

Fruit of the Vine:

Investigating Improvised Musical Composition as a Contradictory
Tool to Un/Cover Occluded Knowledge

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Abstract

This project comprises of an archive of liturgically produced recorded improvisations, accompanied by creative esoteric and profane reflections. The archive is hosted on a website (www.fruitotvine.com) where each improvisation can be experienced in a random order.

Each performance took place in line with the phases of the moon, with around two performances being undertaken every month. These recorded performances were undertaken solo and in collaboration with others, as well as in various locations from the domestic, to the academic, to the professional, to outdoor rural and urban environments. Each performance, and the project as a whole, is concerned with concepts of *change*, *searching*, and *the hidden*. It is rooted in a belief that there is an ineffable presence of *something* beyond human consciousness and experience, the threshold of which can *almost* be outlined in improvised practices, yet it can never be traversed, and this *something* cannot ever be known or understood. As such, this work is additionally concerned with the striving for impossibilities.

The reflections that make up the body of this thesis are structured by the random selection of the website, and cover the banalities of how individual performances were undertaken – what technique or instruments were employed; who the collaborators were; what the location was – as well as dealing with philosophical or occultic topics being explored at the time of recording the works, and creative interpretations of what the sounds present in the music could be perceived to mean.

This PhD thesis is dedicated to the memory of Ronald Mitchell and Roy Howes

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Thanks to the support of my family, especially my mum (Jill), sister (Hazel) and uncle (Chris). Thanks also to my partner, Charlotte, for putting up with me making a racket in various places, all of the time; and for letting me drag her to all sorts of weird places to collect recordings and undertake performances – I’m sorry to say that I will be continuing these practices for the foreseeable future(!).

I am thankful, finally, for all of the interactions I have had with colleagues, collaborators, students, and friends, both within the music department at Newcastle University, and outside of it. As I hope is clear in the writing that follows, substantial work, and significant (subjective) realisations about the world, would never have been possible without these meetings, conversations, lectures, seminars, tutorials, and lessons (even/especially if I was the supposed ‘teacher’).

*While the moon slips into shadowland
Oh soft voices of the night
I join your minstrelsy
And call across the fading silver light
As something calls to me
I may not all your meaning understand
But I have touched your soul in shadowland.*

Big Brave, 'Moonset'

Contents

<i>Introducing the Vine</i>	1
<i>Introducing the Fruit</i>	13
<i>Tracing the Vine</i>	
First Set	14
Second Set	25
Third Set	34
Fourth Set	41
Fifth Set	50
Sixth Set	60
Seventh Set	72
Eighth Set	81
Ninth Set	88
<i>Conclusion: Harvesting the Fruit</i>	98
<i>References</i>	108
<i>Appendix</i>	120

Introducing the Vine

Fruit of the Vine has been a five-year creative practice project that has involved conducting liturgically timetabled improvised recorded performances. This has culminated with an output of over 150 works, each a minimum of 20 minutes long, by the submission of the doctorate (although this work is still ongoing). All of the recordings are hosted on an online archive that is deliberately difficult to navigate, and it is this archive that constitutes the primary body of work for the submission. Many of these improvised performances have reflected on philosophical, spiritual, religious, and/or musical theories and texts; using improvised creative practice as a means to think through these ideas and uncover, recover, or express responses to these ideas in a non-linguistic manner.

Creative practice is the very heart of this project, both in a pragmatic and a structural sense (the work I conduct for the project always fits around the schedule of the creative practice), and in a more integral sense: the creative practice work has *always* been informing the musical, philosophical, religious, occultic, or political concepts that I have covered in the (traditional) research and they in turn have *always* influenced the creative practice work I subsequently create. Any theory (be it 'music theory' or 'cultural theory') is *only* useful and applicable to the project if I can see a practical application for it. The reading and (traditional notions of) research that I have conducted throughout the project has had a singular goal to feed into the creative practice: ideas that seem interesting are picked up and improvised with, turned one way and another and inside out (they are investigated with intuition, from the 'inside' as Henri Bergson would describe it), and then they are put down again.¹

This doctoral project hasn't applied a single creative technique or idea to the entire project; nor has it worked within a singular musical aesthetic. The creative work has covered freely improvised work that *sounds* like freely improvised work (for example the work of Derek Bailey, Eugene Chadbourne, etc); or work that sounds like minimalist composition (such as Julius Eastman; Terry Riley); 'Kosmische' (Neu!; Cluster); drone (Eliane Radigue; Phil Niblock); Anglo-American folk guitar (Robbie Basho, John Fahey);

¹ Henri Bergson, Keith Ansell-Pearson, Michael Kolkman, Michael Vaughan, *Creative Evolution* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 114.

ambient (Sarah Davachi; Pauline Oliveros); rock/punk (U.S. Maple; Deerhoof); and ‘jazz’ (Mary Halvorsen; Pharoah Sanders); and frequently explores the use of recorded environmental ‘soundscapes’ (such as the work of Chris Watson; Kate Carr), to name a few idioms employed. However, while the archive does possess individual works that have these genre qualities, many works lend themselves to a blurring between these distinct categories, occupying and referencing many differing idiomatic voices simultaneously. In the instances where a single set genre is apparent in a performance, this has not typically been the intention when starting the performance, but, rather, the stylistic voice which emerges as the performance progresses, or through the materials employed. Rather than the Derek Bailey anti-idiomatic approach to improvisation, the approach here tends to be a multi-idiomatic approach, that layers idioms on top of or next to each other, to question what these idioms have in common with one another, or what they do not, willing to embrace an approach that ‘[freezes] the dialogue’ as an interesting occurrence in itself, rather than something to be avoided.²

There are three methodological principles that have unified the project which are: an openness to ideas, and a willingness to learn from these ideas through their application; an intuitive improvisational approach to both the formation of concepts, and the application of them in a performance setting; and an approach that is continually searching for something new to try, in order to see what this newness reveals and what knowledge it can impart, or, what knowledge is forgotten or occluded. These methodologies, in particular the searching for newness, and openness within the musical style(s) explored in the doctorate, resonates with the methodology of ‘thinking improvisationally’ explained by artist Henry Threadgill: this approach refuses to draw on routine and habitual tropes that are easy to fall into, both in the mundane world, and in the creation of artwork.³

Contradictorily, however, the creative work produced has been created in a habitual, routine manner, with a recorded performance being undertaken and ‘released’ on Bandcamp (and then embedded in the online archive) in line with the lunar calendar; with one performance produced in line with the full moon, and another in line with the

² Ben Watson, *Derek Bailey and the Story of Free Improvisation* (London; New York: Verso, 2004), 251.

³ Library of Congress, ‘A Conversation with Henry Threadgill’, *Youtube* (1st April 2014), https://youtu.be/42pCOWN6Uf8?si=fDRi_tjlaTz25Z2Z [accessed 10th April 2024], 1:03:10-1:04:25.

new moon. The moon is significant in this work conceptually as well as structurally: its being a planetary satellite that is observable through its reflection of the sun's light resembles poetically a key theme of the doctoral project; reflection. This work began in January 2019 and continues to the present. The majority of these releases are solo performances, however there are collaborations too. Some of the collaborations that have been uploaded to the archive have taken place in between the lunar calendar releases, and these are considered additional works that have been produced, making the production of work of 'two per month' a *minimum* requirement.

I have worked in duos with (in alphabetical order): Professor John Bowers, Dr Will Edmondson, Marlene Everling, Joseph Harmsworth, John Garner, Rory Johnstone, Michael Mather, Dr Tim Shaw, and Dr Mick Wright. Larger ensembles have been trios of myself with Pete Currie and Wright; Edmondson and Garner; and Robin Fry and Johnstone; and a quartet with Edmondson, Katie Oswell and Marianne Sice. Each of these ensembles has been given its own individual 'artist' name on the archive (the above quartet is named 'New Brain', for example), while all solo works are credited to the archive (Fruit of the Vine), rather than to me as artist.

Instrumentation has been diverse (both from myself and collaborators). I have mainly produced work on my first instrument, the guitar – this has ranged from electric, with and without effects, as well as both steel and nylon acoustics – but I have also performed on piano (an instrument I don't play in any 'professional' capacity), as well as with digital (Virtual Studio Technology, or VST) instruments and synthesisers (some hardware synths, as well as modular and granular 'soft' synths), and I have made use of field recordings using conventional microphones, Electro-Magnetic Field (EMF) microphones, and very-low frequency radio (treating these recordings as both principle and supplementary sound material for works, and the collection and curation of these materials in an improvised manner). The most frequent collaborator on the project, Edmondson, also shares the same diversity in his choice of instrumentation: he has been a vocalist as well as playing acoustic guitars (nylon and steel string), Dictaphone, synthesisers and double bass. This diversity of instrumentation is significant to the

project in terms of both its openness, ‘improvisational thinking’, pursuit of newness, and the recognition of improvisation as contingent.⁴

The recorded performances are listed on the archive as ‘Illuminations’ and given a number, as well as each of these Illuminations having individual ‘album titles’ ([Illumination #108](#) is also named *Fragments*, for example).⁵ This naming as an ‘Illumination’ is a direct reference to mystic artist and poet William Blake and his *Illuminated Books*.⁶ Illuminated manuscripts more broadly, are simply books where the text is decorated with illustrations, however, in such a format, lies a dimension where these illustrations are always ‘intimately connected with a text’, where dialogue and interconnectivity is implicit in the ontology of the form itself.⁷ In terms of *Fruit of the Vine* (FOTV), multiple dialogues are at play: between the musical idioms explored; between the album covers and the audio (some of which were chosen prior to recording and were used to inform the sonic material created, others were chosen after); on the archival site between the album cover and itself, in terms of how the same image is overlaid on top of itself (which sometimes ‘works’ aesthetically, and other times does not); between the archive and an audience; between each *Illumination* of the archive and its preceding and subsequent *Illuminations*; between the tools used, the environment, and myself; and, additionally, if it is a collaborative work, between the collaborators. None of the above is particularly profound, but it is worth stating and understanding that every musical catalogue (and FOTV is no exception) are always speaking to something/someone, are always evidence of a dialogue taking place, even if there is no (real or imagined) audience perceived, there is, nevertheless, an audience of some kind (even if this is ‘only’ the artist themselves).

In the context of Blake, illuminated manuscripts take on a further secondary meaning, that is, they become *illuminated* through their contact with a divine truth. The use of a combination of visual art and text is also important: the texts, on their own *are just text*, but through their combination with artwork, they *become illuminated*.

⁴ Dan DiPiero, *Contingent Encounters: Improvisation in Music and Everyday Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022), 112.

⁵ This example was selected through visiting the archive, with the aleatoric structuring of the site deciding on what would be used as example.

⁶ William Blake, David Bindman (intro), *The Complete Illuminated Books* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2019).

⁷ Janet Backhouse, *The Illuminated Manuscript* (London; New York: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1994), 7.

Likewise, this thesis *needs* to be consumed in relation to the archival recordings, with the work of the archive taking a primary *illuminating* position to the text: it is the music itself which is producing and un/veiling knowledge, the accompanying text is merely (subjective) interpretation. A further resonance to Blake's texts is also present in *FOTV*; like Blake's work, this project is a product of a continual syncretism that mixes influences and concepts from multiple religions, doctrines, philosophies and occultisms into a singular, paradoxical work that is multivocal and transmits multiple contradictory messages.⁸ Doing so originates from a desire to 'lead the [audience, as well as artist(s)] into a process of perpetual discovery, without the closure given to a simple understanding'.⁹

In the (improvised) writing that follows, these *Illuminations* are frequently referred to as 'releases', this is partly due to a hesitation in referring to them as 'albums' – as I frequently did at the beginning of the project – because of the historical associations the production of an 'album' represents, and its grounding in, predominantly, popular music culture. 'Releases' is not totally free of these associations, but it is a little less easily defined. Furthermore, 'release' while having certain culture industry associations, does possess an additional meaning connected with the concept of freedom and, more importantly, the verb *freeing*.¹⁰ These works have been, or are undergoing the process of being released, but they are also, simultaneously, in their consumption by an audience, performing a *release*; they are *releasing* a form of knowledge into the cosmos which, in their case, is a culture artefact. As such, these works are functioning both as reified cultural artefacts and dynamic cultural *verbs*.

The archive is presented as a randomised collection to reflect the project's focus on process over product, and on the concepts of contingency and duration as key methodologies. There are no concrete indicators as to how large or small the archive is, besides the number assigned to each Illumination, and no catalogue or temporal or thematic systems to order the releases. The only way the work is presented and can be

⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the World of Mourning and the New International* (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), 18.

⁹ David Bindman, 'Introduction', in Blake, *The Complete Illuminated Books*, 11.

¹⁰ Nathaniel Mackey, 'Other: From Verb to Noun', *Representations*, No. 39 (1992), 52.

navigated is through the randomisation feature, which guides audiences onwards to the 'Next Illumination' (there is a way to search for individual Illuminations, via typing the number after 'illumination-' in the URL bar of the browser being used, accompanied by the year and month of release, but this is closer to a cheat or a hack than an actual designed feature of the archive). Having the archive ordered in this way is vital for the project: when the archive is navigated, an audience experiences work created in the initial stages of the project adjacent to work produced closer to submission, jumping through time, and even retracing the same point on occasion. Consequently, when an exploration is examined in full, the path taken strongly resembles the tracing of the complex rhizomatic shape of a vine, with the 'Illuminated' releases throughout being the ripe fruit hanging down. By numbering each *Illumination*, this jumping across time is highlighted explicitly to an archive visitor.

This project doesn't consider there to be in/correct ways to experience the archive and, therefore, there are no 'listening guides' for audiences or examiners of the project. Releases can be listened to in their entirety, multiple times, skipped through arbitrarily, or only the first minute listened to before a listener moves on to the 'Next Illumination'. Should an *Illumination* be repeated in an audience's visit to the archive, it is left up to them to decide whether to skip through onto the 'Next Illumination', or to re-listen to it and try to understand the temporal contextuality this release now has as a repeated experience, over it being the first time.

If a striking sound is heard once, it is just a sound, twice is a repetition, but a third is the beginning of rhythm. Beyond this, pitch itself is a sustained repeated experience, a sustained rhythm, as can be observed in the changing of a frequency dial on a Low Frequency Oscillator (LFO) of a modular synthesiser, or the time control of a self-oscillating delay pedal, where a 'beat' can be transformed into a tone simply by increasing its speed. Furthermore, two differing rhythms can be sped up to produce harmony as Henry Cowell made clear in *New Musical Resources*.¹¹ Such observations reduce music and sound to their most basic: to the concept of rhythm; but additionally, it highlights the importance of rhythm throughout everyday life and forces this project to continually draw its attention to repetition and recontextualisation. Jacques Derrida

¹¹ Henry Cowell, David Nicholls, *New Musical Resources* (Cambridge; New York; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 47-48.

explores this recontextualisation and repetition in *Specters of Marx* in relation to ghosts: every repetition is, also, simultaneously a first and last as well.¹² In the film *Groundhog Day*, each repeated day is *not* the same day, from the perspective of Bill Murray, because with every repetition, Murray possesses the *knowledge* that the day is repeated, thus the quality of sameness is transformed into a unique difference.¹³

The archive can be visited from anywhere, with any means that an audience deems fit; from playing the audio out of a tinny mobile phone speaker, to booking a control room in a studio and using their monitors, to everything in between. The work can be listened to when cooking or on the train, or in a time especially carved out to provide the work with one's full attention. The project as a whole has been generated through a continual engagement with creative materials, and through the creation of a routine and transformation of creative practice into a profane or mundane activity, and it should therefore be experienced and treated as such. It has come into being from having been part of everyday life, and so should be given this same treatment in the way it is experienced.

The work is multi-vocal and multi-functional. It *is* the 'creative practice element' that is to be submitted for consideration of an academic qualification, but it is also the distillation of my own personal creative practice over a five-year period. This (creative) work has been produced variously in the academic settings of university buildings, in 'professional' settings of private rehearsal/recording studios, in the 'field' at specific sites of importance, and in the private settings of flats/houses (both my own and of collaborators). In terms of exhibition, work from the archive, for the archive, or inspired by the archive has been presented at academic conferences, in undergraduate lectures, in private music lessons, in art galleries and music venues, in religious buildings and pilgrimage sites, and in personal settings of the homes of friends and family.

Music generally possesses this multifunctional quality and is treated as the accompanying to religious service (such as the organ playing at church), the semi-ritualistic-yet-profane (such as at a SunnO))) performance), through to the background accompaniment to life (like the playing of a busker on a busy high street, or, even, popular music pumped into supermarkets and shopping centres). These examples of

¹² Derrida, 10.

¹³ Harold Raims, *Groundhog Day* (1993).

music are connected simultaneously to the mundane and the divine: a transcendental experience can be had listening to the playlisting of a local Morrisons as much as it could listening to the organist of Carlisle cathedral, and this work recognises and understands this, and wishes to be experienced in the same way. Not just as an either/or, but contradictorily, also as a both; whilst the project *is* profane, academic, and ‘professional’, it is also, paradoxically, private and sacred. This is not merely a facet of this project, but an ontological spiritual quality of music generally, as Marcel Cobussen states:

Neither subject nor object. Connecting body and soul. Between heaven and earth. Determining an unambiguous place for the spirituality of music seems a complex task. [...] music’s spiritual dimension has no clear definable place of its own, no well-defined *topos*. Its inbetweenness seems to mean “both ... and” and “neither ... nor”. Music’s spirituality is both heavenly as well as earthly and simultaneously none of these two, that is, it cannot be reduced to one of the poles. However, this intermediary state is also not a third place, as in a kind of dialectic move where the opposites are sublated. [...] The inbetweenness seems to resist and disorganize the oppositions without even constituting a third term and without ever leaving room for a dialectical solution.¹⁴

Because the research on this project is led by the creative practice, the commentary of the creative practice forms the main body of the written component. However, because this creative practice has been informed (and goes on to inform) the historical, philosophical, and occultic research; and explores broader concepts of philosophy and religion (than those attributed solely to music) these concepts are also covered in the commentary, but always through the lens of the creative practice. Furthermore, the commentary that follows is not purely a report on what was done and what ideas I was thinking of at the time, but it is creatively engaged with the music as artefact, and the writing is an improvised creative-occultic product in itself, that can be examined and engaged with as such because, (as already stated) the creative practice is both the beginning and the end of this doctoral work.

I have framed the following writing in groups of three performance recordings, viewing each triptych as a unit comparable to a ‘three card spread’ in tarot, and have then reviewed them at the end of each set. The work that has been selected for review

¹⁴ Marcel Cobussen, *Thresholds: Rethinking Spirituality Through Music* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2008), 47.

has been picked in the same aleatoric way as examiners and other external visitors to the site will engage in the work, so the shuffled element of the creative practice presentation has directly influenced the work that is written about here, and the order it is written in. So, in the writing too, the shape of the project as a whole can be observed; as a vine that moves and jumps both forwards and backwards through its teleology, tying itself in knots and embracing *change* whilst shunning *development*.

The commentaries are approached through multiple modes of writing: theoretical (both in terms of philosophical reflection and music analysis); creative (normally utilising stream-of-consciousness and reacting to the musical work while listening in real time); and thirdly, occasionally, the use of generative artificial intelligence that has been trained by a model created from my own previous creative reflections. Some of these commentaries were written at the time of the performance of the music (normally written in the time it took to render the audio file of the performance in the Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) used and the time taken to upload this file to the distribution platform Bandcamp), and others when writing up the thesis and the randomisation function of the website selected releases to be reflected on. When the reflections were written at the time of the release, they have been included with the release on Bandcamp as liner notes, otherwise they are only featured in this thesis (all the liner notes to also feature in the thesis are expanded on further here, however).

The structure and content of this work employs improvisation and the free play of ideas, much like with the production of the music, with the chance selections of the website and contingent events surrounding the music's creation and secondarily the thesis writing to dictate the topics covered in the writing. As such, this thesis is continually creatively engaged and, even when some elements may seem rooted in academia, they are very deliberately not intended to be in the strictest sense (with a wholehearted embrace of misinterpretation and error). This work is not, for example, intended as a philosophical text, and in instances when philosophers are used, it is as a means to voice and drift through certain observations, a belief that the 'voice' of philosophy is, in the context, the best tool at the disposal of the writer at the time. In

some respects, this tangential wander across and between disparate, loosely connected topics resembles W.G. Sebald's novel *The Rings of Saturn*.¹⁵

The reason multiple modes of writing are employed in the commentaries is due to a grappling (and, ultimately a failure) to realise the function and emotive and philosophical achievements of the music when attempting to express these in language. For the most part, the reflections begin with mundane historical details about the creation of the work, before progressing into deeper philosophical and/or musical analysis. Oftentimes, however, these reflections are not felt to be sufficient in translating the music's message and its impact and interpretation by myself into language, at which points the register is switched. At such points I mainly turn to an attempt at expressing these insights through the mode of creative writing, which then also invariably fails; sometimes I turn to the use of generative AI to express them, in a recognition of the futility of rendering such reflections into language, hoping (also unsuccessfully) that the non-human may better express and summarise the work.

There are some occasions where the liner notes accompanying the music is not featured in the thesis (e.g. [Illumination #53](#); [Illumination #77](#)); these commentaries are absent from the thesis because they were contributions of my collaborators on the project. In this respect it allows for the subjectivity of the following comments to be brought to the fore: these commentaries are my own interpretations of the work, and they can be shared by their audience or disagreed with, and as is the case with *Illuminations #53* and *#77*, where even the contributors were not in total agreement about their interpretations of the work.

At the end of each triptych of reflections is a final section titled 'Reading'. The function of this section is unstable in the initial groups but begins to become clearer as the thesis progresses. These sections begin as a means of attempting to conclude or summarise the triptych of commentaries preceding it, but as the thesis progresses the function shifts to begin to act as a commentary of its own, that instead of focusing in on a singular release, details observations taken from viewing the 'Set' of three previous releases as a whole. This emerging into being exposes the process of the writing as an improvised work: a structure was established at the beginning of the writing (of this

¹⁵ W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn* (London: Vintage Classics, 2020).

version of the thesis), which was maintained throughout the duration of its writing, and the content within this structure was improvised with and played with to get the most out of them. Through the earlier readings being weaker (as their purpose had not been fully realised) attempts to highlight the project's focus of exhibiting a process rather than a finished product.

This doctorate questions what a sustained engagement in improvised creative practice, used as a tool for seeking out occluded knowledge, can uncover, for myself (and collaborators) as artist(s), and for an audience as witnesses. This knowledge could be merely pertaining to subjective understandings of artistic and collaborative ideas (e.g. how one's sense of identity changes when collaborating in one group in comparison to another, or alone); or it could speak to broader social and political understandings; or religio-philosophical insights about the world and the work's place within it.

Most commonly, and increasingly as the project progressed, the concepts reflected on by individual releases originated from multiple religio-philosophical traditions; and were frequently and deliberately occluded (or, more truthfully, not revealed) in their titles and the images that accompany the works, this allows for a greater amount of freedom in interpretation to be made by a listener. While there is, perhaps, a greater proportion of Western religious concepts that are meditated on throughout the project – which is reflective of my geographical positioning in the world, and cultural upbringing – non-Western positions are included and reflected alongside, oftentimes within the same performance. As someone whose is from a white, rural, low-economic British background, I have had a great deal of exposure in my life from mainstream Christianity, Christian mysticism (I would walk past Julian of Norwich's anchorage daily in my late teens), British folklore, and Western esotericism and occultism, and so it is with these philosophies that I feel the most comfortable to explore, pull apart, and combine, without feeling like I am exploiting them, or looting these traditions.

Releases concerned with a single, or primary, religio-philosophical position come from traditions such as: western Christianity (e.g. [Illuminations #47](#) and [#106](#)); Islam ([#150](#); [#63](#)); shared Abrahamic concepts originating in Judaism ([#84](#); [#109](#)); Eastern Orthodox Christianity ([#70](#); [#117](#)); Christian mysticism ([Illumination #23](#); [#64](#));

Judaic mysticism ([#72](#); [#81](#)); Sufism ([#74](#); [#107](#)); Gnosticism ([#8](#); [#76](#)); and Ravidassia ([#83](#)). Historic European paganism is explored such as ancient Egyptian, Roman, Greek and Norse mythology (*Illumination* [#65](#); [#54](#); [#71](#); [#28](#) respectively); as well as folklore ([#53](#); [#68](#)); and paranormal investigations/spiritualism ([#112](#); [#148](#)). There are releases that deal with concepts taken from mainstream western philosophy – that use the structure of the project as an opportunity to meditate on concepts that I was reading about at the time of the performances – for example, the works of Martin Heidegger and Henri Bergson ([#45](#) and [#124](#) respectively). There are also releases primarily concerned with Western esotericism and occultism, such as the Elizabethan magician John Dee; the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn; Thelema; and Austin Osman Spare ([#43](#); [#50](#); [#4](#); [#7](#) respectively). None of these positions are fully integrated into the project, nor are they explored comprehensibly (and, quite possibly misinterpreted in places, both deliberately and accidentally). This engagement of ideas aligns with the methodology of the project as a whole of ‘thinking improvisationally’ – as already discussed in terms of aesthetics – whereby these ideas are picked up and considered, turned in a number of ways to assess their relevancy *to myself* as artist, before being tossed aside until such time they are picked up and explored again in another way.

In its presentation, the project hopes to question concepts of growth and development but arguing simultaneously against stasis. It understands history as inheritance, and does seek to reflect on this, but this reflection does not necessarily always require there to be any alteration, or if there is, drastic breaks can also be present. It views iconoclasm and repetition as just as important critical devices as development and evolution. Although any drastic breaks or shifts in style are always caveated: they can be framed as my having ‘said everything necessary’ in this style, or with these materials, but only ever ‘for the moment’. There is always a precondition that ideas, aesthetics, arrangements, etc. can be picked up and revisited again, and that the temporal shift that has been experienced from the initial point to the second recontextualises these artistic decisions and gestures. Such a recontextualisation is also, then, reflected in the presentation of the work, as well as in its production.

Introducing the Fruit

The archive can be found and experienced here:

<https://www.fruitotvine.com>

Tracing the Vine

First Set

Past: [Illumination #65: Senet](#)

This performance formed an attempt to draw down the Ancient Egyptian God of writing and wisdom, Thoth, and the Egyptian lunar deity Khonsu. It came at a time when, in addition to my usual research and teaching commitments I was ‘moonlighting’ as an exams invigilator at a high school an hour’s walk from my house. This physically resulted in me being a little strung-out from some 12–14-hour workdays and a six-day week; and, as a result, incapable of thinking in the cohesive way I normally would. However, perhaps such a mind-set was ideal to be meeting two Gods of the moon, on their terms. On the evening of the piece’s release, I was to be teaching the Pink Floyd song ‘Set the Controls to the Heart of the Sun’: which is particularly significant for a number of reasons.¹⁶ Firstly, down to the most famous association Pink Floyd holds with the moon: the album *the Dark Side of the Moon*.¹⁷ Although the song I was teaching wasn’t from this record, the association still remains, as Genesis Breyer P-Orridge states a sample or reference in part to one thing is in actuality referencing the *whole* of a body of work or concept.¹⁸ And secondly, the topic of the song of both space travel and self-destruction was of some importance as a theme for an album concerned with attempting to meet two lunar deities (hence the space travel), and because the event I was attempting to ascertain led to Khonsu forcing himself to destroy part of himself and fundamentally alter his ontological deific status (hence the self-destructive element).

The event which I was trying to get inside of in this performance concerned the two Gods playing a game of Senet (an ancient Egyptian boardgame). Thoth had challenged Khonsu to the game knowing that it was the latter’s favourite, and he would therefore accept; and proposed to raise the stakes by suggesting Khonsu wager part of his territory of the moon should Thoth win. Khonsu agreed to the wager and lost the

¹⁶ Pink Floyd, ‘Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun’, *A Saucerful of Secrets* (Columbia, 1968).

¹⁷ Pink Floyd, *Dark Side of the Moon* (Harvest, 1973).

¹⁸ Genesis Breyer P-Orridge, ‘Thee Splinter Test’, in Richard Metzger (ed.), *Book of Lies: The Disinformation Guide to Magick and the Occult* (New York: The Disinformation Company, 2003), 32.

game. As a result, Thoth claimed a 50% lease of the moon, which is why the moon gradually gets smaller throughout the month until it disappears (Thoth slowly gains more of it until he has it all and then steadily returns it to Khonsu). The performance date of a New Moon was significantly the time at which Thoth had total control of the moon's illumination.¹⁹ The title chosen for this release was 'Senet', not only as it was the game that the two Gods played and staked their reputations and future on, but also because the game was, it felt at the time, the closest I managed in reaching these two deific powers: I felt like an unimportant piece of a seemingly innocuous yet in actuality supremely important game; rattling around the box, mixing with the other pieces, and, ultimately, stuck inside an oppressive darkness and profound *lacking* of divinity: a potential pessimistic atheistic revelation. Such a position was also occupied by humanity in Homer's *Iliad*, or, further, more relevant resonances to the story of the use of a frivolous board game to determine a grand outcome can also be seen in the Sun Ra Film *Space is the Place*, where Ra plays chess against the devil in order to attempt to save humanity from the influence of evil.²⁰

I undertook this performance twice (perhaps, once for each protagonist). The first attempt I made at the performance was aesthetically much more abrasive. It was, for the most part, a continual strumming of an E5 (power) chord on a heavily distorted electric guitar with modulated delay effect. For the whole performance I was also gripping the 'whammy' bar of the guitar while performing. This act, coupled with the modulated delay effect created a thick, daunting, wobbly sound that felt extremely oppressive, as if the moon was shaking on its axis as it orbited the earth: constantly threatening to wobble slightly too far and tumble completely. The whole piece, whilst daunting and oppressive, was also comical, like an animated elephant riding a unicycle across a tight rope (an analogy that feels so visceral to me that I think I'm referencing something, but I can't pinpoint it whatsoever, a scene from *Dumbo*, perhaps?).²¹ Such an image and effect I felt did not do the event I was exploring justice, and believed this

¹⁹ Ann Kramer, *Egyptian Myth: A Treasury of Legends, Art, and History* (Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2016) 16-19.

²⁰ Wolfgang Kullmann, 'Gods and Men in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 89 (1985), 4; John Coney, *Space is the Place* (1974)

²¹ Ben Sharpsteen, *Dumbo* (1941).

was hugely unsuccessful. As a result, I re-recorded the performance the next day, with much greater success.

This second performance is the one that ‘made it’ as the released piece. In comparison to the original attempt, the second one used much less gain, a greater dynamic range and really lent-in to the modulated delay effect still present from the first take, it also built up and utilised long loops of the performance to reintroduce past ideas and recontextualise them against new improvised ones. Like the first take, the second was still principally revolving around a single chord, however this too had been fleshed out from the first take, extending above the ‘5 chord’ to add a minor third (creating an E minor chord), and occasionally flattening the fifth to create a diminished triad. As the piece progresses, the harmony extended, getting more adventurous and further away from the ‘E Minor’ home, but continually returning to the original key as reinforcement of the ‘tonic’ and, perhaps, acting as allegory of Khonsu’s continued hold over the moon, despite having lost to Thoth.

Within Western esotericism Thoth is extremely important: the etymology of Hellenic semi-divine being Hermes Trismegistus takes his name from a conflation of the Greek god Hermes, god of wisdom and the messenger of the Gods, and an epithet commonly attributed to the Egyptian deity Thoth that means ‘thrice great’.²² Many writings were attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, such as sections of the Corpus Hermeticum, and these texts formed the basis of much of the western Alchemy of the early modern period and were extremely influential on Neoplatonism, Islamic and Christian mysticism, along with many of the occult groups of the late 19th and early 20th century (Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Aleister Crowley’s organisations, Theosophy).²³

Perhaps it was Thoth’s cunning nature – which must have only grown in the several thousand years he has been worshipped by humanity – that made him such a difficult character to cross paths with and caused me such difficulty, even forcing me to rerecord an improvisation prior to release. *Illumination #65* is the *only* release that was

²² Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western esoteric traditions: A historical introduction* (Oxford; New York; Auckland; Cape Town; Dar Es Salaam; Hong Kong; Karachi; Kuala Lumpur; Madrid; Melbourne; Mexico City; Nairobi; New Delhi; Shanghai; Taipei; Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2008), 16.

²³ *Ibid.*, 18.

performed as a 'retake' in the archive – and there are *many* performances that have been released that I am not satisfied with – so, that I made the decision to repeat this work is testament to both how badly I viewed the original recording, and how difficult I found reaching these deific powers (and also interesting that the website 'chose' this to be the first release to be written about, given its uniqueness in my sort-of rule-breaking).

Creeping down the sepia-toned empty corridors in search for Khonsu, in search of reflection, in search of illumination. Footsteps echo left and right, false-promises of the trickster Thoth; shadowy, empty reflections of history. The divine child, cosmic traveller and creator of earthly life has lost his power, lost half of his kingdom. Living after the game of senet requires us to spend just one night a month in the gaze of a full reflection. That is the cost of an enlightened wisdom. Thoth, backwards, announces himself in an elongated perfect fifth, the time of creation and travel is behind us. Is now the time of revelation?

Present: [Illumination #12: Raven and Hare](#)

This is another oppressive performance that creates a daunting narrative following on from *Illumination #65*. This performance engaged in a symbolistic ritual discourse with an anthropomorphic spiritual approach, attempting to harness the characteristics of both a Raven and Hare to divine the outcome of events. This particular release engaged with two accounts (one of each animal): of the two ravens belonging to Norse God Odin; and of the hare released by Iceni Queen Boudicca to foretell the outcome of a battle against the Roman Empire.²⁴

This piece was one of the earlier releases on the project, and at the time I was recording full performances and then carving them up into shorter ‘song-length’ pieces. This approach was reasonably quickly abandoned, as it nurtured a dividing up of experience, and of the whole of a musical work, that much of the creative work has since been opposed to. Taking the Bergsonian approach instead, that an outsider categorisation and division of ideas can only go so far in an understanding and, in fact, being within a work, within its total duration one can gain a greater insight into the work *as a whole*.²⁵ This work, like the majority of releases, was performed on guitar, but, for the most part, it is a guitar performance that is occluding its source, as rhythmic tapping on the pickups, heavy distortion and careful tweaking of speeds on dual delay pedals (often with one self-oscillating), was used as a disguising or veiling of the ‘instrument’, or to turn the effects pedal circuits themselves into sound generative sources. Along with the previous performance discussed, this piece used changing and repeating loops that were improvised over. Due to the nature of the loops, it is often difficult to distinguish what is a loop and what is a ‘live’ performance. Because much of this performance relies on the tones and noise generated through the effects pedals, the guitar’s tuning and the piece’s overall melodic and harmonic content are totally arbitrary and the performance drifts towards a more ‘musique concrète’, electro-acoustic, or a ‘noise’ approach to its composition than some of the semi-formalist ideas explored in other releases.

²⁴ Stephen A. Mitchell ‘Óðinn’s Ravens’, in Jürg Glauser, Pernille Hermann and Stephen A. Mitchell (eds.), *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies* (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 454; Luke John Murphy and Carly Ameen, ‘The Shifting Baselines of the British Hare Goddess’, *Open Archaeology* 6(1) (2020), 216.

²⁵ Bergson, Henri, Margaret Nancy, Palmer, W. Scott (trans), *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone, 2005), 183.

The performance began with a soaring bird, the shadowy corvid rising and descending as it glides over the thermal currents of time, space, and changing understanding. Out on the stormy moors of a timeless desolation, wind howls halfway. Odin awaits the return of his fearless avian companions, how long has he waited? He can never be sure as the realm that he is trapped within, along with all other divinity, lies outside that of time. It is outside space, outside all material concepts. Humanity dreams of the divine: dreaming, dreaming, ever dreaming. But those dreams can never become reality: their very existence is ontologically opposed to that of divinity. How can a dog imagine what it is to be a rock?

A captive hare awakens and slowly comes to the understanding that it is caught between two raging trains, both intent on obliterating one another. They hurtle faster and faster towards one another, before they collide, exploding with shrapnel cast out to career forward and backwards in time, ever further from the event. The hare, stunned, realises that it has foreseen the event and is, in fact, safe in its slumber. But will the hare remember this foretelling when it wakes? Or is it bound to foretell the future whilst simultaneously living in an always-already forgetting of itself, its dasein, its knowledge of what is always living just ahead of its present self?²⁶

A clock is striking from a church tower in the just-before. It is a clock caught between a nightmare and a haunting, oscillating between the imagined and the once-was. Such a once-was that can only be remembered through stories and writing, it is too far in the past for a verifiable account to have survived, or to even have been made. Torrential rain engulfs the church as it begins to become washed away, back into the ethereal chasm of the timeless. It is doomed to become naught but a counterpoint to the shrieks of banshees.

Is this writing, or is this music, a true account of the experience of the performance? Or is it a creative material 'thing' that can be grasped that is remnant of an otherwise ineffable moment or multiple ineffable moments stitched together through time; or otherwise meaningful connections to fill out a vast quilt of insurmountable

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, Joan Stambaugh (trans), *Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 185.

untranslatable, uncommunicable experiences that, nevertheless, this project attempts to translate, attempts to communicate?

Future: [Illumination #64: Dress Rehearsals](#)

This performance was made in preparation for a filmed presentation for the Newcastle University faculty of Humanity and Social Science Postgraduate Research Showcase in June 2021. The goal of the work was to try and reach a musical (non-linguistic) understanding of the experiences of mystic Julian of Norwich detailed in her book *Revelations of Divine Love*. Both performances interpreted the same graphic score. The score was created, in part, by using an improvised approach to sigil making, a technique first pioneered by occultist Austin Osman Spare and later refined by Chaos Magicians such as the graphic novelist Grant Morrison.²⁷ It was created by taking a selection of quotes from the text ('All shall be well, all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well', for example) and turning them into two types of sigilised forms.²⁸ Both forms initially took the usual sigilisation approach of deleting any repeated letters (creating 'alshbew' with the example above). In the first instance, these letters were then rearranged to form new words and sentences (some examples were: 'shit fog lavender', 'bleakish thud', and 'farthing loved'). The second approach took the collected letters (without repeats) and ran them through a table of correspondences that mapped letters to 12 tone equal temperament pitches (the letter A matched the pitch A, the letter B matched Bb, etc). This created a series of tone rows to be interpreted either as melodies, 'scales' with which to improvise, or to be interpreted vertically as chords (a far more formalistic, albeit still improvisational, approach to musical materials than the previous release examined). The quotes, letter formations, rearranged phrases, and tone rows were then used to form elements of an improvised drawing that, when completed, resembled an octopus (as the drawing was improvised the form wasn't planned but gradually came in to being as it was created). Once the score was completed, it was interpreted in performance through an interaction with the eye to page, with gazing across the page throughout the performance and interpreting sections which 'stood out' from the rest of the text. When these sections were linguistic, the interpretation was an abstract one: attempting to musically summarise what was written. However, when it was a tone row, the pitches were performed exactly on the

²⁷ Austin Osman Spare, *The Book of Pleasure: The Psychology of Ecstasy* (N.P.: One Eye Publishing, 2018), 112; Grant Morrison 'Pop Magic!', in Metzger (ed.), *The Book of Lies*, 19-20.

²⁸ Julian of Norwich, Elizabeth Spearing (trans.), *Revelations of Dive Love* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 80.

guitar. The approach of 'gazing' that was used attempted to both take an intuitive approach to the score as outlined by Bergson of 'disinterestedness', as well as drawing on occult practices such as scrying that utilises a disinterested gazing to receive occult messages in the surface of mirrors or water.²⁹

The work utilised live-recorded loops and delay effects to stretch and shrink time as a reflection on the revelations of Julian of Norwich (God showed her a thing as small as a hazelnut, and this thing was all of creation, Julian comments of how small it is, but is taken care of, despite its size, because 'God loves it'); and on William Blake's 'Auguries of Innocence', particularly the opening lines, 'To see a World in a Grain of Sand/And a Heaven in a Wild Flower/Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand/And Eternity in an hour'.³⁰ It also approached these dual observations through Heidegger, specifically his understanding that 'taking care' is a foundational ontological characteristic, and that care can summon one from an inauthentic position that manages expectations of exterior individuals back into an authentic ontological being.³¹ In the eyes of a Heideggerian Julian of Norwich, not only does all creation *only* exist *because* 'God loves it and cares for it', but God is *only* its true authentic being *because* it takes care of all creation.

Living in the time of plague, perhaps is all we have in common. Climbing up to the gates of divinity, slowly spelling out the names of God (is 'shit fog lavender' a hidden name: the 'Heaven in a wild flower'?). Passing by the ghostly dead, forever trapped in purgatory, it rises, rises, rises, each repeat a further flight above, like octaves round a spiral. Occasional drops as the invisible puppeteer releases the cords and my stomach turns as I fall briefly, like a child being tossed by a parent. The fall results in a more cautious approach, as Dante illustrated: it's a long way down. Is purgatory the highest level this performance will reach? A brief initial glimpse of divine revelation before being cast back down for the duration? But, as Blake understood, eternity can be comprehended in no

²⁹ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 114.

³⁰ Julian of Norwich, 47; William Blake, *Poems* (London: Vintage Books, 2007), 37.

³¹ Heidegger, 118-119.

time at all. Or, as Robert Fripp surmised; 'Forever is a long time, eternity is in the moment'.³²

³² Robert Fripp, 'Forever is a long time, Eternity is in the moment', *Instagram* (January 2023) https://www.instagram.com/p/CoFri_ooHmW/?igsh=MTZoMnJwNWY2N2Vvdg%3D%3D [accessed 11th April 2024].

Reading

Examining the previous three releases drawn by the website (*Illuminations* #65, #12 and #64), an occult reading can be made into ontological and mystical problems. These works, divided in their performance approaches and in their dates across the duration of the doctorate form a sample of a vast rhizomatic body with multiplicitous internal and external connections. When examining the three piece's performance dates, a circle can be observed: the first performance (#65) was performed in June 2021, then the work is thrust back in time to April 2019 for the second release (#12), and then forward once more to May 2021 for the final example (#64), ready to move just two weeks ahead in order to start the cycle again and return to *Illumination* #65. Such a cycle is comparable to the 'eternal recurrence' of Nietzsche here, as we are trapped inside a loop.³³ Will *Illumination* #65 mean the same as it did if it is listened to immediately after having heard #64 and #12? Or has this experience recontextualised it to mean something different?

If a reading was made of these three performances in a style akin to the 'three card spread' of tarot (provided a reader agrees with my subjective understanding of each work), the past experiences would be viewed as a futile search for divinity ending in atheism, but it could also be itself interpreted as a divine interaction, as defined by Georges Bataille, 'The *absence of God* is no longer a closure: it is the opening up to the infinite. The absence of God is greater, and more divine, than God'.³⁴ The present would read into this with the possible solution that deities *are* in fact experienced, yet are misremembered and, perhaps, divinity's very ontology is incompatible or beyond the limits of material understanding. And, in the future, it would foretell an almost reinforcement of the present's intuition: that glimpses of divinity are indeed obtainable, but they can only be caught in fleeting moments of eternal knowing.

³³ Friedrich Nietzsche, Bernard Williams (ed.), Josefine Nauckhoff (trans.), Adrian Del Caro (trans.), *The Gay Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 194-5.

³⁴ Georges Bataille, Michael Richardson (trans), *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism* (London; New York: Verso, 1994), 48.

Second Set

Past: [*Illumination #96: Sublime*](#)

This piece was performed on the Catholic Holiday that commemorates the Assumption of Mary. In my own life, I had just begun to suffer with – what has now been diagnosed as – Repetitive Strain Injury in my left (guitar fretting) hand. As a result, I was suffering quite badly; and I had to come up with a pragmatic solution to the need to perform, and the physical need to rest my hand. The solution to this was to retune the guitar to a set of desired notes and only use my right hand to perform (either by just picking the open strings, or by playing over nodes of the string that brought out additional harmonics present in the open strings), and to utilise a violin bow to punctuate the performance and reinforce the guitar’s dissonant tuning. Aesthetically the piece resembles the music I was listening to at the time, namely, the work of guitarist Mary Halvorson (whose influence can be heard in the occasional pitch-shift flutter created with a Digitech Whammy pedal), and the work of cellist Arthur Russell, whose use of delay effects and tone management is a continual inspiration for my own work.

Sublime used a number of overdubs of performances and environmental recordings. The first, was a recording of a meditation I undertook with a guitar and violin bow. The meditation lasted for about fifteen minutes, without my playing any notes on the guitar, but, mindfully, imagining them and what they might sound like prior to them actually being played, there was then a short exploration of these sounds (1-2 minutes) where the sounds were played and can be heard on the track, this is followed by a few minutes of reflection on the sounds. Initially this was to be all that I was going to release, however having performed it I realised that while it ‘worked’ as a performance and a meditation experiment, it didn’t stand up as a piece of art or recorded cultural artefact. As a result, I decided to add an overdub to this of a second performance, this time on electric guitar. The electric guitar was tuned the same as the acoustic had been on the meditation track, but it was played continuously throughout the performance: this time the mindfulness and meditative state was achieved through the repetition of the same movement with small changes. This movement was a constant rubbing of the guitar’s strings with a plectrum in small concentric circles. In the beginning, these small

movements took place between the bridge and stop bar tailpiece of the instrument, causing the strings to vibrate in quiet sympathy to the movement, but my right hand also ventured further forward throughout the performance: over the pickups (the ‘conventional’ area to play) and over the fretboard (highlighting specific harmonic nodes, as has already been discussed). The environmental recordings that were used were taken the same day at the window of my study (where I record most of the work), and these recordings were of the wind catching a number of bells that hung from a nearby shelf, these recordings were intended to add subtle punctuation and interest to what was otherwise a repetitive piece, but also as a means of grounding the work in the geographic and temporal space it occupied: my study on a day in August 2022 when the window was open and the wind caused the bells nearby to chime.

In Abrahamic religion, God brings the world into being with his breath.³⁵ In Nordic mythology, Odin gave the breath of life to the first humans, Ask and Embla.³⁶ In Jewish folklore life is also breathed into the Golem.³⁷ Breath and the starting of life are intimately connected. This release leans more heavily towards a gnostic interpretation of the Abrahamic understanding, especially given the album artwork. The photograph was taken on the day of the performance behind the university dental hospital (perhaps the apple a day didn’t keep the doctor away!). The etymology for ‘sublime’ means to be ‘under the limit’, beneath the threshold, and it is this reaching towards a threshold that the performance is attempting to come into contact with as it seeks to take, in one sense an overly thoughtful approach to the music making, and in another a detached mindlessness to the practice.³⁸ The goal of both of these approaches is to reach the sublime and discover an occluded knowledge there, like how Yaldabaoth in gnostic mythology occluded divine knowledge from Adam and Eve; until Sophia, the unintentional creator of Yaldabaoth, disguised as a serpent, encouraged Eve to break

³⁵ Gen 3:3.

³⁶ Teodoro Manrique Antón, ‘Völuspá, the Uncertainty of Norse Creation Myths and some Babylonian Parallels’, in Alberto Bernabé Pajares (ed), Raquel Martín Hernández (ed), *Narrating the Beginnings* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer, 2021), 166.

³⁷ Gila Aloni, ‘Medieval to Pop Culture: An Old-World New Text, the Golem of Prague—A Traveling Monster/Hero’, *South Atlantic Review*, 81(1), (Spring 2016), 178.

³⁸ Jan Rosiek, *Maintaining the Sublime: Heidegger and Adorno* (Bern; Berlin; Bruxelles; Frankfurt am Main; New York; Oxford; Wien: Lang, 2000), 8-9.

free from the imposter god and search for their own Truths, through eating the apple in the garden of Eden.³⁹

Reach out and touch the sound, mid-creation. Feel the resonance, a world in vibration. Sympathetic and humming. Each particle has its own unique contribution to make to the discourse, each particle must resonate fully to allow the symphony of creation to sound. It is not enough for it to sound, however: it must also be listened to. Listened to, understood, what does the ringing say? Not what does it represent. Not what is it a metaphor for. But what is it saying? What does it mean? Knowledge comes from all; knowledge is for all. Yaldabaoth masks it from the material world, conceals it inside the apple. Will one bite be enough to shatter the glistening prison? Will one bite be enough to rip down the veil that shields experience from itself? Sophia is the serpent who will lead us to divinity. Sophia is herself wisdom in an eternal search for the divine. All that is known and all that is not known will combine into an amorphous globule of something. It is this something that must be taken into consideration: too big to be held in the palm of one's hand (except, of course, by Julian), it is too big to even be held in the mind's eye.⁴⁰ Yet it exists. It has always existed. It will always exist. Matter is not created or destroyed; it is merely converted. All will become converted into sound, into sympathetic vibration.

³⁹ M. J. Edwards, 'Paradise Reconsidered in Gnostic Mythmaking. Rethinking Sethianism in the Light of the Ophitic Evidence. By Tuomas Rasimus.', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 62(1), (2011), 346.

⁴⁰ Julian of Norwich, 47.

Present: [Illumination #44: Feast](#)

This performance was undertaken two days after the funeral of my grandfather (4th August 2020). It was also performed the day after the feast day of Saint Oswald (5th August 2020).⁴¹ The full moon was three days prior (3rd August 2020), but due to the emotional impact of the funeral and the time constraints surrounding this (such as travelling to Norfolk from Newcastle and back again) this performance was forced to be late. In many ways this performance was, whether or not it was intended to be, dedicated to my grandfather. It was performed and released too late to coincide with the full moon (despite this it is still related to this moon), and too late to line up with the feast-day it is named after. Perhaps it is ‘fashionably late’ for these events, much like how my grandfather would always be ‘fashionably late’ to events himself.

The photograph was taken during the trip to Norfolk for the funeral, near the village Caistor St Edmund, at the site of the original Iceni tribe’s capital.⁴² The Iceni are important for my own ontological connection to the past as they are, in some imagined sense, my ancestral peoples. Oswald has been continually important for my research (for example the 2020 field trip/performance at St Oswald’s in Heavenfield Church) because of his association with both the spread of Christianity, and because of the parallels between the folklore surrounding him and the Norse Allfather, Odin. Oswald was visited by Saint Columba in a vision on the eve of a battle and was instructed by the saint to convert his army to Christianity.⁴³ When Oswald died at a later battle near Oswestry, a town in West England named after the King of Northumberland, his limbs were severed from him, a raven carried off his right arm, and dropped it at the foot of an ash tree, where the arm was dropped a spring erupted. This story has much in common with the mythology of Odin, from his dual Ravens Hugin (Thought) and Munnin (Memory) who travel the earth and provide Odin with reports of their travels (also explored above in the write up for *Illumination #12*); and the tale of Odin’s hanging of

⁴¹ Alan Thacker, ‘*Membra Disjecta: the Division of the Body and the Diffusion of the Cult*’ in Clare Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge (eds), *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint* (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1995), 116.

⁴² Daphne Nash Briggs, Elizabeth Mellings, Margit Thøfner, ‘Sacred Image and Regional Identity in Late-Prehistoric Norfolk’ in, T. A. Heslop et al., *Art, Faith and Place in East Anglia: From Prehistory to the Present*, (Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 31-32.

⁴³ Clare Stancliffe, ‘Oswald, “Most Holy and Most Victorious King of the Northumbrians”’, in *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, 50.

himself as sacrifice from the ash tree Yggdrasil (that connects all nine worlds together) for nine days and nights in exchange for divine knowledge.⁴⁴

The performance utilised a series of pitches derived from the table of correspondence outlined above (see *Illumination #64*), and these were performed on a distorted electric guitar and using an *EBow* to vibrate the strings. Throughout this performance, changing layers were added and manipulated through the use of a loop pedal (with reverse and changing speed functions). Because of the strong (extremely personal) emotional connection I have to this album, I do not intend to write any more philosophically/creatively about the goals and metaphysical achievements or failures that this album made. However, at the time of performing this work, I had fed a series of creative writing texts that I had composed, into an Artificial Intelligence (AI) as source material to produce its own written response to the work and below is what it produced (in lieu of my own written commentary):

Naked Trees

Naked trees resemble the sepia images of the middle ages, the brickwork of the elderly, the succulent roots of the piano, and the bubbling cedar.

But they are both alive and well. The older you get, the more like this image becomes — a ghost town than a reality living-history study.

You might not suppose such things from the air, but it is not true from inside the town. No longer do people dwell in cemeteries, but rather in runaways from the past. No longer can you find long-dead hippies in pickup trucks, searching for new ways of yoga.

In the week leading up to the World's Fair, Bill Nye was a hothead and a controversial figure. He was also a provocateur: he ranted about humanity and in his attempt to destroy it claimed the lives of nine people.

Today, while at the end of the world, he lay dying, not buried, but inescapably linked to the disposal heap.

The world over, you and I are on the afternoon, and you and I are in the middle of the night.

You saw a ghost town before dawn, and returned to see a ghost town on the day of Rapture.

You were not in the presence of a spectre prior to that, and returned to see a spectre again on the day of Yggdrasil.

You were not visited by a ghost prior to that, and returned to see a ghost still standing.

You were not visited by a spectre prior to that, and returned to see a spectre's reflection already.

You were not visited by a spectre prior to that, and returned to see a spectre's reflection of the past.

⁴⁴ David Rollason, 'St Oswald in Post-Conquest England', in *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, 170.

You were not visited by a spectre prior to that, and returned to see a spectre's reflection of the present.

You were not visited by a spectre prior to that, and returned to see a spectre's reflection of the future.

How will you define gentility? Do you want to be known as gentle as possible?

How will you define gentility? Do you want to be known as gentle as possible?

How will you define gentility? Do you want to be known as gentle as as practical?

How will you define gentility? Do you want to be known as gentle as as as practical?

What is your current attitude toward strangers? Is it peaceful?

Future: [Illumination #98: Feather](#)

This work was created at a time occupied mostly by reading in preparation for thesis writing (the thesis at one stage was going to be an exceedingly academic piece of work), I was also making conscious efforts to always carry a sound recorder with me when I left the house and make as many recordings as possible (something I am always *trying* to do, and encourage students to do, but it also a habit I frequently manage to drift out of doing, much like my repeated attempts to start taking B12 and Omega supplements to make up for things lacking in my vegetarian diet). The release created here comes from a series of layered field recordings taken on sequential days of thunderstorms, and two solo guitar improvisations that react to this layered field recording track. The goldfinch feather photographed for the album cover appeared (as if by magic(k)) on my hallway floor on the evening of Monday 5th September – presumably walked in on the sole of the shoe of myself, my partner, or one of my private students – but the feather appearing in this way, particularly such a delicate and reasonably unusual one, was a particularly synchronistic event given that I had just read a passage in Herman Rapaport’s *Is There Truth in Art?* (also photographed for the cover) interpreting feathers and the poetry of René Char, and it forced me to revisit the passage again, and to meditate on it as that week’s recorded performance.⁴⁵ Inspired by the book’s passage, the work sought to investigate field recordings *as if* they were feathers: fragments of a whole body of work detached from any higher levels of meaning or truth, and void of significance. However, in its combination of multiple recordings (and in conjunction with an original performance) it questions whether a multitude of these disconnected fragments could be reassembled into a unique, new species of bird capable of speaking a new, unique form of truth.

Thunderstorms have often been associated with divine intervention from ancient cultures to today: Thor, Zeus, Set, Chacac, the great flood of Genesis, and many others.⁴⁶ In a later research project titled *Lightning Lullaby* (May 2023), I explored the story of composer Peter Warlock who, after performing a secular song on the organ of a rural Norfolk Church (and, in some accounts also suggesting they sacrifice his ‘mistress’ on

⁴⁵ Herman Rapaport, *Is There Truth in Art?* (Ithica and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 116.

⁴⁶ Gen 6-9

the altar), the church was struck by lightning: which Warlock subsequently interpreted as an intervention of a divine being.⁴⁷

Both the guitar improvisations mimicked the storms in the release, with heavily distorted and modulated guitar sounding akin to thunder, along with the use of a low, rumbling self-oscillating delay pedal. A dual delay was also added to these guitar tracks in post-production, to create further confusion, and associations reminiscent of both the rain bouncing off of surfaces, and of the static electricity rubbing against each other in clouds to create the radical discharge in the form of thunder and lightning. These improvisations both used fixed pitches taken from the F# melodic minor scale: despite both of the improvisations using the same pitches, the oscillating delay changes between the two improvisations and thus changes the tonal centre (in my ears at least) from F# in the first performance, to B in the second, implying that, even with the same notes, the second performance is more closely associated with the mode mixolydian b6 than its 'parent' melodic minor.

Collecting storm water in empty jam jars, in the darkness of the New Moon. Rebirth and renewal like the springtime crocuses sprouting from the frozen ground. Static tingles in the air as oppositely charged masses collide: the result is an almighty crash and burst of light. Almighty indeed. Energy, energy, energy. This is the vital life force: the gift of divinity witnessed in real-time. Over-saturated, the situation proves too much, and the density needs to be relieved. Rapid and unannounced. Uninvited, yet gladly welcomed. Glistening fragments cast all around, like shards of a mirror: if this disconnected multitude is reassembled will it be whole again? But it is ever whole, broken or intact, it is ever part of the system, ever still just part of the ongoing cycle, the eternal recurrence.

⁴⁷ Barry Smith, *Peter Warlock: The Life of Philip Heseltine* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 130-131.

Reading

What can be revealed in an engagement of these three performances is a past hopeful search for the divine in the mundane or sinful; along with a desire to continually seek out knowledge, even in these supposedly prohibited spaces, and see them as means to ascend to the thresholds of the material and spiritual, and the profane and the sacred. This practice is destabilised in the present, where the creative mind is drowned in grief and forced through this overwhelming emotion to remain in stasis, but where the germs of hope still prevail that the ravens of thought and memory may return and begin healing to restabilise the creative endeavour. This optimistic speck will germinate in the future (#98) where grief will give way to hope and rebirth. As allegory of Lazarus rising from the dead or Jesus Christ rising from his tomb after the crucifixion (or of Odin descending from Yggdrasil).⁴⁸ This trio of releases is also quite surprisingly Christian in tone, with the past and present both being conducted on (or occupied with) feast days in the Catholic church, and the future also maintaining this reference in its interpretation of lightning as divine intervention. Throughout, however, there are also continual subterranean and parallel resonances with other religious traditions (that have influenced the development of Christianity): from Gnosticism in *Illumination #96* to paganism in *Illumination #44* and *#98*. This multi-theistic referencing is a common feature throughout the project: a sustained searching for divinity wherever it presents itself. It also highlights how different traditions influence each other, no matter the contradictions that may be present. These contradictions are not, however, a fault, mistake, or somehow ‘proof’ that there is a lack of divinity, but rather a truth in themselves that reveals the depth and complexity of the search for the divine and the interconnectedness of all things.

⁴⁸ Jn 11:1–44; Jn 20.

Third Set

Past: *Illumination #9: the Pathway Spread*

As with *Illumination #12* (discussed above), this work came at a time when I was carving up single improvisations into shorter tracks: wilfully ripping apart a singular constructive narrative into smaller, confused works whose meaning could be misinterpreted, as they lacked the temporal context and togetherness that the performance was originally presented as.

This work was part of an exploration in the genre of ‘noise’ – notably diverse as a genre encompassing subgenres such as ‘noise rock’ through to ‘harsh noise’, and groups like Boredoms through to Wolf Eyes to name two – as well as an experiment in live mixing and recording. The guitar I was using ran through a dual mono set of effects with volume control on each side, and then directly into an audio interface. Doing this allowed me to control the different effects on the same source material in the left and right channels live, as well as mixing the volumes of both channels. I was also using a ‘Donner Deluxe Looper’ pedal (a pedal purchased after noting its use by noise artist Merzbow), this pedal allowed me to create stereo loops and mix the volumes on each channel, as well as control the speed (and therefore pitch) of each loop, and run these loops both forward and backwards (unfortunately it also recorded at a very low sample rate and had earthing issues, so despite its great functionality, the audio quality suffered).⁴⁹ The result of this effects set-up was a wide, ever changing, stereo environment (listening back I am jealous of my past-self, wanting to return to this form of musical production again!). Thematically, this work was conducted as a meditation on a tarot card spread made just prior to the recording, and the topics I was meditating on a searching for answers for musically directly corresponded to the tarot spread in front of me.

Generosity leads to rebirth which in turn leads to strength. Lightly receiving meaning given generously by the hum of amplified electrics at 50 oscillations a second. God has

⁴⁹ See Equipboard entry on the Donner Deluxe Looper, <https://equipboard.com/items/donner-deluxe-looper> [accessed 27th April 2023].

been trapped within the frequency; its vibrations must be changed for divinity to escape the electronic cell. Is this notion one of truth, or just a new-age fantasy composed by a sheep-craving android? Cards are drawn while the circuits are left running; how will this procrastination (or preparation-as-performance) influence the rest of the whole? Electric clocks set the pace of the dizzying descent, and wind rushes past as a fizzing in the witness's ears: will this take us all the way down? No. It crashes down onto a barren rocky landscape, like Altair IV in the Forbidden Planet.⁵⁰ Deafness overwhelms like a My Bloody Valentine concert without ear protection: ear drums are burst. Out of the confusion of deafness we return to Altair IV and our first encounter with Robby the Robot. Dick Dale briefly performs a comical cameo that rips away the veil of pomp from the entire affair, unveiling the set as all just fabrication: the moon landings are faked. Instead, we are subjected to an ongoing and pointless whirl round and around, this is no Altair IV, it is Wallace and Gromit's moon; this is no trip to space but a cheese-dream hallucination.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Fred M. Wilcox, *Forbidden Planet* (1956).

⁵¹ Nick Park, *A Grand Day Out* (1989).

Present: [Illumination #77: Dream Plateau](#)

This work was a collaborative release made with Dr Mick Wright. Like the previous performance, this artefact is a collection of tracks. However, unlike the previous performance, on *Dream Plateau*, these small snatches of music were intentional, and part of a consistent daily creative practice routine implemented by Mick and me. The brief I had set for this work was for us to create around 2 minutes of music every day, over a period between a new moon and a full moon. In the first week, each of us produced work in a solo, remote setting. In the second week we shared our work from the week prior and added overdubs to our collaborator's work. Such an approach increased the intensity of the project by forcing us to make enough room in our lives to create something daily, and to be continually searching and *thinking* creatively. It forced the time and place for musical creation and production to be 'every time, everywhere'. Such an approach was hugely challenging, but also greatly rewarding, as it stretched out creativity and, in having such a multitude of short pieces, forced originality and content production. In the usual single performances I conduct in line with each moon, it is possible to 'sit on' or draw out an idea for the duration of a performance (much like Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, for example).⁵² However, when producing this short collection of works, we as composers, performers, and improvisors were forced to keep coming up with new ideas and frameworks that didn't re-tread on ideas covered in previous pieces. The type of content created was completely free and open: from the performance of folk tunes and jazz standards; to freely improvised guitar performances; to field recordings of fallen leaves, 2 minutes of breathing, or washing machines. This work highlighted (to me) the importance (and general everyday neglect) of creativity and improvisation at the heart of human existence: revealing that creativity is an ongoing process and a fundamental part of living, not something to be turned on and off at will like a kitchen tap. It also worked to practically iterate points made by Dan DiPiero, and reflect on improvisation as both as freedom, when considered artistically, and, often, a necessary faculty, and reaction to constraint for less privileged members of society:

⁵² Joseph Kerman, Alan Tyson, Scott G. Burnham, Douglas Johnson and William Drabkin, 'Beethoven, Ludwig Van', *Grove Music Online* (2001) <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.libproxy.ncl.ac.uk/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000040026?p=emailAwqBDtQGiWOaQ&d=/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000040026> [accessed 26th March 2024].

where work is coming from (and the gig economy); how bills will be paid, or what will be sacrificed to afford rent, as all hugely important improvisatory choices that many are forced to make on a daily basis, for example.⁵³

John Dowland rests by the river at Snape Maltings, slowing sinking into the broad like the rotten wood of the board walk. Speaking backwards like spirits in search of Garmonbozia, the many eyed, many winged angels stare down at the sodden Dowland and wail. What place does a renaissance composer have in the modern world?⁵⁴ In a world where guitarists feel they can make light of divinity as they perform in reverse, mimicking out-of-tune pipers. A horrific and ghastly present where every cadence is interrupted and every name for every God is nothing but a dirty joke. Speaketh slow and speaketh true, we ask of nothing but love from You; sitting atop the highest peak, the air is fresh, and future less bleak. A senseless world creates senseless art, but humour can present us a glimpse of true experience like witnessing the backstage preparations of a theatre production through a torn curtain [Verlaine takes the stage].⁵⁵

⁵³ DiPiero, 154-157.

⁵⁴ David Lynch, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992).

⁵⁵ Television 'Torn Curtain', *Marquee Moon* (Elektra, 1977).

Future: [Illumination #19: Genesis](#)

This release was a recorded live performance that took place at Newcastle University in August 2019. It was a collaborative improvised performance between Michael Mather on the drumkit and me on electric guitar. This was principally an aesthetic venture into freely improvised rock music. Michael and I both studied a masters degree in music at Newcastle University at the same time, but we mainly got to know one another after our studies, when we worked as instrumental teachers at a 'rock band' community music group. Our job roles and relationship can be heard throughout this performance: a camaraderie and understanding of what each other goes through when dealing with large groups of unruly school children, who are hyped up on biscuits and orange squash, and have electric guitars and drumsticks thrust into their grasping, sticky hands. Furthermore, our positions as teachers can be heard throughout, as there is a mutual understanding and respect for each other played out across the performance, and a sort of seminar being presented by each of us to each other (him teaching me drums and me in turn teaching him guitar). This is particularly prominent when Michael begins playing militaristic rudiments on his snare for me to respond to (such militaristic approaches to the kit are shunned by a later drum collaborator of the project, Marlene Everling). Like the other early illuminations, this singular product has been carved up into multiple tracks: however, in the case of this work it has actually been carved into two separate releases ([Illumination #20](#) is the second half of this performance).

The title Genesis takes its name from the first book of the bible. It is the first release by this duo, and it is presented as a biblical adventure, that depicts the experience of the unworthy (cockroaches) search for divinity through the tools and experiences they have available to them (which are invariably not up to the job). There was also a second release on *Fruit of the Vine* named *Genesis* ([Illumination #36](#)). This title is the only artwork title repeated in the project (at the time of writing this reflection, at any rate), however the meaning behind each *Genesis* title is different. While the first is a reference to the bible, [Illumination #36](#) is dedicated to the artist Genesis Breyer P-Orridge (a performance that took place the week of P-Orridge's death). Having both of these releases share a title is an interesting (and unintended) coincidence, and if we were to take a P-Orridgean view of them (as explained in write up to [Illumination #65](#) above) we would see how one both aesthetically and artistically references the other

(*Illumination* #19 is a rock band without a bassist, *Illumination* #36 is a bassist without a rock band, for example); but also thematically: does a reference to the first book of the bible simultaneously and impossibly also act as reference to Throbbing Gristle, Psychic T.V., etc?

Gnawing on the rotten debris of 20th century pop culture, Cockroach Kids crept out like pus oozes out from a gangrenous wound. Sifting through the forgotten gems, and overhyped trash of the past one hundred years, they begin a distillery inside themselves. They crawl across overflowing ashtrays belonging to decomposing corpses of long-dead hippies, heads and freaks. Getting stoned by association (Geordie taggers have got here before the duo and have left their marks across the wall: FIGS, or, 'Fuck It, Get Stoned'). The duo is in no right mind to be operating this kind of machinery, they haven't got the training necessary to conduct this experimentation with such a dangerous force as music. Music: the greatest of intoxicants. Music: the great summoner of demons. Music: greatest healer (can you feel George Clinton's presence in the room yet?).⁵⁶ Music: the voice of God in humanity (in then, walks Peter Warlock).⁵⁷ The vermin excrement is banished from the duo's bodies in all direction: detritus to be added to the rotting pile of cultural production.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Parliament, 'P-Funk (Wants to Get Funked Up)', *Motherhip Connection* (Casablanca, 1975).

⁵⁷ Barry Smith, 130-131.

⁵⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt (ed), Harry Zohn (trans), *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 257.

Reading

For this set of performances, an idiomatic arc is created that begins with noise and drifts through more conventional or conservative forms of music practice (e.g. folk) before returning to noise by way of improvised (noise) rock music. The end in its title represents a beginning again, another (of many) resonances with Nietzsche's eternal recurrence but also to the wheel of fortune in tarot, the water cycle, and many others.⁵⁹ Interestingly, two of the three albums are collaborations, and even the first performance, which is a solo performance, in its being an experimentation in mixing and stereo improvised performance, is a collaboration of sorts. Each of the three releases can be viewed as a coming together and merging of two discrete entities into a singular product: in the first instance one is divided into two and then recombined; in the second two are separate completely but are bonded externally (through remote post-production); and in the third two separate entities come together in the same space and become a singular being throughout the duration of the performance.

⁵⁹ Alejandro Jodorowsky and Marianne Costa, *the Way of Tarot: the Spiritual Teacher in the Cards* (Rochester, Vermont; Toronoto, Canada: Destiny Books, 2009), 181-185.

Fourth Set

Past: [Illumination #53: Bucca](#)

This record was a duo performance with long-time collaborator Joseph (Joe) Harmsworth. I have known Joe since we were undergraduates together: he was in the stage above me but spent a year abroad studying in Berlin in his third year; I didn't go abroad (mainly due to commitments in touring bands), so we were both finalists at the same time and befriended each other on a shared module (I can't remember what module it was exactly).

Our first collaboration together took place when I invited him to a group improvisation session Will Edmondson was running, in part for the music masters programme I was studying, but it was open to others within and without the university to join in on. On this particular session, Will was away and, despite him telling those who normally attended that it would still run, only myself and Joe showed up. We decided to perform despite this. The room in Newcastle University where this took place was used variously as a meeting room, and to house the departmental photocopier/printer (at the time the music department of the university had been moved temporarily while the building it was usually housed in was undergoing refurbishment). Usually when Will was present at these group sessions the multi-purpose nature of the room went unnoticed. However, on this occasion, the duo session was punctuated twice by an infrequent (and unknowing) collaborator: the photocopier (set off by Professor Kirsten Gibson on one occasion, and Professor Magnus Williamson on the second). The photocopier sounds were easily audible on the recording made of the session, but it was released despite this – under the group name Post-Xerox – as an embracing of the music we were making as a part of the environment and community it was part of. Much of this embracing of (traditionally unwanted) environmental sound has since become a huge element of my creative practice (particularly memorable pieces that feature these unintended sounds are [Illumination #118: Chant and Moan](#) and [Illumination #94: Buck \(Philosophy Stool\)](#)).

Illumination #53 was part of a series of performances by Joe and I, completed between periods of national lockdowns in the U.K., when people could only meet in outdoor locations. This series of performances searched for folkloric creatures underneath a number of bridges

in Newcastle. This particular performance searched for a 'Bucca', a Cornish hobgoblin that inhabits mines and coastal locations during stormy periods.⁶⁰ My guitar tuning for the work was derived from a method I took from Sonic Youth guitarist Thurston Moore and from B-52's guitarist Ricky Wilson, whereby I strummed the strings as a single chord in the performance space and moved the tuning pegs until I reached a tuning that sounded good to me *in the space*.⁶¹ This had a double advantage (in my eyes), in that it transformed the guitar into an unfamiliar instrument, allowing me to explore the sounds in it while performing and investigating the space. An exploration for Buccas on two fronts: the guitar and the location. Midway through the performance, Joseph noticed a plastic cup and placed it beneath the dripping from the bridge to provide percussion to the ensemble, allowing us to collaborate with the space we were occupying and, like with the photocopiers in our first collaboration, as a means of grounding the performance and recording specifically to the that instance in time, at that particular location.

Throw out the pastry crusts, covered in soot and dirt, a gift for the Bucca to keep us safe. Every expression is both a search and a prayer. Tunnelling deeper, a gouging into the darkness of an unknown abyss of abysmal knowledge, passing through the homes of lost souls as we tip-toe underneath the bridge. We are trolls and three goats simultaneously: we have to pay the tax and extort the toll. The red serpent that imbues the earth with its energy is steadily creeping underneath as the yellow serpent rattles above, we are caught in between in the neither-neither.⁶² Folkish foot-tapping lifts our spirits, yet we are disharmonious, causing a twisted Bartók to reel his demonic head. Fae and magicians are regulars here, both the kind that attend children's fancy dress parties, and those found in folkloric tomes, or at least, so we have been told. Neither species introduced themselves to us during our burrowing on this occasion. A dripping begins as an ominous foretelling: relentless and timetabled like the mechanic rattles

⁶⁰ Ethan Doyle White, 'Devil's Stones and Midnight Rites: Megaliths, Folklore, and Contemporary Pagan Witchcraft', *Folklore*, 125(1) (2014): 73.

⁶¹ Fender, 'Alternate Tunings with Sonic Youth Guitarist Thurston Moore (LIVE) | Guitar Tuning | Fender Play', *Youtube* (19th April, 2021) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8BtI2fNVAw&ab_channel=Fender [accessed 23rd May 2023]; Jim Sullivan, 'Hero Worship: Remembering Ricky Wilson of The B-52's', *Rock and Roll Globe* (19th March, 2023) <https://rockandrollglobe.com/remembrance/hero-worship-remembering-ricky-wilson-of-the-b-52s/> [Accessed 19th October 2023].

⁶² Doyle White, 73.

above. However, much like the overhead rattling, we have no concern with operating off timetable. Stalactites begin to form that stretch downwards as great elongated structures, guiding lost travellers towards a treacherous descent towards the jaws of the gleeful Bucca.

Present: [Illumination #120: Prime](#)

This release was created using largely pre-composed material (although with little preparation or rehearsal, and still very much improvised in the performance of these materials). The composed sketch was based around the order of prime numbers from 2 to 13. 13 is a significant number because it is the first repeat in a number of different important cycles for the project: musically, it is the number at which the cycle of tones in the chromatic scale repeats (in 12 tone equal temperament (12-tet)); and temporally, it is the number at which a year begins again, and the 12-hour clock repeats again (hour 13 being equal to 1). Additionally, it is a number associated closely to the occult in the public consciousness (perhaps only dwarfed by 666). This exploration of occult numbers has been inspired in part by an analysis of John Zorn's *Necronomicon* by John Brackett, who highlights Zorn's integration of the numbers 13, 15 and 666 into the work.⁶³ 13 is often regarded as an unlucky number, and Friday 13th a particularly inauspicious day. Occultic associations with the number (and bad luck) persist historically: there were 13 diners at the Last Supper (Jesus and the twelve disciples); and the Knights Templars (oft cited by occult organisations as an occult group, and their esoteric practices as the reason for their persecution), were arrested on Friday 13th October 1307.⁶⁴

The composed material comprises of a set of 6 double stops played on the guitar, the relation of these double stops follows the order of prime numbers (the first is an interval of 2 semitones, the second is an interval of 3 semitones, the third is an interval of 5 semitones, etc., up until the sixth being an interval of 13 semitones). Additionally, the lower note of each of these double stops falls to the next one by this same interval (the first double stop is 'rooted' on A_b which falls by 2 semitones to G_b/F# for the second double stop, etc.). This was composed so that when the final (6th) double-stop of the piece is reached, the lowest note is also the lowest note on the (standard-tuned) guitar (E₂). Each double stop also lasts for a number of beats that corresponds to the prime number represented (the first double stop lasts 2 beats, the

⁶³ John Brackett, *John Zorn: Tradition and Transgression*, (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 45.

⁶⁴ Sean L. Field, 'Torture and Confession in the Templar Interrogations at Caen, 28–29 October 1307' *Speculum*, 91(2) (2016), 302; Peter J. Carroll, *Liber Null & Psychonaut: An Introduction to Chaos Magic* (San Francisco, CA; Newburyport, MA: Weiser Books, 1987), 8.

sixth lasts 13 beats). These beats are then represented in the music by the time set of the delay effect on the guitar (another delay is also added in post-production that is not related to the timing of the piece but added somewhat arbitrarily to give the otherwise quite methodical and well-structured work an element of chaos and uncertainty). The composed work was performed 'live' whilst also being recorded onto a loop pedal, the loop was repeated once the progression was performed in entirety once, plus an additional 13 beats, meaning that the loop and the repeated performance of the progression was always out of sync by 13 beats, allowing for an overall structure of the piece to be created that resulted in a rising density and complexity of sound, as the work was being continually overdubbed, 13 beats behind the prior loop.

Spilt milk, unlucky for some, but not for the lurking black cat about to pounce on a delicious treat (but do cats drink oat milk? [edit post-adopting a cat: yes, they do]). Reminders too to past undergraduate students: triplets. Unlucky, lucky? Very unusual at the very least, the only triplet I've ever met. A steady falling descent of prime numbers like an ever-widening set of stairs, by the end they must be vaulted down, with both feet first, no longer an easy descent. Dripping pipes contextualise this space, this undercurrent. This occultism, that since the beginning of western civilisation has acted as subterranean counterpoint to western philosophical and religious thought. Deep in it now, beginnings and endings overlap, and glass harmonicas accompany in sympathetic vibrations, a threat of fracture and the lacerating of hands, but also dragging the performer into an inescapable madness. Echoes of Mesmer seep through.⁶⁵ Has it been forgotten that the instrument 'excessively stimulates the nerves, plunges the player into a nagging depression and hence into a dark and melancholy mood, that it is an ape method for slow self-annihilation'?⁶⁶ Is this a wilful drive towards madness: and conscious striving to discover what knowledge awaits the edges of sanity? Perhaps a disinterested daydream of being featured in a book by Prinzhorn (despite the

⁶⁵ David Toop, *Into the Maelstrom: Music, Improvisation and the Dream of Freedom before 1970* (New York; London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 112.

⁶⁶ Fabienne Moore, 'Germaine De Stael Defines Romanticism, or the Analogy of the Glass Harmonica', in Tili Boon Cuille and Karyna Szmurlo (eds), *Stael's Philosophy of the Passions: Sensibility, Society and the Sister Arts* (Lanham, Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 269.

problematics of his influential publication)?⁶⁷ This is an oscillation between the contradictory positions of madness as freedom and madness as constraint.

⁶⁷ Allan Beveridge, 'A Disquieting Feeling of Strangeness?: the Art of the Mentally Ill', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 94(11) (2001), 579.

Future: [Illumination #70: Stillness](#)

This improvisation came out of using a delay pedal that had been sent into self-oscillation and then the time control slowed down prior to the recording, as a means to synthesize the sound of a heartbeat. This was predominantly the loudest sound in the mix. The delay pedal was accompanied by a (mostly) clean electric guitar part that was played in a conventional manner. This guitar part was mainly drawing inspiration from the work of Michael Rother with his work in Neu! and Harmonia, as well as the album (*No Pussyfooting*) by Robert Fripp and Brian Eno.⁶⁸ *Stillness*'s primary aim was to improvise an ambient album that could be used as a background or aid to meditation and employed 'open' sounding melodic and harmonic intervals (such as perfect fourths and fifths) to create a still and peaceful space and, ultimately what was driving the improvisation was quite antithetical to standard improvisations that I undertake: a lack of motion and dynamics, essentially a musical treading of water was the desired goal. Because the 'heartbeat' is produced by a self-oscillating delay that the guitar track is running through, this heartbeat has some elements of fluctuation and is intrinsically tied to the guitar work: it could be interpreted as a music that in its existence and being-in-the-world it (inadvertently, perhaps) creates life, or that once the music ceases as does life.

The heartbeat is an interesting topic of meditation, study, and foundational sound source for a piece. While the phrase 'listen to your heart' is a cliché that I would try to avoid – and references to the Roxette song of the same name – there is something to be said for restating that basic notion that all living things have a rhythm continually beating within them, and that rhythm (and the changing voltage that defines this rhythm) is the very fundamental basis of what it means to be alive.⁶⁹ Listening to (real) heartbeats is a source of inspiration, and the means of controlling a function generator to create electronic music for drummer Milford Graves, but, beyond the pragmatic function of what recording heartbeats can do, he describes them conceptually as providing an answer to a question he, and many other of his peers were searching for in their drumming:

⁶⁸ Neu!, *Neu!* (Brain, 1972); Harmonia, *Musik von Harmonia* (Brain, 1974); Fripp & Eno (*No Pussyfooting*) (Island, 1973).

⁶⁹ Roxette, 'Listen to Your Heart', *Look Sharp!* (EMI, 1988).

[W]e're not going to have to go around begging no more to so-called traditional people to teach us this and teach us that. I said [to other drummers] I got a recording that's got everything that we do. That's supposed to be the so-called secret rhythms, our possession rhythms, our ritual rhythms. I immediately obtained a stethoscope, an electronic stethoscope [...] what happened was that I heard some heart sounds that wasn't on Dr Geckeler's recordings [of heartbeats], I mean I really heard some stuff that was just blowing me away.⁷⁰

Illumination #70 was inspired by the Eastern Orthodox Christian movement of Hesychasm (derived from *hesychia* or 'stillness') founded by Gregory Palamas (the image of whom is used as the album cover) which seeks to achieve deification through practices such as the recitation of inner prayer: practitioners of which are encouraged to bow their head and focus their attention on their breath and the beating of their heart.⁷¹ This stance was held throughout the performance as a means to act-out inner prayer through the medium of musical improvisation. This deification is not a transformation of the human body into the God, but a reintegration of the consciousness into the divine. Hesychasm has been dismissed as heretical and conflated with 'magic' by Russian Christian authorities.⁷²

Heartbeats beginning, off kilter though, unwell, spluttering, disconnected and out of sync with the rhythm driving all animals but a peaceful existence, nonetheless. Lynch's Elephant Man: laughed at and ridiculed but as worthy of existing as anyone else.⁷³ It is a being now, as it is also about 'being now': in the moment, oneness with all things and the whole of creation. Some shadow-work is always necessary, there can be no path to enlightenment without the recognition of sin, the rot is still a part of the fruit. Is it possible to consider the possibility of transcending the rot and regaining an openness so integral to the reintroduction of the otherworldly into the profane?

⁷⁰ Jake Meginsky, Neil Young, *Milford Graves: Full Mantis* (2018), 29:30-30:08.

⁷¹ Marco Toti, 'The Hesychast Method of Prayer: Its Anthropological and Symbolic Significance', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 8(1) (2008), 17-19.

⁷² Paul L. Gavrilyuk, 'Nineteenth- to Twentieth -Century Russian Mysticism', in Julia A. Lamm (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism* (Chichester, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), 493.

⁷³ David Lynch, *The Elephant Man* (1982).

Reading

All three of these releases can be united in how they represent a document that traces a *searching*. Such a position is, in fact, the key unifying principle of the PhD itself, and outlined in the introduction regarding Henry Threadgill's concept of 'thinking improvisationally'.⁷⁴ In the past and present (*Illuminations #53* and *#120*) there is a distinct influence of Jacques Derrida's Hauntology, and the related field of psychogeography, where place, history, folklore and mythology all play a role in shaping and constructing the present, where past forgotten histories return (and return again) to restate themselves and influence the future.⁷⁵ These releases (and much of the place-based work I have undertaken on the PhD) recognises Ivan Chtcheglov's observations that, 'You can't take three steps [in a city] without encountering ghosts bearing all the prestige of their legends. We move within a closed landscape whose landmarks constantly draw us towards the past': every building, street and feature of the environment is a site of a haunting.⁷⁶ The future in the spread (*Illumination #70*) is also characteristically for this set also looking back and as it engages with more accepted religious practices and beliefs to seek out knowledge of an Other, and understand what it is just beyond the realm of conscious thought, a threshold that is always being brushed up against but never fully transcended within improvisation. This engages with the etymology of sublimity explored by Jan Rosiek, that is, as something that has been raised up to the point that it encounters a border that cannot be crossed, a location that is forever positioned below the limit (sub-lime).⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Library of Congress, 'A Conversation with Henry Threadgill', *Youtube* (1st April 2014), https://youtu.be/42pCOWN6Uf8?si=fDRi_tjlaTz25Z2Z [accessed 10th April 2024], 1:03:10-1:04:25.

⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the World of Mourning and the New International* (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), 10.

⁷⁶ Ivan Chtcheglov, 'Formulary for a New Urbanism', in Ken Knabb (ed. and trans.), *Situationist Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 2.

⁷⁷ Rosiek, 8-9.

Fifth Set

Past: [*Illumination #110: Wyrd-Mad Craft*](#)

As with *Illumination #12* detailed in the first spread, this work was performed using an electric guitar but continually sought to conceal the identity of the instrument, as it used effects pedals transformed into noise-generators to ape sounds of synthesizers. But, unlike *Illumination #12*, the guitar slowly emerges into the maelstrom of improvisation to restate its identity amongst the synth-like swooshing and unmask itself. The work is made up of two separate improvisations layered on top of each other. The first was an improvisation utilising effects pedals, mainly a delay, a flanger, and a tremolo (with a step-filter setting engaged), this track was created mainly by setting up sounds and ‘turning knobs’ in the mode of a modular synthesizer. The second improvisation was shorter than the first and consisted of more conventional guitar playing and using only a distortion/fuzz effect.

The image used for the release’s artwork is a photograph taken in a café in Carlisle, the shadow of the gears of a bike hanging from a wall. The choice of a shadow alludes in part to that of Plato’s cave, but also is referencing back to the music’s concealment of the guitar: what is displayed throughout the initial recording is the delay trails and sustained notes of the guitar, its shadow rather than its actual sound itself.⁷⁸ The work as a whole, in its ontological state as a recorded artefact of a past event it is also a shadow that is being consumed on replay, rather than the ‘actual’ sound of a live event. Furthermore, this is two improvisations overlaid, so it has become a shadow of an object that never existed in the first instance (as a singular object anyway, this is, perhaps two separate shadows in the same place, a trick of a shadow play), these are shadows who have lost their bodies.⁷⁹

The album title derives Anglo-Saxon (pagan) mythology, and specifically references the Allfather, Woden’s discovery of the runes after being driven mad by the Wyrd when he sacrificed himself on the world-tree Yggdrasil. In the process of this

⁷⁸ Plato, G.R.F. Ferrari (ed.), Tom Griffith (trans.), *The Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 220.

⁷⁹ Derrida, 146.

journey the madness also allows him to invent art and discover occult knowledge.⁸⁰ This story (revisited from a number of different angles throughout the course of the doctorate) ties together consciousness, art and the occult at a single point within Woden's noose. It also alludes to the concept held so preciously by the project that there are multiple forms of knowledge and wisdom, some of which, especially, cannot be easily communicated or transmitted through language, particularly when discussing musical knowledge. As Pierre Schaeffer wryly critiques:

Taken as a whole, the copious literature devoted to sonatas, quartets, and symphonies rings hollow. [...] When we put aside the smug comments on the composer's or the performer's state of mind that litter the work, we are left with the most tedious list, in the language of musical technology, of his methods of production or, at the very best, a study of his syntax.⁸¹

Furthermore the story of Woden specifically resonates with Michel Foucault's statements in *Madness and Civilization* that in the renaissance those deemed 'mad' were celebrated as prophets and knowledgeable and embraced in the centre of society, as opposed to the modern position that, Foucault observes, separates the insane from the 'sane', and houses them 'safely' in the asylum where their understandings cannot harm the 'sanity' of society's structures and norms.⁸²

Tumbling towards the last minute of the track, the final course of train track laid to date, a helicopter can be heard, and the ghost of Stockhausen can be felt (the sheer ridiculousness of a string quartet in helicopters needs not be discussed).⁸³ Wait, no, there is a mistake, it wasn't a helicopter at all but a pneumatic drill, Stockhausen immediately transforms (incensed at the mistaken likeness) into the image of Neu! and the opening sounds of 'Negativland' that woke me up, startled, thinking roadworks had begun taking place in my teenage bedroom when I had fallen asleep while listening to the album aged 19. ⁸⁴ More than this, though, the sound is also a prophesising (as all

⁸⁰ Brice Stratford, *Anglo-Saxon Myths: The Struggle for the Seven Kingdoms* (London: Batsford, 2022), 23-26.

⁸¹ Pierre Schaeffer, Christine North (trans.), John Dack (trans.), *Treatise on Musical Objects: An Essay across Disciplines* (Oakland, California: The University of California Press, 2017), 4.

⁸² Michel Foucault, Richard Howard (trans), *Madness and Civilization: a History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 64.

⁸³ Frank Scheffer, *Karlheinz Stockhausen: Helicopter String Quartet* (1996).

⁸⁴ Neu!, 'Negativland', *Neu!* (Brain, 1972).

music is) of the pneumatic drilling I will record with relish on a busy street in Norwich in March 2024, on a day when I fall in love (again) with the city where I was born.⁸⁵ A foretelling of its repetition.

⁸⁵ Jacques Attali, Brian Massumi (trans), *Noise: the Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minesota Press, 2009), 11.

Present: [Illumination #94: Buck \(Philosophy Stool\)](#)

From the spring of 2022 I had begun learning classical guitar, the reasons for this were multiple. Firstly, my music score reading was atrocious, and for someone who had *technically* studied ‘classical music’ for an undergraduate degree (though I had always been a ‘pop’ musician of some description masquerading for this time) it was a bit embarrassing that my reading skills were *so bad*.

Secondly, as a guitar teacher by profession, I had (and still do at the time of writing) hold aspirations to take a Grade 8 in Classical Guitar, so that I could offer teaching as a service in this field, should it be required of me. It is my belief that if a potential student would ask me to teach them classical guitar, I myself should have the technical ability to succeed in a grade 8 exam – not that I hold that these instrumental grades are actually necessary for anyone to become a successful musician in their own right. I do voice several critical views of the graded system, particularly in the way it has canonised popular music and has turned the education of it into the introduction of a dead museum culture full of ‘genius’ (often white male) artists who *must* be studied in order to understand or perform the music, and how this has influenced a decline in originality and creativity in student recitals and ‘real world’ performances where setlists have become filled up with cover versions of modern ‘standards’ – the value I hold for instrument grades is as a hoop musicians need to jump through in order to obtain qualifications to pursue a course in music or to impress their parents, or as something necessary for teachers to undertake to prove they are capable of teaching a subject.

Thirdly, and most importantly, I was interested in learning classical guitar as it was something I had never done before, and I was keen to learn more about the instrument and explore new techniques, phrases and chord-voicings that I could bring into improvisations. Such a reasoning is common in improvised music, such as Evan Parker working to memorise all of Thelonious Monk’s pieces: to *practise* and to *learn* other forms of music or material from outside the improvised idiom still helps in developing as both instrumentalist and improviser.⁸⁶ This release was the first that in the equipment used (a nylon string acoustic guitar) and a number of the techniques and

⁸⁶ Interview with Evan Parker in James Saunders (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Experimental Music* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 333.

phrasing employed shows signs of being influenced by my extra-curricular (non-PhD) practice/hobby.

This work was performed in ‘classical position’ (the left leg elevated with the guitar resting on thigh, with the instrument’s lower bout between my legs, and the body at a 45-degree angle). At the time I didn’t have a stool to use to elevate my left leg (as is the most common way of performing on a classical guitar), so I had to improvise by using a number of books I had nearby. All of these books were philosophical texts (mostly concerning music and ontology), and these were to become my stool for the performance. I chose to highlight this non-musical improvisation on my part by recognising it in the work’s subtitle; because of the poetics and contradictions latent in the action: philosophy is used (literally and metaphorically) as a stool to elevate the work and attempt to help understand what is actually happening, but equally it is a reference to the work as a product of philosophy, specifically the stool, or faeces. Beyond a joke or a relishing of a double meaning that succumbs to transgression, this reference is important for the doctorate broadly, as it works to draw attention to the spiritual and the sacred in mundanity and regard this as much a part of the uncanny mystique of creation as the beauty and sublime oft cited by the religious and/or mystical. This also draws into it a quote from percussionist Jamie Muir: ‘Improvising percussionists are primarily concerned with effecting alchemical changes over rubbish. The changes can be directed towards objective ends – a conception of beauty/purity/music – or subjective ends – an essentially organic interest in the process of change/transmutation itself.’⁸⁷

*The classical canon is a rotting carcass, is there any possibility for such a carcass to be revived? I think I see the maggots. But maybe its these maggots, eating away at the rancid flesh, that will bring forward new life for the tradition. The work is titled Buck, but it’s incorrect: does the artist not know what a buck is? Or is this an intentional mislabelling? The artwork for cover of Captain Beefheart’s Trout Mask Replica does indeed feature a fish mask, but in the ‘replica’, they have not used a trout at all.*⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Jamie Muir qtd in Ben Watson, *Derek Bailey and the Story of Free Improvisation* (London; New York: Verso, 2004), 199.

⁸⁸ Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band, *Trout Mask Replica* (Straight, 1969).

Perhaps the 'buck' in question is in fact a verb rather than a noun: a jogging into one's senses or an attempt to revisit the rotting carcass with a fresh pair of veterinary eyes. Disruption, cough, snort, whimper. Music is created by the living, why are so many compelled to erase this life from music? To disregard these interjections as noise, as unwanted? Wasn't John Renbourn once frustrated by a squeaky chair on his recordings?⁸⁹ I wish my chair squeaked more.

⁸⁹ Something told to me by Dr Mick Wright

Future: [Illumination #121: João Torto](#)

This release was a duet with project supervisor Gwilly Emondez (legal name Will Edmondson) under the group name Mud Orange. Whilst this group's name is obviously similar to the fruit blood orange (and fruit have obvious resonances with the doctoral project title), the name is also drawing attention to the individuals and the group as a whole, with each word standing in for each member: 'Orange' being a reference to Will (as in the historical figure William of Orange, which itself has religious significance as a code for Protestantism, and a way to tie the whole together as a play on blood orange, as mentioned above); and 'Mud' being code for myself, Adam who, biblically speaking, was created by God out of the earth and life was 'breathed' into him. This particular story holds further significance for the group, and the project more broadly if we take the almost gnostic view that humanity is divine. Such a concept is voiced loudly in the work of occultists Aleister Crowley and Austin Osman Spare, as well as within Christian doctrine, from Athanasius' view that, '[God] became man that we might become divine', to the internalisation of the divine realm in the Gospel of Luke that states: 'the kingdom of heaven is within', and in the practices of Hesychasm explored above (*Illumination #70*).⁹⁰ Through viewing this divinity as something that has developed out of dirt through divine creativity, comparisons can be drawn with the quote from Jamie Muir above, and the view that mundanity has just as much creative and sacred potential as the traditionally beautiful or transcendent and that humanity is itself example of this.

The release's title *João Torto* somewhat cautions against the above point (of humanity as divine): in 1540 the character João Torto, from Viseu in Portugal, believed he had the necessary insight into aviation to construct a flying machine (and matching bird hat) and test it by leaping off of the roof of a local tower. However, so the story goes, Torto plummeted to the ground and succumbed to his injuries.⁹¹ The figure of Torto conjures in myself a childhood memory of a mobile of an Icarus-like figure (though in renaissance-style clothing) and, looking back, I wonder if this mobile was itself based on Torto or one of his contemporaries. The character in the mobile was, of course, flying

⁹⁰ Aleister Crowley (trans.), *The Book of the Law* (n.p.: Strigoi Publishing, 2018), 17; Austin Osman Spare, *The Book of Pleasure: the Psychology of Ecstasy* (n.p.: One-Eye Publishing, 2018), 7.; John R. Meyer, 'Athanasius' Son of God Theology', *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (1999), 250.

⁹¹ Todd A. Borlik, 'Hellish Falls: Faustus's Dismemberment, Phaeton's Limbs and Other Renaissance Aviation Disasters—Part I', *English Studies*, 97(3) (2016), 262.

successfully, but perhaps this was a static image, taken in the split second after jumping where the ability to fly was a real possibility, before the seconds that followed where gravity asserted itself as a dominating force. Such a view gives a darker interpretation to the childhood mobile (setting a child up to hope for what will inevitably be failure) but such dark stories are not unheard of in children's stories or rhymes, for example: 'Ring a Ring o' Roses' rumoured to be about the plague; 'Oranges and Lemons' ('Here comes a candle to light you to bed, here comes a chopper to chop off your head'); or Humpty Dumpty.

This is the second release in a row (in the write up, not teleologically, after *Illumination #94* above) that features a carcass for the cover. These two releases are by no means the only covers in the project that feature a deceased creature, and that two have appeared in a row highlights my morbid fascination (one that I share with Will) of photographing deceased animals. In conversations about this practice, Will has voiced a jealousy of dead rabbits, observing their frequent peaceful appearance, while I always consider dead birds to be angelic, particularly those which are in various states of decomposition, or whose bodies have been mutilated by predators (as is the case for the artwork for *Illumination #121*). That I don't eat meat and, in fact, find the sight of meat in butcher's shops and supermarkets repulsive perhaps adds another bizarre dimension to this gruesome practice.

Recording at Will's flat in Newcastle (the first time I'd visited there) I was perhaps a little uncomfortable in these new surroundings. Listening back, it sounds like the track has been over compressed and most nuance eradicated (St. Anger is gloriously terrible, isn't it? Is Lulu worse?).⁹² Pulsing, synthesizers foretelling doom break away into an unsettled dance, but not unsettled as in unsettling, more like an uncomfortable need to go to the toilet when there isn't one around. The guitar responds for the entirety, would it be possible for it to 'lead' when the synthesizer's mechanics are so mysterious? (Will, having read this, comments that he believes that I do indeed start to lead the narrative around the 7-minute marker, I am less sure). Outside, (living) birds squawk – inaudible on the recording, but a memory I have of the session – and the guitar tries to mimic the

⁹² Metallica, *St Anger* (Elektra, 1990); Lou Reed and Metallica, *Lulu* (Vertigo, 2011).

corvid as response. As the performers move into playing on kitchen utensils (pots and pans and boiled egg slicers) accompanied by ceremonial rattles, the performance begins to assert itself as a ritual. A reenchanting of everyday and a drawing down, desecrating, profanising of the sacred. The performance is constantly trying to take off, like an infant bird it leaps into the air and hurtles around before descending again, but, unlike the infant who eventually learns to fly, this work stays firmly rooted in its place (and happily so). In its refusal to compromise, its contradictions hold it down firmly: it is a creature whose wings are constantly striving for the air, but whose talons refuse to surrender the perch, surrender the earth, surrender the mundane.

Reading

Taking these three releases together, we can observe a past occupied by shadows and illusions, a misremembered past that resembles a carnivalesque hall of mirrors. The events remembered were *real*, but they have become distorted; contorted to look like something other than what they were. The present acts as archaeological dig-site, uncovering a tradition that is latent underneath the earth, a remnant lingering on from a past that, in some ways perhaps better-forgotten, like the deformed skull uncovered at the beginning of folk horror film *Blood on Satan's Claw*.⁹³ This tradition is taken up and an attempt is made to reinvigorate it, whilst life itself is praised and a true 'living in the moment' is reached through an appreciation of the mundanity and a recognition of the Other (the alive recognises the dead). Reaching forward into the future, we see a further, extended striving into the unknown but an unwilling to give away ground of the known, like a toddler at a nursery who wishes to play with a new toy on the floor but refuses to surrender the one already clasped in their grip: an impossibility and a failure, of course (but ultimately isn't everything), but in its failure it is itself worthy of mention, of merit.

⁹³ Piers Haggard, *Blood on Satan's Claw* (1971).

Sixth Set

Past: [Illumination #23: All Shall Be Well](#)

This release came at time in the project when I was first developing the ‘audio sigil’ concept outlined above in the write up for *Illumination #64: Dress Rehearsals* (an album that coincidentally in its reflections on Julian of Norwich shares a thematic tie to this one). As explained in the write-up above, this work placed the letters of set words and phrases (‘Julian’, ‘All Shall Be Well’, and ‘Four’) into a table of correspondences that related to musical pitches via letters, and then transferred these pitch sets into music. Unusually for the work in *Fruit of the Vine*, this release comprised of a number of tracks (three), however, unlike some of the earlier works of the project (e.g. *Illumination #12* explored above) that created multiple tracks for each release by ‘carving up’ a single improvised session into multiple tracks (reminiscent of the approach German band Can took), this release comprises of three distinct pieces.⁹⁴

As with *Illumination #9* discussed above, this release experimented with stereo, splitting the guitar’s signal into two mono pathways with separate effects on each, and running these into a stereo looper that could mix the two separate loops independently. Such an experimentation of stereo was an attempt to create a release out of a single improvised take that could be perceived as a fully produced recording or a composed performance featuring overdubs, as opposed to a single live take. It was also an attempt to recontextualise and improvise along with something else rather than as a fully exposed solo performance (something that I was less comfortable in doing at the beginning of the PhD, having mainly been part of improvising groups prior to this). Such an improvised solo overdubbing style draws on ideas explored by saxophonist Evan Parker on *Process and Reality*.⁹⁵

The first track ‘Julian’ is a deliberate abstract scene setting for the work that begins to attempt to understand the protagonist on a purely superficial level, that is through her name only. The second track explores one of the most famous quotes from the mystic and what the potentials of this concept may be. The third track, ‘Four’ moves

⁹⁴ Rob Young, Irmin Schmidt, *All Gates Open: the Story of Can* (London: Faber and Faber, 2018), 106.

⁹⁵ Evan Parker, *Process and Reality* (FMP, 1991).

beyond Julian specifically and into her wider influence and significance, the title of this track is a reference to the fourth of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, titled 'Little Gidding', this poem quotes Julian of Norwich multiple times (e.g. 'And all shall be well and / All manner of thing shall be well / When the tongues of flames are in-folded / Into the crowned knot of fire / And the fire and the rose are one').⁹⁶ Coincidentally, at the time of writing this reflection, this release is the third of a series of four releases that contemplate Julian of Norwich (the fourth being *Illumination #64* the themes of which are explored already above).

The artwork for this release was created by processing and editing an image of Julian of Norwich in the free audio editing software Audacity. To *databend* images in this way, an image is loaded into a blank Audacity project and converted into 'raw data', audio effects can then be added to this 'raw data': distortions tends to change the colouring, delays and reverbs add 'echoes' on the image, while wah, phaser and flanger adds 'scoopy' patterns like smudges of ink (wah tends to do this in the same colouring as the original image while phaser adds extra brighter colouring). Depending how much of the track these effects are added to, depends on how much of the image is effected when it's converted back into an image (if the whole track is selected, the whole image is effected, if just the start, then only the top of the image is altered, if the end of the track, then the bottom of the image is effected). I enjoyed using this approach to image editing for a number of reasons: firstly, I liked the poetics of reintroducing musical/audio effects as a way to distort or alter the image, allowing the image to be directly shaped and controlled by auditory processes (an inversion of what is often common in music where both audiences and practitioners will 'hear with their eyes'); secondly, while the general shape of an outcome of an action could be predicted (a delay on a certain highlighted part of the images 'track' will add 'echoes' to the image, for example) the actual specifics of what the image will come to look like were impossible to predict (the exact part of the image being 'echoed', how this echo translated onto the image, if the adding of the effects would actually break the image file entirely), this led to the improvisatory nature of the project as a whole to seep into the production of the cover artwork as well as the music. The use of Audacity for creating images for releases was a

⁹⁶ T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), 198.

common feature of the doctoral project in the first year, but this method of image editing quickly dropped off after [Illumination #39](#) (although that is not to say it won't reappear in artwork for future releases). I never kept any notes on what I did when creating these images – partly because it was fairly common for me to create a number of these 'glitch' images and pick my favourite, or the one that wasn't broken of all the choices – nor did I save any of the Audacity files, but studying the image for this release, it looks as if distortion, reverb and/or delay have been added to the entire image to draw out the orange and to create the repeating echoing pattern, once this was created the image was probably opened in a 'standard' image editing software so that details and colours could be accentuated further.

This release was accompanied by a set of liner notes, as with *Illumination #44* above, this text was produced by A.I., which briefly formed part of the interest of the PhD in seeking to create stronger associations between technology and the creation of work (viewing technology as a collaborator rather than purely a tool). Conceptually, this idea had planned to begin integrating A.I. further into the work, so that liner notes and even music itself could begin to produce work 'in the style' of what had been produced prior, with vague goals of automating the A.I. to produce work liturgically so as to erode the human element of the work and replace it with technology, allowing the work to slowly transform into a golem. At the time I was experimenting with this concept A.I. wasn't advanced enough (text was often garbled, lacked much sense, or was straight cut-ups of what I'd inputted, not that these things weren't interesting in themselves, but they did not stand up on their own without human interference), and the production of A.I. music was still very early on in development.

You were paying a heavy price for that belief.
You were condemned to live as a raven-haired hippie.

You are a star shining in the darkness.
Wither away the radishes.

Keep an eye on the ashtrays.
What are the ashtrays missing?
A guitar? A turquoise ashtray.

A framed picture of yourself? A crucifix.

What does the box say?

It says to your spirit: 'Keep an eye on these boxes, they are being kept.
You people are traitors to yourself.
You people are savages of the earth.
Go ahead become the savannah.
Your incarnation is the wolf egg, an attempt to turn the bird of the sea, and an attempt by the human to separate the wolf from the lamb.

This text that the A.I. produced (based on a 'library' of creative writing produced by myself) is one of the better A.I. productions of the doctorate, and possess some really innovative and interesting ideas (to me at least!), 'Wither away the radishes', and 'Go ahead and become the savannah' are particularly interesting and visceral statements to me. But the A.I. (as can be seen when comparing this section of writing to the one produced for *Illumination #44*) seems to have certain preoccupations: namely, hippies, ravens, and ashtrays.

Present: [Illumination #50: Figura Femminile](#)

As with the Divers Alarums' release *Bucca* (*Illumination #53*, outlined above), this release used a non-standardised tuning of the guitar, and used intuition to settle on a particular tuning. This settling on tuning is recorded as the initial opening of the first track, demonstrating that improvisation (in this instance) has begun from the moment the guitar is picked up, and that the tuning itself is part of this improvisatory process. In retaining the tuning-up on the release, it also serves as a blueprint for future performances, a notetaking of what the tuning is, so I (or other guitar players) can tune guitars to this track in future to explore the tuning afresh. The exploration of the tuning is the main element of this release, so having the tuning-up present as the initial opening seems (to me) only logical.

The use of such unconventional tunings can, in my opinion, open up new concepts to be explored that would not ordinarily be uncovered on the guitar. As Pierre Schaeffer explains; 'musical ideas are, and more than you would think, the prisoners of the whole baggage of music, just as scientific ideas are of their experimental equipment', I as a guitarist will often compose 'guitaristic' things purely because of the mechanics of my instrument.⁹⁷ One method that can be explored to get out of this is the tuning, as math rock guitar player Yvette Young promotes, is by changing the tuning, so that certain chord or scale grips and known spaces are no-longer present on the instrument.⁹⁸ Such a 'getting out' of the normal or well-trodden spaces on an instrument implies an allegiance (if only in part) with the school of thought outlined by David Toop that emerged in free improvisation in the 1960s that promoted a 'deconditioning' as opposed to 'virtuosity' on the instrument as a means to reach new ideas and sounds.⁹⁹

This project overall does not subscribe wholly to this belief, however. Contradictorily, it follows both approaches and beliefs within this so-called 'split' in improvisation: depending on the context both 'virtuosity' and 'deconditioning' have been employed by the project to access different views and understandings. Much as this project refuses to back or accept one philosophical, religious or occult school or

⁹⁷ Schaeffer, 2.

⁹⁸ Reverb, 'Yvette Young (Covet) Creates Songs with Guitar Tapping and Open Tunings | Reverb Interview', *Youtube* (2019) <https://youtu.be/GKdsaRU2u8g?si=8VdeFrD1yysE2OI4> [Accessed 16th November 2023].

⁹⁹ Toop, 164-5.

position over another – and embraces the contradictions that arise from such a position – musically too, many different schools and concepts are explored and heralded throughout this project, despite their contradictions.

Illumination #50 is a solo acoustic guitar work, that while also exploring intuitive tuning methods, also tests my short-term memory: a theme is established in the first track of the release, which is then further revisited in each of the following tracks, and recontextualised and improvised around. This theme functions much like the ‘head’ of a traditional jazz standard (or chorus of a pop song) however, unlike these, it was not pre-composed, but improvised in the course of the performance, and only became a ‘composed piece’ or ‘head’ through its being repeated twice more throughout the performance’s duration. In its exploration and testing of memory, this work questions the distinctions between composition and improvisation (does an improvisation cease to be if it is repeated? Or is it still an improvisation if composition is not the intended outcome?), as well as referencing in part an influence from Bergson’s text *Matter and Memory*. Bergson contended that we cannot know the body from ‘without’ but only from ‘within’, in the (forced) presence of breathing in the second track, I am, in the performance being made ‘aware’ that I have a body.¹⁰⁰ However, this is an interesting realisation that can only be experienced in that scenario: when listening back to the recording, while it is *me breathing*, through the process of recording and replaying, it has ceased to be *my breath*, it has become a disembodied ghost of myself.

The project as a whole works inside occultism, referencing the methodology of intuition developed by Bergson. Bergson’s philosophy itself bears no direct links to occultism, but there are numerous tangential connections. One example is the position he held as the president of the Society for Psychical Research: an organisation dedicated to researching the scientific proof of supernatural phenomena. Additionally, as Alex Owens comments, during his life, Bergson was hugely influential to the work of occult practitioners, with many of his ideas resonating with, or being synthesised with, occult thought and practice, in a comparable mode to the method employed by this doctorate.¹⁰¹ Within his philosophy, Bergson briefly comments on the historical belief in

¹⁰⁰ *Matter and Memory*, 183.

¹⁰¹ Alex Owens, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 117.

magic in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. Bergson also draws multiple comparisons in *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* of the mystic and the musician, and how they are regarded in society.¹⁰² He makes further comparisons, contrasting the mystic to someone suffering from hallucinations induced by mental health issues and the musical ‘genius’ and when he explains how some people are less receptive to mysticism, deeming it ‘quackery’, he compares it to how some people believe music is ‘nothing but noise’.¹⁰³ Furthermore, that Henri Bergson was the son of a composer, Michał Bergson, and the brother of an occultist, Moina Mathers-MacGreggor (formerly Mina Bergson, a prominent member of the occult organisation the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn), is perhaps no mere coincidence for this project.¹⁰⁴ *Fruit of the Vine* is concerned with the intersections of (instantaneous) musical composition, metaphysics, and occultism: an intersection found at the heart of the Bergson family unit.

Illumination #50 takes its name from the painting that features as the release’s artwork, an artwork that stems from the family unit outlined above. This work was created by Mathers-MacGreggor, and she is also referenced in the titles of the album tracks.

As with the previous write-up, this release made use of A.I. to write a text these were:

Slowly drawing out the shy child
Listen to what it has to say,
Does it laugh or does it howl?
Like an animal in the night
Or a dog abandoned by its owners.

Is this what it's all about?

¹⁰² Bergson, R. Ashley Audra (trans), Cloudesley Brereton (trans), and W. Horsfall Carter (trans), *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), 230.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹⁰⁴ Owens, 135.

Future: [Illumination #123: Step Up](#)

Interestingly, this is the second release running where the tuning of the guitar features as a key element of the performance. This performance stems from starting with a guitar with strings that begin (almost) as loose as they can whilst still being able to sound. I then improvised on this guitar, whilst also tuning the guitar – slowly, without interrupting the improvisation – until the guitar reached ‘standard’ tuning, at which point the piece was finished. The idea for this piece was not my own, but ‘stolen’, from a description of William Bland’s *An Homage to Picasso – For Guernica* in John Schneider’s *The Contemporary Guitar*.¹⁰⁵ Occasionally the tuning-up element of the performance fails and the nature of what is ‘going on’ is revealed as a disruption to the performance, while other times it is concealed, either through the tuning of a string other than one of the strings that is sounding; or disguised as an exaggerated glissando. Listening back, I find the plate reverb on the track as a little over the top (an attempt on my part to disguise that the performance was recorded in a ‘bad’ sounding room).

Bizarrely, to my ears at least, the type of guitar (and perhaps even that it is a guitar) that this work is performed on is gradually revealed as the strings get closer to their ‘normal’ tension: elements of the sound could be an acoustic bass guitar, a shamisen, a theorbo. While the approach to performing on the guitar was largely conventional (plucking fretted strings) as ways to make the most of the tuning of the instrument – the tuning wouldn’t matter as much if the piece only involved striking the body rhythmically, for example – one more extended technique that was discovered and explored on this release was the sound of the strings rubbing against the fretboard. This sound is achieved through the use of an exaggerated vibrato specifically a ‘rock player’ vibrato where a finger of the fretting hand pushed the string up and down parallel to the fret wire, stretching the string and thus modulating the pitch, as opposed to the more subtle ‘classical’ vibrato where the finger is moved perpendicular to the fret wire, along the length of the string, which creates, particularly on a classical guitar a smoother and more subtle vibrato. While this exaggerated vibrato can achieve the ‘rubbing’ sound on a guitar in standard tuning, because of the tension on the string, it is often difficult to achieve the rubbing sound exclusively, and it is often accompanied by the sound of the

¹⁰⁵ John Schneider, *The Contemporary Guitar* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: the University of California Press, 1985), 152.

string vibrating itself. However, with the reduced tension of the loosened string, this rubbing it more pronounced and appears without its more conventionally sounding counterpart.

For the most part when improvising, I am attempting to create or discover new, unheard music: original sounds, phrases, or ideas. Occasionally, as discussed throughout this thesis I may use pre-prepared tools (e.g. effects pedals, or methods of ‘preparing’ the guitar), or pre-prepared processes (e.g. the tuning-up of the instrument in this release), or, very occasionally, pre-composed elements (like in *Illumination #120* discussed above), but I almost never intentionally quote themes or chord progressions from other artists’ work in different idioms. This is could be interpreted as being in line with Derek Bailey’s dispensing with ‘idiomatic’ playing – while quotations are not strictly idiomatic playing, they can make playing between players from different musical/cultural backgrounds difficult and problematise the reaching of mutual ground (e.g. a rock player may not be able to understand or be ‘in on’ the joke if a classical player keeps quoting Brahms at them, for example) – but it is mainly because I do not find the ‘quoting’ of music particularly interesting.¹⁰⁶ When I was a less experienced improviser I would routinely quote Beethoven, Led Zeppelin or Britney Spears in my playing as a way of recontextualising them, but this became stale to me personally quite quickly. Certainly, since becoming a guitar teacher, I have had to learn and play hundreds of non-original pieces every week when teaching my students, so to then to do it again in my practice doesn’t provide me with any satisfaction or interest.

However, there are occasions when quotes ‘appear’ in my playing, either through my concentration drifting, or through finding a note, and then another, and then another, and the quote forming itself. Both of these approaches result in something genuinely surprising when they happen, and I am never totally sure of where exactly they have originated from. This was the case in this release when the theme from the film *the Godfather* appears: I had, up until this performance only ever played the theme once or twice as a teenager, and only ever in a disinterested, non-committed fashion, I had never memorised it and when it reappeared in this performance, I hadn’t played it for at

¹⁰⁶ Watson, 251.

least 15 years. I also hadn't seen the film in the last 15 years (and I have only watched it once in my life), so where exactly had this quote appeared from?

To add to the mystery to the quotation's appearance: because of the nature of this performance, until the end, I never had a complete picture of how the guitar was tuned until I had reached 'standard tuning' at the end: the notes themselves were often a mystery to me until after I had played them, the piece itself in a continuous state of unknowing, uncovering and discovery. Such an appearance of the quotation marks a paranormal undercurrent in (my at least) contemporary psyche: a continued haunting of Western culture on my subconscious lurking, in a perpetual state of waiting to appear in some form at an opportune moment.¹⁰⁷ The appearance of the theme in my performance could have been lurking in my psyche for the past 15 years; or from having heard it as the ringtone of a 'geezer' somewhere on the street, where somehow, the film has become linked to his own sense of self; or from its being used as soundtrack to a comedy sketch, where its use elevated the comedic message of the scene through signification; or from something else entirely.¹⁰⁸ The explanations of the 'geezer' and the comedy sketch are examples that both *feel* very real to me as things that I've experienced, but the specifics themselves are out of the reach of my memory, and I'm unsure if they were *real* encounters I had with the theme or, instead, plausible fabrications by my mind, much like the tightrope-walking elephant in the opening write-up of the thesis.

One third of the way through the performance, breaking glass joins the conversation as the bin men arrive as an unexpected counterpoint to the performance, rupturing the 'solo' nature of what has gone on up to then and, on listening back, reminds me of the smashing glass in the introduction to Pere Ubu's 'Sentimental Journey' (a song that, like NEU!'s 'Negativland', woke me up as a teenager with a fright, in this instance as I thought someone had broken in to my house through a window).¹⁰⁹ The unintentional duet that develops roots this release temporarily on a Thursday (as that's when 'bin day' is for me), and thus, throws up potential latent references to

¹⁰⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the World of Mourning and the New International* (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), 2-3.

¹⁰⁸ Roland Barthes, Annette Lavers (trans), *Mythologies* (London: Vintage, 2009), 136.

¹⁰⁹ Pere Ubu, 'Sentimental Journey', *the Modern Dance* (Blank, 1978).

paganism or the Norse god of war, Thor, who the day is named after. But the inclusion of the bin lorry also roots the release, and the practice of the doctorate more generally, in mundanity, creating this release is as everyday, is as routine, as brushing teeth or putting the wheely bins out. That the mundanity here is voiced through the bins and literal rubbish, echoes of Jamie Muir's opinion of improvisation can be found here, as well as the readings of mundanity and spirituality that I observed above (*Illumination #94: Buck (Philosophy Stool)*).

The photograph used for the artwork, while looking somewhat staged was a 'true' discovery. The image is a pair of abandoned or lost shoes that I came across in the Newcastle suburb of Sandyford outside of the local council roadworks depot. I found these shoes utterly fascinating: they had been left relatively neatly, unlaced in the middle of the pavement, as if whomever the owner of the shoes was had been wearing them up to that point, before deciding they no-longer wanted to wear them and just took them off, only to walk the rest of their destination without shoes (this in itself reminds me of someone I once met while studying at music college who hadn't worn shoes for several years, walking *everywhere* in bare feet). I came across the shoes whilst travelling to teach a guitar lesson in a suburb on the other side of the city to where I live, in Fenham, incidentally, this image bears a similarity to the framing and setting of the artwork used for [Illumination #85: Bird Lament](#), the photograph of which was taken five months prior, in Fenham, and also on my way to teach the same student.

Reading

Drawing together the three strands of this set and plaiting them together, a general shift can be observed, that extends from an examining of the possibilities of a solo guitar performance in the past – in terms of a grandiose arrangement of multiple parts and layers (*Illumination #23*) – through to a questioning of the ontology of the instrument in the present and future, as various tuning systems were implemented and experimented with (*Illumination #50* and *#123*).

Numerically, the catalogue number of the ‘future’ in this set (*#123*) can be constituted by adding the ‘past’ (*#23*) with the ‘present’ doubled (*#50*), ultimately these numbers are arbitrary, and I do not know whether this is ‘only’ a coincidence, or if it has some sort of deeper meaning. Certainly, if we were to take these three releases as a singular narrative (as the system has set them up to be), the ‘future’ does resemble the ‘present’ far more than it does the ‘past’ in terms of both methodology (experimentation with tunings); and aesthetics created through the technology used (acoustic guitar). However, while the guitar’s tuning in the ‘present’ can be read as a sustained revealing of hidden secrets stored across the fretboard; the continual retuning implemented in the ‘future’ shares a wilful concealing (or reveiling as occultist Éliphas Lévi would voice it) of secrets which shares more in common with the ‘past’ in *Illumination #23*’s use of effects and noise to conceal the work’s instrumentation.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Éliphas Lévi, Arthur Edward Waite (trans), *Transcendental Magic: its Doctrine and Ritual* (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2011), 173.

Seventh Set

Past: [*Illumination #87: ARR RAR*](#)

In the first few months of 2022 I was a member of an experimental/psychedelic band called Emergency Librarian. I was asked to join the band by their synthesiser player and band leader Rory Johnstone (who now produces work under the moniker Lava Mouse). Emergency Librarian performed at a number of venues in Newcastle, but, after the band having been together for many years prior to my joining, they disbanded after only a few months after I had become a member (although I was assured my joining had nothing to do with it!). My relationship with Rory began when he reached out to me in August 2021 to teach him to play guitar, and we got on very well on a personal level, with many shared musical, visual art, and occult interests; and I continued to teach him after the end of Emergency Librarian. Incidentally, it was Rory to whom I taught 'Set the Controls to the Heart of the Sun' discussed in the first entry of the thesis (*Illumination #65*).

Because many of the band members had conflicting schedules and commitments (some had childcare to consider, others had unusual shift patterns, one was working as a professional musician full-time) whilst rehearsals were scheduled fortnightly, there were only a couple of occasions where all six members would attend (bassist, Paul, has since joked that he would play gigs as a member of Emergency Librarian and not have met the other band members until the performance - this was only a slight exaggeration!). On the occasion relevant to this release, the only members present at the rehearsal were Rory on synthesisers and samplers, drummer and vocalist Robin (also drummer for band the Last Path, formerly Bad Amputee), and myself on guitar. Rather than spending the whole of the rehearsal time going over a set of three songs that were joined together by long extended improvisations when half of the band members were absent, we spent some time improvising a number of pieces separate from the usual material.

When listening back, an influence of many of the early 1970s German Kosmische/'Krautrock' band can be heard, an area of musical interest shared between the three of the participants (while on tour, that I was absent from, but had been told about in rehearsals, the band played a guessing game of 'Faust or Fault' where weird

noises had to be attributed to the Faust boxset being played on the car radio, or a fault with the car itself). Distinctly, the band Can haunts the opening track with its monotonous drum pattern and repetitive chord sequence, while the second track reminds me of NEU!'s 'Lieber Honig'.¹¹¹ Robin's lyrics on 'Soldier' were a common occurrence in improvisations. I do not know if these lyrics derived from an old folksong as they seem, to my ears at least, sound like, or if they are Robin's own composition *in the style* of traditional folksong.

The third track emerges out of a mess, a cloud on insecurity or 'not-knowing': I had only been a member of the band for a few weeks, and while I had known Rory for a while, our relationship was still in flux (a change from teacher-student to peers/friends/bandmates/colleagues); and Robin and I were still very unfamiliar with each other and each other's playing style. I felt unsure of what I was expected to play: while improvised, was there a boundary or was it completely open? So much of this initial tentativeness is worked out in the first few minutes of the final track, before drifting into an extended psychedelia-tinged piece heavily influenced (in my part at least) by bands like Gong and Soft Machine. As this piece winds down, a common preoccupation of my playing emerges, that is, (artificial) harmonics. As someone whose research has concerned the paranormal, I tend to view harmonics as a prime example of musical ghosts: notes that are always present but are, for the most part, unheard and need a specific treatment (either physical application of techniques as is shown here, or the use of effects such as distortion) to draw out these overtones so they can be properly perceived and unveiled. Composer Henry Cowell recognised the subliminal influence these overtones, and the ability for instruments to produce audible overtones, have over the harmonic systems of music cultures adapt, and my continued experimentation with harmonics is always a fascination with the mere materiality and complexity of even the simplest sound.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Julian Cope, *Krautrock Sampler* (Great Britain, Head Heritage, 1996), 51; Neu! 'Lieber Honig', *Neu!* (Brain, 1972).

¹¹² Cowell, 4-5.

Present: [Illumination #91: Effigy](#)

This release took place two days after returning from the wedding of an old school friend. I have only kept in touch with three people from high school, all three of them were members of the first band I was in (we were awful). The band used to rehearse in my mum's garage in a space that had old 1970s patterned carpet nailed to the wall to try to deaden the sound that, because of the lack of airflow, and dampness in the air, went mouldy, so the garage always smelt of a combination of bleach and a dusty muskiness. Alex, whose wedding, I had been to, was the bass player of the band. Alex and I had become friends because we both had bass lessons at the school and had similar tastes in music. When we decided to start a band together, we concluded that we couldn't have two bass players, and so I learnt to play guitar because Alex was the better bass player of the two of us.

The only other school friends the both of us speak to were Jamie (the band's drummer) and Matt (the singer). It's interesting that the only people who I have maintained contact with from high school were musical connections to myself. I am the only one of the four of us that has continued music in any long-lasting or 'professional' (as in being paid for it) capacity: Alex did a PhD in Nuclear and Chemical Engineering, Matt is a doctor, and Jamie, after having done a MSc in Physics, has become a property surveyor. Alex had, for a time, done some music making, playing bass in a Leeds-based 'indie' band, but when I last spoke to him about music, he informed me he hasn't even looked at an instrument for several years now. When I found this out it made me profoundly sad, I wouldn't have expected them (or anyone) to try and be 'professional' musicians, but to have got to a standard and been a performer for such a sustained period of time (14 years old until early or mid-twenties) to then have just stopped making music, even recreationally, something that, in my mind, *is the best*, feels like such a waste, but not just for him, as there *must* be countless of other lawyers, bankers, shop assistants, etc., who have at one stage been performing musicians and who have, through a slow but consistent occupation of their life by other hobbies and mundane jobs, music has been eradicated from their lives completely.

This release features a number of layered guitar parts and a recording of the crackling of a fire, this is used to make the title of the work (*Effigy*) more prominent in the music itself. Like with previous releases discussed, this project utilised the Audio Sigil

concept to create a tone row for the work's title. A distorted guitar used tremolo picking to play the tone row in order, this was reintroduced around halfway through the piece, substituting the tremolo picking for a tremolo effect which cut the guitar more drastically and cleanly, perhaps more clinically, and in more of an inorganic way. While tremolo picking divided up sustained notes like a tearing of a piece of paper: rough, messy edges and a lack of neatness like a collage by Kurt Schwitters; the tremolo effect acted like a guillotine: crisp, sharp divides like the lines of a Russian constructivist artwork.¹¹³ A second guitar used the tone row (C# D E♭ F A) and harmonised these notes into two chords: Dm(maj7) (DFAC#) and F7(#5)/E♭ (FAC#E♭), these chords were then turned into an arpeggiated pattern on an electric guitar with flanger effect added (similar in style to many prog-rock bands such as Marillion).¹¹⁴ Because there were 5 notes in the tone row created, the time signature used for the arpeggiated guitar pattern was 5/8. There was also 5 different guitar parts overall.

¹¹³ Examples of these art styles mentioned are: Kurt Schwitters, *Opened by Customs* (1937-8); El Lissitzky, *Proun 99* (1923-25).

¹¹⁴ Marillion, *Misplaced Childhood* (EMI, 1985).

Future: [Illumination #54: Janus](#)

This was the first release of 2021, and it marked a time of reflection. In popular consciousness January is the time of the New Year and ‘New Year Resolutions’, and in ancient times this was true too, with the etymology of the month being tied to this reflective nature. January takes its name from the Roman god Janus, the God of doorways and boundaries: as we reach the first day of the month, we are stepping through one of these boundaries of Janus, reflecting on the world we are leaving behind while simultaneously being apprehensive about what awaits us through the door.¹¹⁵

This release was aesthetically improvised rock music akin to the work by Kockroach Kids discussed above (*Illumination #19*). This work, however, was a solo project featuring a single guitar with some edits made post-production. The main guitar sound was the result of my having been lent a fuzz pedal by northeast based pedal manufacturer NEelectronix – that I subsequently bought – and this release was my first experimentations with it, pulling out what was possible with the pedal and letting the sound of the pedal guide my musical decisions. Like a number of the earlier releases, this was a single improvised performance that was then ‘carved up’ in post-production. However, unlike the other releases that simply cut the performance up and left it, this work took the opening passage of the improvisation (a series of harmonics played on the guitar, titled ‘Origins’) and stretched it and placed it as a background drone track for the duration of the release. Conceptually this was intended to stand in as a haunting of the past onto the present and into the future that is experienced continually in mundane life (old buildings rubbing up against new, old procedures in the workplace being built out of old ones, roads and paths that have remained in the same place for centuries) and as highlighted by Ivan Chtcheglov, as already discussed above.¹¹⁶ This highlighting of the past’s ability to haunt the future can be observed particularly strongly at the beginning of a new year and under the influence of Janus. Like many of the other releases discussed already, the note choices for this work were dictated by running the work’s title through a table of correspondences to produce a tone row with which to improvise around.

¹¹⁵ Gary Forsythe, *Time in Roman Religion: One Thousand Years of Religious History* (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 14.

¹¹⁶ Chtcheglov, 2.

Look forward, look back

Look forward, look back

A double transition is taking place

I continue to string disconnected narratives together. All that is needed to make them work is a strong belief and the correct adhesive.

We are all uniquely here

We are all uniquely now

Fractured byrdsong enters the picture before being quickly cast aside: now is not the time, the time was then and it will never be again.

No 'out-of-tune' and no 'in tune'. No tune at all that I recall. No tune at all to scribble down, in preparation to be inscribed into a time-loop: warping what it means to toe the line.

Look forward, look back

Before every step.

Look forward, look back

To hear it once is to hear it again.

Look forward, look back

Who is following who?

Look forward look back

Row upon row upon row

Look forward, look back

Look forward, look back

Look forward, look back

Look forward, look back

Look forward, look back

In this reflection, that was composed contemporaneously with the work's release, a number of things relevant to the project as a whole can be observed. Firstly, a 'time-loop' (as with the First Set), the order of this release moves forwards in time from the *Illumination #87* to *#91* before jumping back before the 'past' for the final release in the set (*Illumination #54*), creating a sort of loop.

Secondly, the deliberate misspelling of 'birdsong' as 'byrdsong' has several resonances, musically it could be referencing either the English renaissance composer William Byrd, the American pop/psychedelic band the Byrds, or it could be an allusion to, and a promotion of, a non-standardisation of the English language (such a non-standardisation that was commonplace in the time of William Byrd, in fact). Such an attempt at unravelling language is a key strand of the doctorate: linguistic knowledge is so often placed at the top of a hierarchy within academia, but this language not the *only* medium knowledge can take, and aesthetics, sonics, taste, touch, smell, can all also transmit knowledge about the universe *in their own way*. This multivocal approach to knowledge is often excluded within the academy, that prioritises the written over any other means, but this project refuses, intending to upend this traditional hierarchy and place creative practice and most especially musical knowledge as the major transmitter of knowledge for this project.

Such a position has made the requirement of the qualification to produce a written thesis difficult, and the thesis has undergone a series of transformations throughout the doctorate before settling on the format it currently takes. The drafts have resembled a dense pseudo-philosophical text intended to be almost impenetrable and boring, in an attempt to create a drastic contrast with the creative project work. The thesis has also, at an earlier stage, comprised of a series of three texts presented in parallel columns (one text of diary entries to the creative practice work; another that was a piece of totally creative writing; and a third that was a traditional academic dissertation), these texts could then be read across the page from left to right with chunks of each text being 'cut up' across the lines (this approach being heavily inspired

by William S Burroughs).¹¹⁷ A third 'safer' draft was also started that was a mixture of traditional philosophical grounded and definitions of occult terms used, followed by a series of general observations on the creative practice as a whole ('why improvisation?', for example).

¹¹⁷ Matthew Levi Stevens, *The Magical Universe of William S. Burroughs*, (Oxford: Mandrake of Oxford, 2014), 197.

Reading

The 'future' foretells a time of reflection of the horizon: a looking forward to look back. This is significant at the time of writing, as I am writing the reflections on this series of releases close to Christmas 2023, coming up to the 2-year anniversary of the release of *Illumination #54*, and the time for which the album derives its theme (January).

Potentially quite depressingly, the past reveals collaborative practices which are replaced by solo work in the present and future: a drive away from collaboration and community towards isolation: the turning over of the Tarot's Hermit card.

All three works rely on electric guitar and effects pedals, something which has been a continued part of my practice (even when I was producing more conventional or 'normal' musics), although the number and complexity of these effects has reduced with every release (*Illumination #87* features delays, flangers, overdrives and compressors; *Illumination #91* features flangers, distortion and tremolo; but *Illumination #54* only features a fuzz pedal which is, in itself the simplest audio effects circuit, and one of the very first types of guitar effect historically). So, there could be perceived, technologically speaking, either a reduction in complexity, or an imagined return to the past.

This 'return to the past' is also apparent in the move from a more openly free improvisation in the *ARR RAR* release of the 'past' (albeit often using more conventional note choices derived from modes), towards a more fixed set of pitches derived from the process of creating audio sigils. Such a lineage may also delineate a greater movement towards meaning in music as opposed to 'music for music's sake', however. In placing the concepts at the heart of the improvisations, the 'present' and 'future' releases have, perhaps, a stronger conceptual grounding. In returning to audio sigils in the 'present' and 'future' this is perhaps encouraging a reflection or return to older approaches to the project: the audio sigil technique was something that I developed very early on in the life of the project, and was something that I have, more or less, completely abandoned at the time of writing this thesis, preferring instead more open or intuitive approaches to the work.

Eighth Set

Past: [*Illumination #76: Gnashing*](#)

This work was a collaborative piece by John Garner on violin, piano and percussion, project supervisor Will Edmondson – who in this work played an acoustic guitar, vocals and Dictaphone – and myself on a steel-string acoustic guitar. This was the first time I had met John, but since then we have recorded a number of other releases under the moniker Sun Dog (perhaps an antithesis to the ‘Viking of Sixth Avenue’, Moondog).¹¹⁸ The group name for this release, Gnostic Jaws – which at the time of writing has only met for this one release – takes its name initially from the initials of the members: John, Adam, Will. However, it was settled on as a name when conjoined with ‘Gnostic’ (and pluralised). Gnosticism is an area of interest shared by both Will and myself, and the imagery (particularly when coupled with the release’s title *Gnashing*) produces a vivid image, in my mind, of a creature similar to the Wendingo or Erysichthon in ancient Greek mythology, who is forever cursed to be consumed by a hunger that can never be satiated, however, unlike Erysichthon’s need for food, the Gnostic Jaws in question here have an insatiable craving *to know*.¹¹⁹

Playing in a trio is, for me at least, difficult. In a duo it is easy to for a dialogic partnership with the other musician, and in groups of four or more you can engage with one person, with the group as a whole, or ignore it all and play as a ‘soloist’ in the group, mixing between all three while the rest of the ensemble are doing the same. However, in a trio, it often feels to me, to be comprised of a situation of a ‘duo plus a soloist’. In the best trios that I’ve played in, the duo playing tends to rotate around so it can’t necessarily be observed after the performance or by an audience. Occasionally three duos can be heard, where each musician is responding to someone who is responding to someone else, though this dynamic can produce something more akin to Chinese whispers than an organic and exciting performance.

This performance took place in the studio in Newcastle University’s Culture Lab, a room that I’ve played in countless times now, mostly with Will, but with it being the

¹¹⁸ Moondog, *The Viking of Sixth Avenue* (Honest Jon’s, 2005).

¹¹⁹ Jill Da Silva, ‘Ecocriticism and Myth: The Case of Erysichthon’, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 15(2) (2008), 103.

first session with John, there was a certain uneasiness in the group dynamic: John and I had barely said a couple of introductory greetings to one another before playing. Such a situation is common in the free improvisation 'scene', but my experience is always that the beginnings of a session (sometimes dragging on for longer, occasionally even for a whole session) is a group settling on a dynamic or aesthetic, testing waters out of what ideas work and don't work between each other. This position is often hard between people who know one another socially, but have not played with one another, but is especially hard when the social side isn't present at all, as was the case here. In this instance, both John and I had both had plenty of experience playing with Will, so in the introductory minutes of the session it felt as if Will was a mediator between the two of us. This interpretation is enhanced by our positions in the room, sat in a triangle, and by the panning on the recording, with John being panned left, me right, and Will in the centre. However, we do find our feet more as the session goes on, and do begin responding directly with one another as well as with Will.

Present: [Illumination #35: Raven King \[Live at Saint Oswald's in Lee, Heavenfield\]](#)

This release was part of a project I undertook in partnership with the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, and vicar of the church of Saint Oswald's in Lee, Heavenfield. This piece was recorded as a live (unadvertised) performance in the church on electric guitar. It took place only a few days before the first U.K. wide lockdown during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. It was also the first day of the year that snow settled on the ground, and some early bulbs were beginning to sprout in the churchyard. Because of the time of year, and because the church didn't have any heating, I was extremely cold for the performance, and my hands struggled to stay warm. In fact, the main reason the performance finished after 30 minutes was because I was struggling to physically play the guitar.

The performance utilised the same looper pedal discussed in relation to *Illumination #9* (above), for this work I created a long loop and then manipulated its speed and playing direction, as well as adding overdubs. The performance used a number of parallel scores to draw on, the first a visual sigil – used for the artwork for the release – that combines the traditional sigilisation techniques outlined by Austin Osman Spare to create a glyph, along with an image of Northumberland king, Saint Oswald, that has been edited in audacity to produce a 'glitched' image (from looking at the image, the repeating pattern suggests that I used a delay on the effect, and the primary colour-wash on the image suggest the use of a phaser effect, although it doesn't have the characteristic phaser 'smudge' across the image, so I may be incorrect with my assessment). Another score was text-based and read 'OSWALD OF OLD, RAVEN KING, KINDLE OUR SPIRIT AND BRING THE DIVINE', this text was repeated across a full sheet to paper, creating a mantra-like quality to this page of the score. The final page featured a line reading 'OSWALD OF OLD' and another that used the initial technique of sigilisation (removing repeating letters from a phrase) of the mantra from the page before, creating the letters 'OSWALDFRVENKIGUPTH'. Underneath these two lines of text were musical pitches that derived from feeding the lines into the table of correspondences, these tone rows were: 'BD#GAG#C BD BG#C' for 'Oswald of old', and for the sigil line 'BD#GAG#CDDF#C#A#GFD#FCEE'.

The location of the performance was important as both a historical and religious site: it was at the location of the church that on the eve of battle King Oswald of

Northumberland was visited in a vision by Saint Columba and told that, in order to be victorious in battle, his troops had to convert to Christianity. A large wooden cross was erected at the site under instruction from Oswald (a reconstruction of the cross is erected at the site today) and the soldiers converted from paganism; and the following day, Oswald's army were victorious in battle. As has already been discussed above (*Illumination #44*) Oswald is particularly interesting as his legend, while intrinsically Christian, has many pagan resonances. Historically Oswald denotes a threshold between Paganism and Christianity, and as such it is logical that the stories of him reflect both sides of the threshold: is a doorway inside or outside? It is both and neither simultaneously. Oswald occupies this position between the religious practices of his time. The church at Heavenfield that was established in honour of the event also reflects this facet of their patron: while it is a Christian church, it is decorated inside with (pagan) Roman alters and artefacts: a firm identity of one but a side-glance towards another.

Future: [*Illumination #98: Feather*](#)

This release has already come up in the review of the creative practice in the Second Set; interestingly, like in this Set, it was the ‘future’ position then too. When deciding on using the website as a means of structuring the writing, and the ‘randomising’ element more generally as a means of presenting the creative practice work, I was aware that there may be a possibility that the same release may arise more than once for myself when writing the thesis, or for an examiner or audience when reviewing/consuming the creative practice material. I was, in some respects, tempted to brush over the repeated release when it came about here: I have already reviewed the work for the Second Set, so there isn’t much that can be written about the specifics of the work. However, I have chosen to stick ‘strictly’ to the rules of the game here (not that an examiner or potential visitor to the site should feel the same way, if an album is repeated by website, there’s nothing to stop anyone clicking onto the next one rather than repeat an experience).

In returning to a release already written about, I am provided an opportunity to linger on the concept of repetition further. As already discussed above in the ‘Reading’ for the First Set, and, synchronistically, the previous review of this very release, even within Nietzsche’s concept of an eternal recurrence, repetition is not *unchanged*. Contingency and (re)contextuality are key elements of this work, and when reviewing this piece now it has a very different meaning placed at the end of a set containing *Gnashing* and *Raven King* to where it stood previously after *Sublime* and *Feast*. It also means something different having the whole thesis passed through Sets 3-7 before reaching this release again. The specifics of this will be discussed in the ‘Reading’ section below, but that such a change has occurred on work that is, in terms of its physical characteristics, completely identical, to the release discussed at the end of the Second Set is fascinating. Of course, this is totally mundane experience: an object or person that is passed every day on a commute can mean something radically different after a certain meaningful experience (even if this radical shift is something as simple becoming noticed from *unnoticed*). But such a shift to occur, while mundane, is equally, and fundamentally, magic(k)al; a true work of alchemy that converts one thing into another without changing its chemical or physical makeup at all, purely through the alteration of the veils of meaning, perception, temporality and contextuality.

Reading

The past in this set represents collaboration, consensus, community and democracy, an agonism detailed by Chantal Mouffe.¹²⁰ Such a collaboration is continued into the present, but altered: the artwork is by a single authority, but the project as a whole stands as a collaboration (in that the church gave me permission to perform my work there, and, therefore, gave its approval of the work I would produce, even without my showing the work to them in advance). In the future, such collaboration and democracy has been withered away as the artwork stands as a product of a singular authority, however, the work itself, in its considerations of feathers, and itself as a feather, that is, a small segment of a much larger whole, it is not an *authoritarian* work, but one that is still dialogic, in constant contact with the world around it. Such a reading positions this set as an assessment that even an artwork produced in solitary is still always in constant conversation with a broader contemporary musical culture and heritage tradition.

Viewing the triptych in order, there is an increase of limitations and a drive towards what might be considered 'conventional' music with each release. The 'past' is a completely open 'free improvisation' session; the 'present' is improvised around a series of fixed (but in their organisation reasonably abstract and obscure) pitches; and in 'the future' a series of pitches derived from a conventional western scale is employed. Such a progression can also be observed in society, with the rise of the 'Alt Right' and normalisation of conservative values as represented by the UK conservative government policies such as the Bibby Stockholm barge and Rwanda deportation policies, anti-wokeness, and a rise in anti-trans opinion (from both previous conservative governments and the incumbent Labour one). But, perhaps a turn towards more 'conventional' musical materials shouldn't be considered as equal to a turn towards a conservatism as the preceding observation implied: often in free improvisations 'normal music' is considered antithetical to the improvisatory settings and aesthetics, but such improvisations are by their very nature *open* and *free*. *Everything* is on the table in an improvisation, and *nothing* can/should be rejected. Perhaps instead of viewing the triptych as a progression they should be viewed as they

¹²⁰ Chantal Mouffe, 'Art and Democracy: Art as an Agonistic Intervention in Public Space' *Open 14: Art as a Public Issue* (2007), 3.

are presented: as a collection. That is, the dense and often abrasive free improvisations of Gnostic Jaws is equally valid and holds an equal potentiality of uncovering occluded knowledge and uprooting progressive concepts as the more formalist/modernist approach of creating tone rows in *Raven King*; or in utilising modes and/or western scales in *Feather*. They all hold this potential, and all of the practices and approaches that are used within this aren't separated off from one another, but form a single continuum, a single approach with a variation of materials.

Ninth Set

Past: [*Illumination #101: Full of Hills and Vales/Fuel for Rules and Veiled*](#)

On 3rd November 2022 I performed a solo guitar performance in the Long Gallery at Newcastle University. It was part of an exhibition curated by the rural arts organisation Slop Projects, an organisation that attempts to challenge notions of what constitutes 'rural art'. As well as performing, I was exhibiting work in the space: a sound piece (the work that is currently being reviewed here), and an accompanying written piece. The work as a whole (written installation, sound piece and performance) dealt with occult geography. The city of Newcastle has a number of hidden and buried rivers that still run underground and flow into larger surface waterways like the Tyne and the Ouseburn. This work was particularly occupied with the Pandon Burn, a buried river that runs from Spitalfields (an area in the north of the city), through the city centre to quayside (in the south of the city) where it flows into the Tyne. The ghost of the river still haunts the modern city, from the road named Pandon in the south of the city (roughly in the location where the river used to run), Northumbria University's Pandon Building, and infrequent flooding of Newcastle University building basements after particularly wet weather.

The basis of this piece was a recorded soundwalk that followed the course of the river upstream (from south to north). This soundwalk was split into two c.20 minute pieces. For the second piece, a solo guitar improvisation accompanied the soundwalk. The guitar used an alternate tuning generated by running 'Pandon' through the table of correspondences discussed (multiple times) above to produce a series of pitches ('Pandon' became 'C A B \flat C B B \flat '). These pitches were then reorganised to best accommodate the guitar strings without having to change typical string gauges (becoming C B \flat B A B \flat C). At this point in time, the repetitive strain injury in my wrist was at its worst, and I struggled to fret the guitar for sustained periods of time, as a result of this, I utilised a violin bow for the duration of the performance, exploring the possibilities within the chord generated with the river's name and only using my left hand to position and support the guitar. Individual strings, combinations of a few strings, or all six were utilised throughout the piece (though due to the guitar's relatively flat fretboard radius,

the middle strings of the guitar could not be played on their own). The bow was used above the guitar pickups (the 'normal' strumming position), or, more frequently, at the neck-joint of the guitar; because of the absence of the body, this placement made positioning the bow to catch a variation of string numbers easier. Additionally, the bow was placed above certain harmonic nodes on the fretboard, as in *Illumination #96* discussed above (such as the twelfth, fifth, and seventh frets) that brought out different pitches depending on the harmonics present at these nodes.

Because the note 'C' was both the highest and lowest note of the tuning – and therefore the improvisation – it felt like the 'root note' of the piece, this was reinforced by these two strings always sounding due to the bowing technique used in the performance. To accentuate this, I used a tone generator to produce a stereo 'C' drone, this drone was low in the mix, often drowned out by the sounds of the soundwalk, and only audible in the quieter sections of the walk. Alongside this and the soundwalk – also low in the mix – was a mantra-like vocal performance that repeated the album title 'Full of Hills and Vales, Fuel for Rules and Veiled'. The first phrase of this mantra is taken from the 1736 publication *The History of Newcastle upon Tyne: or, The Ancient and Present State of that Town* by Henry Bourne:

After you are out of *Pandon-gate*, there is one on the left Hand leading to *Pandon-Dean* a very *Romantick Place*, full of Hills and Vales, through which runs *Pandon-Burn*. It is a very entertaining Walk in the Summer to *Magdalen-Well*.¹²¹

This account of the previous rural area surrounding Pandon Burn, is then given a more pessimistic turn in the modern urban environment in the second part of the phrase. A stereo 'ping-pong' delay was added to the vocal. Both the drone and the vocal part were added to both 20-minute tracks of the work. Listening back to the full piece, the first track feels like an elongated prelude to the guitar improvisation that follows in the second track. While there is a certain amount of pessimism in the text itself, with the vocal and drone acting as a frequently covered-over element in the sound piece, they can be seen as allegory of the occluded river itself, and whilst veiled and forgotten, it still haunts the present: unnoticed and unknown, until it forces itself out to be observed again. Forgotten but not irradiated.

¹²¹ Henry Bourne, *The History of Newcastle upon Tyne: or, The Ancient and Present State of that Town* (Newcastle upon Tyne: John Wilkinson and the Common Council of town of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1736), 153.

Present: [Illumination #42: Anthony of Padua](#)

The feast day for the patron saint of lost things, Anthony of Padua is held on the 13th June, the day this performance was recorded (although it was ultimately released a week later). This work was created to be featured in John Bowers' annual *A Midsummer Night's Drone* performance project; and was broadcasted as part of a night-long drone performance by Bowers and collaborators, where it was mixed into the night's other droning events and improvised along to.

The release is dedicated to the saint it shares its name with, and like many of the releases of the doctorate was based on sigilisation techniques. Like the previous release (*Illumination #101*), this release ran the key word of the work (in this case 'Anthony', omitting the repeated 'n') through the table of correspondences (to get A, B \flat , E, E, B, A) and then rearranging the pitches to best suit an alternate tuning on the guitar (E, A, B, E, B \flat , B \flat). I tuned a steel string acoustic guitar to this set of pitches and then recorded the exploration of this new tuning. To this initial improvisation, ping-pong delays were added (as was also the case with the vocals in *Illumination #101*). To thicken up the overall performance, the recorded improvisation track was doubled and reversed, acting as an overdubbed track, with the past and future unfolding simultaneously before they converge in the present at the mid-point of the release.

British composer Peter Warlock also named a song after the saint, 'A Prayer to Saint Anthony of Padua' (that used a libretto by poet Arthur Symons), while this song is not related to this release specifically, it does possess a tangential connection to the doctoral project as a whole. Firstly, while Warlock's music was featured in research project *Lightning Lullaby* (explained in greater detail for the write up of *Illumination #98*, above). Secondly, and more specifically, 'A Prayer to Saint Anthony of Padua' was a song that I arranged for solo guitar for a book that is currently in the process of being sent out to publishers as I am completing this write up. The Warlock song was unknown to me at the time of producing *Illumination #42*, but perhaps, as with the layering of forwards and backwards tracks here, the influence of the Warlock song may be seen to travel backwards through time (in terms of my awareness of the piece) to be considered alongside the release here.

As with the music, the cover of this work is a sigil, the process used to create this particular sigil is unique to the doctorate. It used a 'magic square' as a basic formation and then, through connecting the numbers that represent the letters of 'Anthony of Padua' a glyph emerged that stood in as a sigil for the saint (that was reinforced once this glyph was superimposed onto an image of the Saint). Synchronistically, the glyph lines up incredibly neatly with the image of the Saint, with one triangle shape outlining the line of sight of the saint's likeness, while a second triangle connects a hand holding a quill with flower behind him. My understanding of magic squares comes from the occultist Éliphas Lévi, but he took inspiration from them from the 15th century occultist Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim.¹²²

Magic squares were used once more on the project, on the following release to *Anthony of Padua*, in collaboration with Bowers. In this subsequent use, we took the number squares of the *Book of Soyga*, famously owned by Elizabethan magician John Dee, and used these numbers and encrypted phrases as a basis for the improvised music.¹²³ Since these two consecutive releases, magic squares in all their forms have been neglected, but perhaps they will return for a work further into the future.

Anthony of Padua, finder of lost things, an influence for servitors and an example of humility.

New Moon rises, Midsummer approaches and today the feast is for you.

You came at the right time for me, as I seem to have lost something. More than just material, I think I have lost time.

*When I was last here, it was a month ago. A whole month has disappeared. It passed by so quick that it didn't even happen at all,
It shrank down so small that it fell through the gaps in the pavement.*

But such things you are not equipped find Anthony?

I thought as much.

¹²² Éliphas Lévi, 383-385.

¹²³ Jane L. Kupin, *Aldaraia sive Soyga vocor* (NP: NP, 2014), 539-540.

*This time last year my mind was occupied by solar time.
I meditated on and mediated between the Oak King and John the Baptist*

*Now, with the turn of the wheel I have begun to observe lunar time.
But even with this different method it still slips away from me.
It then returns time and time again
Each time different and the same
I too am different and the same*

*Tony, Tony,
look around,
something's lost
and must be found!*

*Tony, Tony,
hear this sound,
Time's run off,
and gone to ground!*

Future: [Illumination #63: Raise On](#)

Like a number of releases already discussed, *Raise On* comprised of a single improvisation that was carved up into separate tracks. This release was the final time I did this, and all subsequent releases were just a single track unless they had been composed/improvised as separate tracks from the outset. This was recorded during Eid al-Fatr in 2021, and the album cover features a photograph of an Eid celebration taken from a newspaper report. This image was then ‘glitched’ using audacity, a process already outlined. The particular effects used here look to have been delay and potentially a phaser: there is the idiosyncratic colours that phasers contribute to an image, but not the characteristic smudging of the image. The combination of images makes the mosque in the image look like a fractured ghostly structure haunting the picture, while the worshippers around are transformed into a bed of heather like the autumnal dunes at Winterton-on-sea in Norfolk.

With the exception of ‘the Long Goodbye’, the spelling of the track names have all been deliberately misspelled: ‘Play This 2 Yr Mutha’, ‘Driftin’ Thru’ and ‘Play Whot You Don’t Kno’. This misspelling can be interpreted as having been influenced by the work of Genesis P-Orridge whose frequent misspellings were an iconic characteristic of their writings and groups (‘Thee Temple of Psychic Youth’, for example). This action isn’t ‘lazy’ or ‘miseducated’, but a deliberate playing and disruption of language that can be used to reshape the wor(l)d. Language is the initial site of violence and the principal site of potentiality to cultivate radical change in the world. This is recognised in occultism by things such as magic spells; and in spirituality and religion, in the repetition of mantras or Hail Mary, or in the way that language is seen by many religions as the genesis of the world or humanity (‘in the beginning was the word’). But in the political sphere language is important too, transphobes get so frequently worked up about gender pronouns (and deliberately mispronouncing them) because *they know* the power language and words have. Words like ‘terrorism’ are used as a means to deliberately cast a movement or actions of select individuals as evil, whilst terms like ‘self-defence’ can be used as justifications and allowable excuses for comparable actions to ‘terrorists’.

Etymology reveals a word’s history and previous meanings, displaying a narrative that intrinsically tied into our culture and, perhaps, subliminally manipulating how we

speak, write, and think. Many judicial words entered the English language as a result of the Norman conquest. These words, and the Norman language of the time more broadly, acted as a form of oppression: segregating the native population from the foreign oppressors. Some examples of these words are: court; crime; judge; jury; soldier.¹²⁴ While this is almost literally ancient history, it is still relevant to us today: many upper-class families can trace their family history and wealth back to the Normans and the unlawful snatching of land, and descendants of Norman families are still, almost a thousand years after the Norman conquest, 10% wealthier on average compared to descendants of Anglo-Saxons.¹²⁵

More universally, specific languages are important, too, the ways we think, solve problems, and generally interpret the world are always shaped by the logic, syntax and grammar of our native language. All of this resonates with the William S. Burroughs conception of the word as a virus: language as something that has hijacked the way we think and constricts it to understand our place in the world and solutions to problems we face *only* through the lens that language places over our mental processes.¹²⁶ By disrupting the basic spellings of words, readers are forced to attempt an act of translation, whereby the control language places on our mind is brought to the fore.

The first track of *Illumination #63*, 'Play This 2 Yr Mutha', makes an indirect reference to Burroughs in the music as it quotes the Christmas carol 'Silent Night'; this carol was also quoted by Kurt Cobain on the collaboration with William S Burroughs 'The "Priest" They Called Him'.¹²⁷ On listening to the approaches I took in the track, I can feel a distinct presence of the guitar player Ava Mendoza (session guitarist and improviser who has performed with William Parker, Fred Frith and the Violent Femmes, and whose 2023 record *Echolocation* was probably in my running of 'top albums of the year').¹²⁸ The track treats musical genres as geographical sites, locations on a journey

¹²⁴ Thomas Pyles, John Algeo, *The Origins and Development of the English Language* (Fort Worth; Philadelphia; San Diego, et al: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 295-6.

¹²⁵ Paul Kingsnorth, 'High House Prices? I Blame the Normans', *The Guardian* (2012), <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/dec/17/high-house-prices-inequality-normans> [accessed 16th May 2024]; Jamie Doward, 'If you're named Darcy, you're likely to be one of the privileged rich', *The Guardian* (2011), <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/apr/03/social-mobility-britain-aristocracy> [accessed 16th May 2024].

¹²⁶ Mark Pesce, 'The Executable Dreamtime', in Metzger (ed). *The Book of Lies*, 27.

¹²⁷ William S Burroughs, Kurt Cobain, *The "Priest" they Called Him*, (Timm/Kerr, 1993).

¹²⁸ Mendoza, Hoff, Revels, *Echolocation* (AUM Fidelity, 2023).

that are weaved together by a road or train track, covering rock, blues, and jazz as means of getting to grips with understanding what (pop) music is. This traversing of genres acts as a scene setting, establishing a basic working definition of the history of music, before continuing on to understand what this past history can bring into the present, and further into the future. What does it mean that the first jazz recording was made 104 years before this release?

The second track is a purging from an ayahuasca ritual. It is frantic, grasping, rabid. In a fit of iconoclasm, 'Driftin' Thru' violently expels the conservatisms of the previous track. The comparison to an ayahuasca ritual here is deliberate: this isn't a middle class 18-year-old stuffing pills in their mouth at a warehouse rave because they 'want to get loaded and have a good time' (as *The Wild Angels* (1966) put it, or better yet, Primal Scream's sample of the film for their track 'Loaded'), this is a *spiritual purging*.¹²⁹ Like Loki after Ragnarök, an ecstatic wilful burning of the world, including oneself, in order to discover what it means to begin again anew. (That isn't to say the 18-year-old won't themselves undergo a transcendental experience of equal magnitude, just that *that* experience isn't their goal when they are swallowing the pills).

'Play What You Don't Kno' takes this purging as 'ground zero': a point to rebuild conventions from. It returns to tradition as segments of pop, rock and classical merge with crackles and pops like spittle projected from an old man's mouth. Imitations of a shamisen appear: up until now the record has only been concerned with western music history, with a western conception of music, but now, as the world is rebuilt, a *global* understanding of the world is beginning to be conceived of. Everything destroyed in 'Play this 2 Yr Mutha' has reemerged in a new context and is on an equal playing field with everything else, many truths expressed multivocally and simultaneously. This total radical understanding of difference and multiplicity is surely the transcendental truth sought in the ritual? Having reached such an uncovering and understanding of the truth the final track, 'Long Goodbye' meditates on this, drawing out a percussive ambience of restfulness and peace.

¹²⁹ Roger Corman, *The Wild Angels* (1966); Primal Scream, *Screamadelica* (Creation, 1991).

Reading

Taking this trio of releases as a singular group, we can observe a non-ending, or at least sustaining, future of perpetual repetition like the ouroboros. This repetition comes about through violence and iconoclasm, with the destruction making way for the new beginnings of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence. This beginning/ending waiting in the future is precluded by a present saturated with synchronicity and a futile longing for the reinstatement of time lost. 'Where did the time go?' asks Lord Huron, like *Illumination #42*'s pleas to Saint Anthony to recover the time lost, but procession and movement is a key ontological fact of time – as Bergson understood duration as change in itself – there is no way to recover the time lost, and time is always 'going'.¹³⁰ It is always in motion, disappearing at one end, but reappearing at the other in a different form. Further back from *Illumination #42*'s present, the steady vibrating of secluded, subterranean knowledge, its resonating making itself felt like the mysterious hum heard in certain locations worldwide, but whose source is unknown: the presence of this body of knowledge is known to exist, but it's exact location and contents are unknown but nevertheless influencing the present and future.¹³¹ Ping-pong delays retained in the present demonstrate how this occluded past maintains influence on the present. Excavating earlier still, we reach back to the final track of *Illumination #63*, and the cycle can be seen to be starting again in reverse. Forward and backward, left to right and right to left, like the ping-pong delay effects of two of this cycle's releases, the sweep of an ANS synthesiser across an image, or the rewinding of a cassette tape.

¹³⁰ Lord Huron, *Long Lost* (Republic, 2021).

¹³¹ Geoff Leventhall, 'Still Humming', *Noise & Vibration Worldwide*, 36(2) (2005), 21.

Conclusion: Harvesting the Fruit

This project has, in its establishing of a routine and continued interactions with musical materials, produced a multitude of brief, insights into knowledge – revelations of the Gnostic deity *Sophia*, who transmits wisdom through to humanity, and who was instrumental in creating the material world – uncovered through its improvised excavations.¹³² However, like a slap-stick sketch worthy of Laurel and Hardy, any time such revelations were discovered they were almost instantly buried. Or, to put it more religiously: one hand gave while another took away. But this experience is a revelation of the very ontological properties inherent in creative sound and music practices: they are both divine, and fleeting. Sound and music are by their very nature tied to temporality, and only exist while sounds themselves are sounding, and outside of this instance, these sounds only exist in memory, or are stored as data to be replayed another time (whether as digital or analogue audio data, or as written data in the form of sheet music); where their meanings will be sufficiently different due to the new context they are placed in. This temporality of music, its falling into the past contemporaneously to its emergence, is a vital ontological attribute of music itself, and one that separates it from the other arts (excluding perhaps film, dance, and to a lesser extent theatre), and a key indicator of temporality and the present moment itself: as Gilles Deleuze, in *Bergsonism*, explains:

How would a new present come about if the new present did not pass at the same time that it *is* present? The past would never be constituted if it *had not been* constituted first of all, at the same time it was present. There is here, as it were, a fundamental position of time and also the most profound paradox of memory: The past is “contemporaneous” with the present that it *has been*.¹³³

In medieval Europe, artists were ‘makers’ not ‘creators’; the act of creation was deemed to be divine and reserved for God alone.¹³⁴ Therefore, implicit in the understanding that this doctorate constitutes a ‘creative practice PhD’, is also the admittance that all artists are in control of a divine attribute, as explained by Jerrold Levinson; the ‘tradition

¹³² George W. MacRae, ‘The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth’, *Novum Testamentum*, 12(2) (1970), 90.

¹³³ Gilles Deleuze, Hugh Tomlinson (trans), Barbara Habberjam (trans), *Bergsonism* (New York: Zone Books (1988), 58.

¹³⁴ Mark Sinclair, ‘Inheritance, Originality and the Will: Bergson and Heidegger on Creation’, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 22(5) (2014), 656.

of art assumes art is creative in the strict sense, that it is a godlike activity in which the artist brings into being what did not exist beforehand much as a demiurge forms a world out of inchoate matter'.¹³⁵ But this understanding isn't voiced (by this project) in order to elevate music, art and creativity *above* the material world; they are a part of that world as much as everything else. Instead, the work recognises art, creativity, and especially music, as an emanation of the gnostic concept of a 'divine spark' – that is as a spiritual or divine expression encased in materiality and the mundane, present in all people, with the ultimate goal of Gnosticism being the reunification of this imprisoned 'spark' with the rest of divinity – and views its spirituality in the way defined by Marcel Cobussen, and quoted in the introduction of this thesis: music occupies both the material and spiritual, but also, paradoxically, occupying neither of these positions, without occupying a separate third space.¹³⁶ Music can be viewed like the creature described in the commentary for *Illumination #121*: 'its contradictions hold it down [to the material] firmly: it is a creature whose wings are constantly striving for the air [of spirituality], but whose talons refuse to surrender the perch, surrender the earth, surrender the mundane'. The view of music and creativity as sacred is reflected in the project's method of producing work liturgically, in line with the lunar calendar, but such a ritualistic deployment recognises the materialistic facet of music making as well. While rituals *can be* sacred such as Jumu'ah prayers in Islam, or Sunday congregations in Christianity, it is also mundane like feeding a pet, or getting the same bus to work each morning. But, more nuanced than simply this, 'mundane' rituals still have a latent potential to be deemed sacred in some respects, and 'sacred' rituals themselves are also undisputably part of the mundane world: key to this project is that the profane and the sacred are not separated, but fundamentally and continually (and, often unexpectedly) interpenetrated.

Returning to the Gnostic 'divine spark', this work sees music, and more broadly all matter, as something that is implicitly divine at its core, but encased in a material shell. This divinity is not tied to a single religious or occult doctrine or definition, however. It again follows gnostic (and kabbalistic) interpretations that this divinity is

¹³⁵ Jerrold Levinson, 'What a Musical Work is', in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 77(1) (1980), 8.

¹³⁶ Marcel Cobussen, *Thresholds: Rethinking Spirituality Through Music* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2008), 47.

totally ineffable and ungraspable. Its ontology is, perhaps, even shifting, and is never settled on a single definition of itself. There is *something* there, and its presence can be felt through its interaction with other things or, through using improvisation, getting close to the threshold of its domain, but this threshold cannot be crossed, always out of reach, and so any real, tangible comprehension of this ‘thing’ is an impossibility. This understanding comes about inherently *because of* contradiction, not *despite* contradictions.

Aristotle defined five virtues of the intellect: *techne*, or technological knowledge and craftsmanship; *phronesis*, and practical wisdom of the world; *nous*, or intellectual, intuitive perception; scientific knowledge, *episteme*; and wisdom or philosophical knowledge, *sophia*.¹³⁷ Music is traditionally viewed as producing and conveying *techne* – whether that is demonstrated knowledge of an instrument or audio technology through virtuosic application, or knowledge of the shaping of musical structures and forms to create ‘pleasing’ compositions for an audience. However, *Fruit of the Vine* seeks to contend that it can also be a carrier of *sophia*, but due to the dominance of language, characterised by William S. Burroughs as the ‘word virus’, in academia especially, but also in society at large, and the failed attempts to *translate* this knowledge into language rather than ‘speaking through music’, interpretation of such wisdom is frequently lost or left undiscovered.¹³⁸

In the routine interaction with creative materials explored in this project, the concept that improvisation is contingent and reliant on the contextuality of its temporal existence is also highlighted. Such concepts have been extrapolated by Dan DiPiero in *Contingent Encounters* and can be observed in the creative practice material of this project.¹³⁹ The use of different instrumentation and conceptual and material approaches to the performances, that are present throughout the releases, are example of this. The individual releases were variously influenced by the events that were taking place around me at the time: be it the content of books I was reading; private lessons I

¹³⁷ Jason Aleksander, ‘Intellectual Virtues and the Attention to Kairos in Maimonides and Dante’, in Andrew LaZella (ed.), Richard A. Lee Jr. (ed.), *The Edinburgh Critical History of Middle Ages and Renaissance Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 234.

¹³⁸ Pesce, 27.

¹³⁹ DiPiero, 22-23.

was teaching; lectures, seminars and tutorials I was giving; personal life events; world events; the music I was listening to; the music I was rehearsing, and many other factors. It was also present in many releases that featured environmental sounds that allowed these sounds of the outside world to collaborate and interfere with the more musical, or sculpted elements, this introduction of the everyday also further married the sacred and the profane together, and highlighted their existence not as separated, but part of the same continuum.

Contingency is represented in the repeated casting aside and then revisiting of materials throughout the project. Extending from this, this revisiting can be seen to respond practically to highlight concepts outlined by the field of hauntology, a revisiting to the same topics, the same materials, the same questions, such as [Illumination #82](#) and [#149](#), which both take the same approach to aesthetics, and both have the same influences. That is, improvised fingerstyle steel-string acoustic guitar that focuses on repetition and minor variations of ideas, influenced by artists such as Gwenifer Raymond and Steffen Basho-Junghans. The parable, often misattributed to Albert Einstein, that ‘insanity is doing the same thing and expecting different results’ is explored in this notion: the same thing, the same problem, has a very different meaning, and produces widely differing answers depending on contextual and historical factors.¹⁴⁰ The project has revisited specific works in later releases (none of which were discussed in the written commentary), such as in [Illumination #129](#) and [Illumination #138](#), where I began to reuse and revisit previous concepts or creative material from recordings that had occurred on the same day years before. In the case of *Illumination #129*, I had made a recording of myself playing Bert Jansch’s ‘Running from Home’ – as a reference track for a private student of mine to play along to – on the same date as the release a year prior, and I used this recording (slowed down to last for 30 minutes) as a drone-basis for a track that improvised with different microphones (contact and electromagnetic).¹⁴¹ This was combined with an improvisation using a virtual recreation of an ANS Synthesiser – a Soviet synthesiser named after Russian composer and occultist Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin that translated images into sound – using the artwork from a *FOTV* release from the same date two years prior, thus ingraining the importance

¹⁴⁰ Derrida, 61.

¹⁴¹ Bert Jansch, *Bert Jansch* (Transatlantic, 1965).

of time and reflection into the work from the outset as work from a year prior, two years prior, and contemporary improvisation were all blended together using multiple methods.

Many of the releases on the project that feature environmental sounds also reflect on hauntology and the related field of psychogeography, particularly those that feature sounds collected from specific locations, or those conducted wholly at specific sites – such as [Illumination #86: Benwell](#) (in collaboration with project supervisor Tim Shaw) or solo releases like [Illuminations #35](#), [#101](#), [#115](#), and [#143](#) – these releases investigate how time haunts temporality and the landscape, and question whether the past has a subterranean influence on geography.¹⁴² The questioning of the presence of this influence is more than just a physical one – that roads are built over now buried rivers, or that manmade urban structures are named after them are facts, for example – it also questions whether there is a psychological or occult influence present here, as to whether there are clues also latent in the environment of this geographic past that are less easily graspable or understood.

The project's presentation, and refusal to create a single 'final work', host a 'final exhibition', or 'final performance' or recital engages with philosopher Henri Bergson's concept of duration, prioritising change over development and process over product.¹⁴³ The presentation of the creative practice work as a randomised archive resembling a rhizomatic structure underlines the importance of change, time as duration, and the importance of process over product. But it also disrupts one concept of duration as indivisible experience, tying in improvisation as contingency and hauntological concepts already explored, along with alluding to Bergsonian concept of the present as the smallest contraction of the past, and recollection as a shifting between distinct virtual planes of existence: 'it is the whole, integral past; it is *all* our past, which coexists with each present'.¹⁴⁴ Releases taken from every stage of the doctorate are presented without their temporal associations, ripped out of context to haunt the project as a whole, memories reached through the disinterested recollection of the website-archive. Much like how associations, both real and imagined, are continually encountered in the

¹⁴² Merlin Coverly, *Psychogeography* (Harpenden, Herts: Pocket Essentials, 2010), 14.

¹⁴³ Deleuze, 31-32.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

everyday and in creative practice, like in revisiting a city that was once familiar but now, through absence, has become transformed and strange (as recounted briefly in the commentary to *Illumination #110*), or how latent associations make themselves felt in the course of conversation or musical performance (as is the case with the musical quotations discussed in *Illumination #123*).

The failure of language to translate the meaning and message of the music can be observed in the thesis, as has been highlighted in the introduction, with the employment of multiple modes of writing to attempt to address the task, all ultimately failing. The thesis structure also embodies the PhD methodology of ‘thinking improvisationally’ throughout its writing in its employment of free play of ideas. The improvisational elements of the thesis are most easily observed in the ‘Reading’ sections that summarises each triptych of releases. In the earlier ‘Sets’, these sections are largely superfluous to the content of the individual release commentaries (and therefore only really serving a purpose to signpost that the triptych had been completed and a new ‘Set’ was to begin), however, as the thesis progresses more interesting readings develop that begin to demonstrate how the work created cannot only be categorised as a reasonably expansive archive of disparate musical releases, but also as a single expanding creative practice featuring a shifting myriad of interpenetrating concepts, techniques, technologies and approaches. Some common themes that arise in the ‘reading’ sections are: a preoccupation with the concept of *failure*; the work being framed as a practice of *searching*; the employment of multiple aesthetics/idioms (and the refusal to settle on one); and the formation and manipulation of loops (particularly time-loops) and other concepts surrounding the field of hauntology.

Failure (found as a concept in the reading sections 1, 4, and 5) is a key component of the doctorate, both in the failure of language to communicate or translate the music, and therefore shifts in modality of writing employed, but also in the process of music (especially recorded music) to properly grasp or tap into the realm sought outside of the bodily present, at the edge of consciousness. The concept of *searching* (highlighted in many of the ‘reading’ sections notably those concluding sets 2, 4, and 6) is tied deeply to failure too, with the process of the doctorate refusing to give up, and instead maintaining its routine engagement with the improvised materials, accepting

failure, but also recognising that reaching some sort of proximity to the goal as being a commendable achievement in itself.

The employment of multiple aesthetics has been something that has been accepted *a priori* by the doctorate; as the reading of Set 8 states, ‘*Everything* is on the table in an improvisation, and *nothing* can/should be rejected’. In my professional capacity as a creative practitioner outside of academia this has, however, been somewhat problematic: in instances when I have communicated with gig promoters, venues or journalists about my work, I am forced to describe my output in terms of aesthetics and genre. Generally, this comprises of a description of my process (‘improvised’) followed by a list of aesthetics I have worked within and between (‘(post-)minimalism, (dark) ambient, noise, (post-)metal, (weird) folk’, etc.). This approach was unsatisfactory when I first used it, and it has become progressively less satisfactory as time progresses. Other terms that I have been labelled with have been ‘avant-garde’ (I am particularly allergic to this one given its inherent elitist and militaristic origins), and ‘experimental’ (I am more comfortable with this, but it does still have an elitist history, and in terms of the etymology of the word, rooted in clinical, scientific fields). Having gone through the process of the doctorate I’ve provisionally settled on the label of ‘weird music’.

In Mark Fisher’s *the Weird and the Eerie*, he details the concept of ‘weird’ as ‘that *which does not belong*’, this can be found in the combining of elements that ‘should’ seemingly be separated, such as the oversized human hands emerging from the engine of a biplane in Max Ernst’s *the Murdering Airplane* (1920); or the use of multiple genres in my creative practice.¹⁴⁵ (I briefly also considered the spelling ‘wyrld music’ to point to the etymological root of ‘weird’ as synonym to ‘fate’ and tied to concepts of magic, foresight, and the ‘beyond’).¹⁴⁶ Guitarist and scholar John McGrath explains the concept of ‘weirding’ in his music (a music he labels as ‘avantfolk’) and how he uses processes of audio glitching as a means to ‘weird’ his approach to folk music performance.¹⁴⁷ This

¹⁴⁵ Mark Fisher, *the Weird and the Eerie* (London: Repeater, 2016), 10; Max Ernst, *The Murdering Airplane* (1920).

¹⁴⁶ Fisher, 12.

¹⁴⁷ John McGrath, “‘Something seems wrong, should that be happening?’”: Avantfolk guitar and glitch aesthetics, a practice-based perspective’, in John McGrath (ed.), *21st Century Guitar: Evolutions and Augmentations* (London: Bloomsbury Popular Music, 2023), 192.

tactic is frequently employed by the creative work in this doctorate too, alongside the other ‘weird’ practice of ‘folding’ the outside into the ‘inside’, such as with the implementation of audio effects, digital processing (both ‘live’ and in post-production’), and the integration of environmental sound samples into the work.¹⁴⁸

This PhD builds primarily on combining the field of hauntology, especially the work of Jacques Derrida and Mark Fisher, with the concept of memory detailed by Henri Bergson. While Fisher has been criticised and labelled as a pessimistic thinker – a criticism that is not altogether unfounded in texts such as *Capitalist Realism* and criticism of artists such as the Arctic Monkeys in *Ghosts of My Life* – this criticism lacks nuance and brushes over large swathes of Fisher’s writing, such as his championing of the work of the artists Burial and the Caretaker.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, the negativity of Fisher’s writing is in itself rooted in optimism: he has a strong belief that something *better* could be produced in its place. Whilst hauntology is occupied with ‘lost futures’, it does not mean that there is ‘no future’ (Sex Pistols reference unintended).¹⁵⁰ What is implicit in Fisher’s concept of hauntology, and is taken as a starting point within this doctoral work, is that hauntological culture has a potential to produce forward-thinking, future-driven art through dredging the past and picking up, and reinvigorating, futures that had once been promised but then severed before reaching fruition.

As Derrida highlights in his continued return to the example of the ghost of Hamlet’s father in the Shakespeare play, revenants do not (re)enter the world unchanged, they are always contextualised by the present that they are conjured into, and through this reconjuring they are always found to be expressing something new: Hamlet’s father communicates with other characters in the play, he is not a pure, unchanged repetition of his previous (living) self, but a, now deceased, spectral continuation of this self.¹⁵¹ Drawing on Bergson’s concept of memory – that is as an continual undivided abstraction held outside of the body and inaccessible by consciousness apart from in small divided, discontinuous chunks – this doctorate

¹⁴⁸ Fisher, 10.

¹⁴⁹ Matt Colquhoun, ‘Introduction’, in Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester, UK; Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2022), xix-xx; Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, 98-109.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 27; Sex Pistols, ‘God Save the Queen’, *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here’s the Sex Pistols* (Virgin, 1977).

¹⁵¹ Derrida, 10-13.

recognises the storing and recalling of memory (both human and machine memory) as sites of hauntings; within the space where the past emerges into the present, into the body.¹⁵² This memory is continually recontextualised, continually transformed to communicate knowledge that can understand the present moment. But in this communicating of knowledge something is also simultaneously lost or occluded: the process of recollection can never access the full undivided extension of memory, alongside reframing, there is always also loss and omission.

The work of this doctorate engages in a plundering of the past (both short-term and long-term; both personal and cultural) and processes and recontextualises this past to continually say new and different things, not static repetitions of what was expressed in the first instance. Releases such as [Illumination #62](#) take musical quotations (in this case Nick Drake's 'Pink Moon') and bend them out of shape, the quotes are made to say something anew; while others such as [Illumination #115](#) and [Illumination #77](#) integrate full 'cover versions' into the work but rearranged and recontextualised alongside other musical elements (in the case of *Illumination #115*, drones, as well as placed within and between a freely improvised performance). Past ghosts are conjured in works such as [Illumination #50](#) (as explored in the Sixth Set, above) where sections of improvisations are remembered and replayed (frequently slightly differently) as a means of retreading the same point and exploring other possibilities of said musical statements, the other multiple pathways that could be explored away from the same point. Many other works (too many to comprehensibly list, but of those mentioned in this thesis: *Illuminations #9; #12; #23; #35; #42; #44; #54; #64; #65; and #120*) utilise loop and delay pedals; and post-production techniques such as stretching, duplicating, reversing and added delays; as a means to conjure and capture these revenants within audio recording and playback technologies, forcing them to sustain and repeat themselves in different guises (transforming them into ghosts of ghosts, or ghosts of ghosts of ghosts, etc.). This utilisation of machine memory is an area that I intend to expand on further after the PhD, incorporating new pedal-based effects (such as the Red Panda Tensor 'time-warp' effect) and investigating the possibilities of granular and modular synthesis in more depth.

¹⁵² Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 238-240; 248-249.

It's pertinent that the last piece reviewed for this doctorate is titled 'the Long Goodbye' (final track on *Illumination #63*, above). This is a project that has forced me to create a minimum of two recorded musical releases every month, for *five years* (by the time of submission, it will be closer to six years), at the time of writing that is over 140 releases, by the submission this will be estimated at over 150 releases. Is it possible to break a habit as ingrained as this? Can such a project that is so wrapped up in the everydayness of ritual and formed around a core routine be tied off neatly? Of course it *can*, but is it something that I *want* to do? I don't know what I'd do with all the extra time I'd get if I were to stop now.

Joking aside, it has been such a profoundly meaningful project to me personally, I'm not sure I will stop. Maybe I'll take a holiday from it once in a while. Rather than having to lock myself away in a room of an unfamiliar holiday let to 'record a *FOTV* release' if I'm away with my partner's family (as happened several times throughout the project), maybe such a release will 'just have to wait until I get back'. But equally, maybe I won't (project supervisor Will Edmondson, commenting on this, tells me that stopping is an impossibility). Maybe this will continue for years more and spill out into something else, or something larger and (even) more complex.

This project has required the liturgical production of two releases every month for its duration, the production of this work has taken place regardless of other events that might 'get in its way' (holidays, funerals, travelling, etc.), and regardless of whether I, as artist, was 'up for it'. It was produced with and without inspiration, to varying individual success, whether in the musical or visual content. However, when examined in its entirety, all of the works – even those perhaps interpreted by me, as their producer, as less successful – can be seen to be important and worth communicating. The releases, when taken as a collective, can be seen to convey their own meaning, their own internal logic, as they are exhibited against each other and across the whole timeline of the project.

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Appendix

Below is a list of albums that I've taken inspiration from whilst completing the doctorate. This list is in no way exhaustive, but it intends to draw attention to the listening-research practices that I have undertaken whilst completing the work, and how these are relevant for the project broadly (both aesthetically and conceptually). The albums on this list have all been released in the duration of this doctoral project. This is important: it does reflect my listening practices generally (of listening to current music and new releases the majority of the time) – and something I believe is essential for me to successfully conduct my 'day job' as a music educator – but primarily here, it is also reflective of the goals of the project specifically, in the continual pursuit of new occluded knowledge, and the project's methodology of 'thinking improvisationally'.

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Body Void, *Atrocity Machine* (Prosthetic Records, 2023).

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