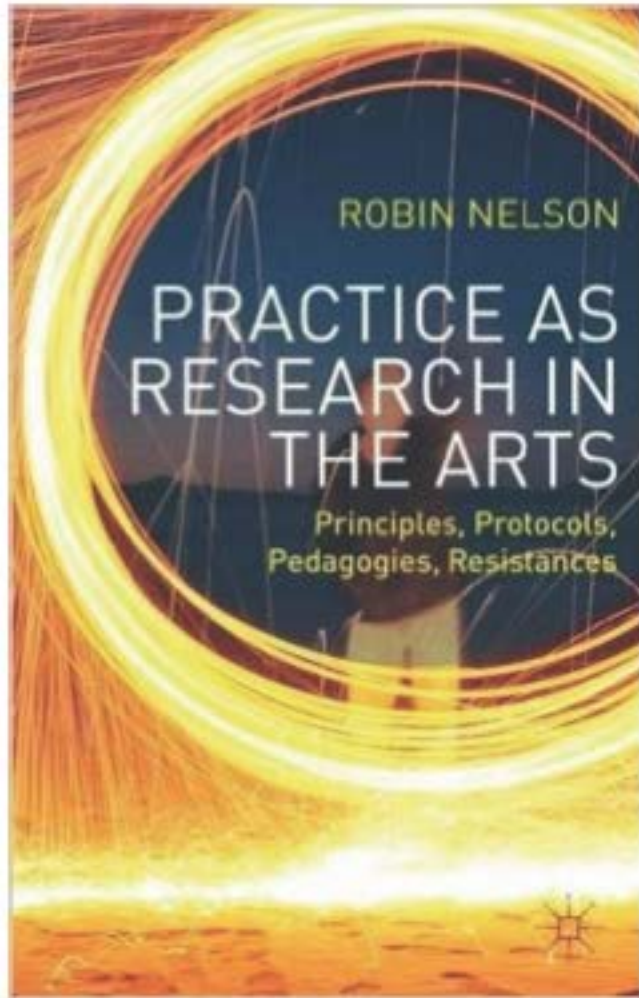
Equally, creativity or practice may involve no such process at all, in which case it would be ineligible for funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

from the AHRC website, accessed 6th April 2016



A guide for PhD researchers?

A guide for PhD researchers?



Robin Nelson

Research as Practice in the Arts

This book takes a fresh 'how to' approach to Practice as Research

Nelson and his contributors address the questions students, professional practitioner-researchers, regulators and examiners have posed in this domain.

The Croft Controversy

- Jonathan Croft, 'Composition is not Research.'
 - Piers Hellawell, 'Treating Composers as Researchers is Bonkers.'
 - Luk Vaes, 'When Composition is not Research.'
 - Lawrence Dunn, 'Squaring the damn composition-research circle.'
 - Martin Parker Dixon, 'Composition can be research (some comments on John Croft's recent article).'
 - David Pocknee, 'Composition Is Not A Jaffa Cake, Research Is Not A Biscuit: A Riposte to John Croft.'
 - Huib Schippers, 'The Marriage of Art and Academia: Challenges and Opportunities for Music Research in Practice-based Environments.'
 - Christopher Fox, 'Music for a Dis-Uniting Kingdom?' (Including some reflections on composition as research).
-

6 - Questions

s.goss@surrey.ac.uk

www.stephengoss.net