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COMING CLOSE: WHAT AN INTERVIEW CAN REVEAL ABOUT CREATIVITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY ART MUSIC COMPOSER

RICHARD WILLGOSS

■ Sydney Conservatorium of Music
University of Sydney
Sydney, New South Wales
Australia, 2000

r.willgoss@unsw.edu.au



www.mca.org.au

JMRO

www.jmro.org.au

Introduction

The term 'creativity', used linguistically in a musical context, gains a first significance by being used to describe a value judgement on a composer's output, both as a score and a performance. The relevance of an investigation into why and how the term is used in this context then gains a second significance in that, buried within being creative, are notions as to why some music is selectively valued, rather than all of what is on offer. These two premises find weak support from parametric approaches to their substantiation. However, gathering and interpreting information in a rational, sensible way should always remain an important step to understanding the subject matter. The major difficulty in resolution that arises is with assumptions made about what might be found, and upon what epistemology it should be based.

Art music composers create compositions that mainly sit as innovations on or extensions to the western classical music tradition. The use of the term in this research is not meant to imply any elitism or intellectual, social or cultural bias. However, it is innovations on, and links that can be made to, the present classical tradition (or lack of them) that often give rise to calling art music creative. Composers who choose to compose in this manner often devote much of their compositional efforts to this end. Unlike discovering and piecing together a workable pedagogy, creativity in art music composition defies being defined, especially in a way that is based on having any preconceived notions of what might be found in an investigation. Investigating creativity is a very delicate process and requires the application of as few constraints as possible.

The focus of interest in this essay is treating the interview as a window into understanding how contemporary art music composers see creativity in their works and impute value via linguistic description of the music, notwithstanding that music can speak for itself. Whilst the interview may be but one means of getting to reliable information here, it is a personal, first-hand way of obtaining insight into what is happening within and around art music composers. There is thus the ability to come close to them, their works and interaction with peers and contemporary artistic endeavour.



The success of an interview, as an investigative technique, relies upon asking socially acceptable questions in a way that brings forth reliable, authentic, and perhaps coherent information, but with minimal constraint. Any suggestion of being part of an interrogation would not be beneficial. In an interview's immediacy, comment on issues that persist in these composers' minds and remain current is obtained with less premeditated packaging and polishing of the response. That is the thought domain of creativity itself. Due to the potential abstractness of their thoughts, these composers make responses that cannot be expected to be uniformly logical and reasonable. This makes the task of understanding them more challenging. Also, unlike formal linguistic discourse that welcomes some close correlation between syntax and semantics, music can communicate of itself — no words are needed — and with unrestrained hermeneutics. There is thus the added difficulty of art music composers talking about creativity in their works when the works could and should normally speak, as music, for themselves.

Background

Since general creativity has an extensive literature of its own, it is briefly reviewed in this essay. A review of research concerning creativity directed at musical matters, inclining to where interviews are used, then follows.

Creativity, expressing a desire to make anew or to be inspired, reaches back to roots in muses and daemons. The Latin word 'creare' means to make, bring forth, produce, beget or bring into existence. Enlightenment in the eighteenth century based on reason alone opened up new ways of understanding but difficulties in defining creativity persisted. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the concept of being creative is constantly used. 'Creativity' today is a general term, often ill-defined and used colloquially, to indicate a positive value judgement on an endeavour, mainly personally achieved, as already espoused by Hudson ([1970: 217](#)). 'Creativity' is also a scientific term for the discovery of some measure of independence, originality, value and efficacy being achieved ([Boden 2010](#)). Attempts to frame the creative have gathered momentum in the last 200 years. Typical of these is Wilhelm Hegel's (1770–1831), creating a well-known dialectic with a three-step causal chain: a thesis was necessarily opposed by an antithesis with no apparent resolution. A third step, as a synthesis, was then found as a new creative way forward ([Hegel \[1807\] 1977](#)). Similarly, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) fixated on the world as being a blind cosmic will, where art was able to overcome this will by non-rational forces that lay at the foundations of exercising creativity ([Schopenhauer 1995](#); [Scruton 1997: 365](#))¹. Similarly, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) associated a Dionysian attitude with a type of primordial creativity with which to overcome the Apollonian attitude². Lastly, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (b. 1934) devised a measure of creativity in relating skill level to the degree of challenge in the task undertaken. A flow effect came into being as the practitioner's skill level and task challenge both increased together in complementarity, optimising creative output ([Csikszentmihalyi 1996](#); [Byrne, MacDonald and Carlton 2003](#)).

Creativity is primarily neither developmental nor constructionist. It triggers its presence in the mind by some means as the creator is manifesting — painting, composing, speaking — as a paradoxical act of unpredictable construction. Triggers occur not only in the minds of initial creators but, in musical terms, also in performers, listeners and analysts. A predictive step, able to foretell the occurrence of being creative, as valued in science, is here oxymoronic. General creativity is regarded ontologically as not bizarre ([Torrance 1998: 42](#)). It can be seen coming out of a well-established domain and has been characterised by, amongst a number of approaches, an extensive literature based on psychometrics ([Plucker and Renzulli 1999](#)). Composite parts of a creative solution may appear pedagogic, but creativity is primarily self-discovery and self-discipline and may not yield to pedagogy³. Creativity needs some expertise for manifestation: it is not flippant, spontaneous or out of character.

Creativity is often seen to be in the process or in the product. The use of technique or craft is often linked to the action of being creative. For example, one speaks of creativity in behaviour. Contentiously, musical creativity may be abstruse or the most abstract of creativities, since music is not necessarily language ([Thompson 1999: 501](#))⁴. Unlike general creativity that can retain reasonable links with its origins, contemporary art music compositional creativity neither needs nor wants a relationship to anything before it: it can be bizarre. If this were not so, such creativity would have little power in making any claims about creative action in this context. If the bizarre is recognised as axiomatic, then reason is not a necessary condition of discourse. Discourse in the arts, and in art music especially, also contains allusions to creativity that are not necessarily logical ([Borthwick 1995](#)). Margaret Boden has addressed definitional and other issues concerning



general creativity, researching mostly from a cognitive viewpoint ([Boden 1994, 2004: 1–10](#)). However, recent offerings from her refer to art in which her categories are linked to an interest in conceptual spaces ([Boden 2007](#)). Definitional and other issues with respect to art have been addressed more recently ([Boden 2010](#))⁵, where the title of her latest book, *Creativity in Art: Three Roads to Surprise*, highlighted that, in art, there is an inevitable element of surprise. Boden referred to some musical contexts but did not address creativity in contemporary art music composition or nominate the challenges involved in understanding it.

As can be seen from the discussion above, the notion of being creative has been worked on in scientific and philosophical terms for many years but creativity linked to artistic endeavour has only come under closer scrutiny in the latter half of the twentieth century. It was Hospers, as late as 1985, who argued that, as a philosopher, he found a paucity of good literature here⁶. He chose to debate the merits of artistic creativity in terms of a kind of property, such as making, expressing, objectifying and also as an unconscious drive. Recently, Bernard Andrews ([2004](#)) has tried to find, for him, the right questions in this regard firstly citing early work by George Wallas ([1926](#)) who proposed a four-stage process to general creativity: starting with a germinal idea (preparation), next to a brief sketch (incubation), then to a first draft (illumination) and last to a final copy (verification). Wallas's stages relate to creativity in general, not necessarily to the artistic variety. Later work and attitudes of composers can be seen as similar to and building on Wallas's proposal. Andrews reviews a number of creativity models as part of what is called The Genesis Project; here the aim was to build an educational pedagogy for teaching musical composition. Recently, Irène Deliège and Geraint Wiggins ([2006](#)) have edited a collection of papers on musical creativity that is arguably the first comprehensive book on the topic. The opening article indicated how creativity in the musical domain could be a distributed property ([Deliège and Wiggins 2006: 1–6](#)). The contributions are diverse in both approach and content. Petri Toiviainen ([2008](#)), in a review, noted little coherence in the contributions but did not link this to the immanent nature of music or the method space being used. The topic is now broadening out into dealing with collaborative artistic creativity as well ([Barrett 2006; Barrett 2009](#)). An understanding of creativity in musical composition, using semantic and dialectic framing, has recently been reported ([Willgoss 2012](#)).

The results of interviews with composers, where art music compositional creativity may have come under scrutiny, have been reviewed. There appeared to be mostly an incidental involvement in being creative, as the following examples are intended to show. Eight composers were interviewed by Stan Bennett ([1976](#)) using a preformed list of questions. The focus was the process of musical creation, in effect presupposing creativity to be present. The questions asked did not allude to creativity *per se* but to composition as a process and also to career progression, canon and marketplace, with answers collated into final objective statistics. A proposal to ask why composers compose, taken from an educational and pedagogic point of view, has been reported ([Andrews 2004](#)) to be conducted via interview in conjunction with a variety of other techniques, such as knowledge accessing mode inventory (KAMI) and personal journals. Creativity is mentioned but treated as an inherently understood phenomenon. Benefits of understanding musical creativity and understanding how composers compose are mentioned, as if the two were concomitant but with no reasoning for this assumption given. In an interview as a conversation with Keith Muscutt ([2007](#)), David Cope, as a computer music composer, recalled his parameterisation of past composers' characteristics. In his research, he generated, via computational analysis, new works symptomatic of such composers. Here, the focus was algorithmic composition with a specific computational input that treated music as a process enacted as an algorithm. As their conversation ensued, the topics of authenticity and creativity were mentioned and appeared to be of major importance in debating the worth of outcomes from Cope's research. David Cope eventually became disillusioned by others questioning the creative and authentic nature of his output — unjust aspersions in my opinion — and then lost enthusiasm for helping others to emulate his work ([Cope 2005: 345](#)). From the different disciplinary direction of anthropology, the focus on what was termed 'rituals of belonging and recognition' was used in interview interaction with two young art composers as they fought for musical survival in their profession ([El-Ghadban 2009: 140](#)). The focus embraced the contrast between identity, affiliation, and belonging and musical authorship, subjectivity, and agency, specifically involving post-colonialism. Mention of creativity here was limited to phrases such as 'creative ways of navigating the structures of contemporary art music' ([El-Ghadban 2009: 153](#)), and noting that agency gave capacity to 'transcend power structures ... through performability, creativity, and imagination' ([El-Ghadban 2009: 154](#)).



A compilation of conversations with art music composers over a few years, in interview form, was made by Andrew Ford ([1993](#)). Ford's intention in the interviews was:

to let them [the composers] speak about their work and attitudes to their work. ... to allow the composer's real personality to emerge ([Ford 1993: xi](#)).

Mention of creativity was not solicited and was present in a serendipitous way. John Tavener said of his own attitude:

But [in contradistinction to feeling close to some music] as I find with almost all Western music, it doesn't inspire me to go on doing what I am doing ... it's beautiful, and I can see why people like it, but ... it doesn't speak to me creatively ([Ford 1993: 91](#)).

A recent set of interviews, compiled under the title of *Contemporary Music: Theoretical and Philosophical Perspectives*, are also illustrative of serendipitous mention of creative thoughts ([Paddison & Deliège 2010](#)). Among them, Hermen Lachenmann has said:

Composing as a way of fabricating magic in music is rather easy. There are a lot of composers whom I wouldn't call real composers but more or less talented arrangers of magical situations. ... This is the quandary: magic as a medium of familiar safety, even of irrational collective ecstasy, or magic as a medium of reflection, dominated and suspended by a creative spirit? At any rate, in what we call art in music, the composer, with his creative and innovative energy, has to evoke and dominate the magic ([Heathcote 2010: 331](#)).

Looking at groups of composers, but not necessarily in the interview context, David Bennett ([2008](#)) posed, in correspondence, a series of questions to art music practitioners, including composers, inviting written responses to a set questionnaire. The questions probed the relevance of postmodernism to music. He then framed the responses in his own postmodern explanation. Reference to the superficial, pastiche, and quotation was seen, by Foucault, to undermine authenticity, creativity, and personal ownership by invoking the author function ([Foucault 1977](#))². In another context, Eleni Lapidaki ([2007](#)) has not used the interview but selected a range of composers to interview at a (temporal rather than physical) distance. The writings of each composer were explored to draw out themes from an educational and pedagogical point of view. The choice of composers examined was made to embrace, in her words, serialism, avant-garde, modernism, minimalism, musique concrète, and electronic music, and she asked the question: who among them placed emphasis on innovation and creative freedom as inseparable from expression? Lapidaki focused attention on creativity as process, highlighting three issues: the significance of the unconscious, acceptance of an inability to explain but still generate output, and the tension between tradition and innovation. She then sadly but, in a near-tangential way to her main lines of investigation, concluded that, as a composer, her gender status still suffered from the political domination of men.

General views on associations between composing, creativity, and pedagogy are present throughout the literature, including those of Igor Stravinsky who regarded it impossible to teach much, if anything, about how to compose ([Ward-Steinman 2011: 9](#))⁸. David Ward-Steinman met with Darius Milhaud and Nadia Boulanger in the 1950s. Ward-Steinman controlled the development of the musicianship curriculum at San Diego State University for over forty years. His recent reflections about classical composing are meant to reveal craft and pedagogy and, in their own way, are based on a quasi-interview. Ward-Steinman's reflections refer to Ned Rorem saying Boulanger was 'the most remarkable pedagogue of our century, and perhaps (who knows) of all time' ([Ward-Steinman 2011: 6](#)). He contrasted this with his own view that

The fact that Boulanger was no longer a composer (uncreative as Rorem mistakenly would have it) was, I think, a surprising advantage for her ([Ward-Steinman 2011: 7](#)).

Nadia Boulanger stopped composing early on in her career but Ward-Steinman would say of her that she remained inventive (not necessarily creative) in her musical criticism ([Ward-Steinman 2011: 7](#)). Ward-Steinman recorded Mike Vernusky as saying



As many predicted in recent years, a new type of composer skill set is needed to maximize our effectiveness in creativity: artists who can quickly adapt to new environments for musical creation, and maintain their own unique musical language inside of that environment ([Ward-Steinman 2011: 18](#))⁹.

Here Vernusky implied that a maximizing of effective creativity was central to contemporary art music composition. Music is also naturally alluded to as language. However, music, unlike spoken language, has personal or idiosyncratic meanings the composer, performer or listener might declare by way of intention or inference ([Spitzer 2004: 54](#))⁹.

In a search for understanding creative issues in music, sometimes the interview has played no role at all as in personal collections of composers' reflections or correspondence ([Schoenberg 1975](#); [Stravinsky and Craft 1960](#); [Stravinsky and Craft 1962](#); [Klein 1973](#); [Stravinsky 1975](#)). Research then becomes necessarily a hunt for phraseology that might bear upon on being creative. By way of examples, Igor Stravinsky, in conjunction with Robert Craft, wrote

Technique is not a teachable science, neither is it learning, nor scholarship, nor even the knowledge of how to do something. It is creation, and, being creation, it is new every time ([Craft and Stravinsky 1980: 26-7](#))

from which it could be deduced that Stravinsky did not rely significantly on pedagogy and that newness was for him a property of being creative. The question remains: to whom does his perception of newness apply? Similarly, Arnold Schoenberg wrote

It is not the heart alone which creates all that is beautiful, emotional, pathetic, affectionate, and charming: nor is it the brain alone which is able to produce the well-constructed, the soundly organised, the logical and the complicated. First, everything of supreme value in art must show heart as well as brain. Second, the real creative genius has no difficulty in controlling his feelings mentally; nor must the brain produce only the dry and unappealing while concentrating on correctness and logic ([Schoenberg 1975:75](#)).

Here it could be concluded that Schoenberg had a Cartesian duality in view such that the creative person had no difficulty in handling both aspects in conjunction with one another: the subjective with the objective, the mechanistic with the mystical. With both of these examples, it must be remembered that these composers were most probably using 'creativity' in a colloquial sense and that the meaning of the word may have changed for them as time passed.

Lastly, sometimes an objective parametric investigation has been made to judge the amount of creative activity present but with no connection to interviewing. Dean Simonton ([1994](#)) focused upon analysing the properties of melodic structure, using computer analysis to cope with a large database of 15,618 themes from 479 composers. This line of inquiry assumed melody to be central to the creativity that was deemed to be present in the musical composition. Simonton claimed his work had the potential to 'reveal an enormous amount of information about musical creativity and aesthetics' ([Simonton 1994: 41](#)), the revelation coming in the form of measuring melodic originality as the inverse of the frequency of two-note transitions in a composition. This metric became, for him, a guide to creative content by making the claim:

the more proximate a composer is to the centres of musical creativity, the higher the expected level of melodic originality ([Simonton 1994: 37](#)).

He thus found peaks of melodic originality, using his definition, at the times of Monteverdi and Schoenberg but a trough around the times of Beethoven and Schubert ([Simonton 1986: 36](#)). By correlation, it could be inferred that compositional creativity was higher or lower at those times too. However, Simonton made an a priori assumption that musical judgement on compositional creative content could be based on an unchanging parametric analysis, itself also based only on melody.



Quest

There is a number of challenges in describing and charting creativity in the arts that become apparent from reading the literature. Art, and music especially, do not rely on being reasonable to get their effects, yet are inconceivable without some form of reasoning to start with. There is also tension between artistic activity that pushes to break boundaries and a commodifying structuralising zeitgeist that tries to subsume all, including what it might not understand. Art expresses the inexpressible where artworks forge their own consistency amongst the ineffable or mystical. Theory then would become spurious closure, i.e., the claiming of a theoretical explanation for what creativity is present or how it operates, when the explanation may neither be needed nor illuminating. In forming any definition, the ineffable remainder¹⁰ will persist, left over as the unexplained. That which defies understanding is creatively important, since any attempt to embrace or facilitate the ineffable is of itself creative.

The review of the research literature on art music compositional creativity where an interview technique was used threw up little mention of creativity. Therefore, it was decided that an interview technique could be in some way illuminating in finding out how this cohort of composers viewed their creativity, if it was given a remit that was missing from previous research. In particular, it would need to cope with capturing the ephemeral and then satisfying at least two criteria (i) the questions asked needed to be potentially open-ended and (ii) immanence be embraced. If that were so, it would enable significant personal interaction between interviewer and interviewee, freedom of response, sensitivities to become evident, and be not bounded by any specific structuralisation. Many forms of response could be given to questions including what might appear to be the unreasonable or illogical. These attributes of gathering information are necessarily masked or harder to document with a standard questionnaire or by statistically processing natural language transcripts.

In an interview-type technique, the conversation can include having a specific focus or wandering over whatever interests and reflections composers have at the time. Information normally relates to comprehending the significance of the composer's corpus of works but the concept of a musical work is itself problematic when improvisation or computerised and electronic means are present. Revelation can thus range widely, from validating hypotheses to casting light upon whatever may be found and helpfully describable, perhaps in a serendipitous way.

Whilst a proactivity greater than passive inquiry or serendipity was needed to elicit information here, the task was necessarily conditioned by needing focus and some initial views on the expectations of what might be found. The focus on art music composition, particularly involving instrumental music, meant starting with meaning as abstract, prior to overloading it with some form of socio-cultural construct, history or provenance. Because of the incipient, abstract nature of music¹¹, the quest was to invite the composer, using minimal steerage and guidance, into answering questions where responses might explain their creative attributes — both theirs and how they viewed those of others. Since interrogation rarely leads to unconstrained information that then speaks authentically of the one who gives it, the composer was encouraged into an empathetic dialogue with an informed interviewer. The interviewer, as the informed listener, should be able to follow and keep a record of arguments or viewpoints put forward, no matter how obtuse, detached, and esoteric they might seem to be. In addition, no particular dialectic, genre, format, protocol etc. could be imposed, save invitation and the observance of social courtesies.

The very nature of any study or research into musical creativity means that you do not know in advance what is relevant until you spend time accumulating and examining evidence. In the same way, relevant questions for this study had necessarily to be set so that the questions might engender rich information from those interviewed. The series of questions that were eventually put explored epistemic and philosophical domains pertinent to art music composition that might involve creativity. Confidence concerning relevance grew as responses were obtained. The feedback from composers was that they had been able to voice their opinions about creativity in composition by speaking freely about their chosen role. A cohort of twenty-eight composers, all professing to compose art music and based in Australia, was chosen. The persons who agreed to be interviewed were self-selected by way of receptivity to invitation and word-of-mouth introduction. The interview process was subject to and controlled by the precepts of The Human Ethics Department of the University of Sydney.



Question Framework for Interview

In forming questions about creativity in contemporary art music composition, axiomatic views will inevitably condition or shape the questions deemed appropriate. Question format was directed somewhere between a structuralist approach and one that assumed there were unlikely to be hypotheses to form. Structure builds on what might be there to be discovered and thus generates an essentially closed question. Hypothetical verity would then be embedded in the interview scripts by linguistic interpretation and categorisation. Conversely, an assumption that there is no refutable hypothesis recognises that the nature of what might be found could be too disparate for categorisation or too hermeneutically open, thus needing an essentially open question to welcome a response. Put another way, creativity generically generates sparse data¹² or the term would not be used. However, even in the midst of being eclectic, composers show distinctive traits or semiotics throughout their output that render their works attributable to the one composer and consistently distinguishable from others¹³. Whatever the type of question used, some form of idiosyncrasy of particular composers and their proclivities will have been captured and, in some way, recognisable. I also anticipated that some responses from composers might address matters of particular interest to them, connected (possibly loosely) to any question asked.

In order to give prospect to uncovering any creative traits the composers might think, say and do, should they be present, the interaction with the interviewees was centred around a chosen set of intellectual domains which are shown in [Table 1](#).

A taxonomy of how the questions were seen to relate to each other is given in [Figure 1](#). In the taxonomy, the heart of the matter is music from which all other motivations flow. [Figure 1](#) is not structural in intent but more a possible mind map of a search that may help intellectual reasoning and generate receptivity in the reader. Being creative cannot but enable different ways of portraying its presence. It is possible, and even welcomed, that, should the taxonomy be attempted at some other stage of proceedings, it might look different to the one offered here. Defining creativity in such a way as to support a particular pedagogy or structure would detract from recognising the creativity in the first place.

The domains generally, but not exclusively, subdivide the search space into specific areas because these areas can involve more than one of the domains listed above. The questions have been grouped by domain and are identified in the taxonomy boxes in parentheses. The letter refers to a domain, whereas the number refers to the question order in that domain. Hence Pc3, identified in the top left hand box set of questions of [Figure 1](#), means it is part of the Process domain, question number 3, series. A key is provided in [Table 2](#). Pc3 thus refers to the question that asks: How synonymous are the concepts of composing and creating to you? A full explanation of this question is to be found in the section below, with the sub-heading, 'Process'.

Problems in terminology were observed. Sometimes the inference in a question was on composing, sometimes on composing creatively and sometimes on being creative. Each usage talks about an activity that could involve composing. However, it is logically possible to be creative without composing, and to compose without being creative. One question was inserted to check the composer's stance if he or she differentiated between usage here. It was latently beholden on the interviewees to show how they made the composition-creative connection, not for the interviewer to impose one.

The conceptualisation captured in [Figure 1](#) may also shed light on how creativity might relate to other areas of music, such as performing and analysis, but that do not form part of the research reported here. The broader context of creativity in musical matters is that it is evident throughout the cyclic loop of composing, performing ([Clarke 2012](#)), listening and analysing, and then, through self critique, on to further composing.

Each of the intellectual domains is addressed next. An explanatory paragraph, that broaches issues and literature relevant to contemporary art music composition in that domain, is provided. The questions for each domain are then listed. Each question is followed by an explanation for how and why the question was posed and what might be forthcoming by way of an answer from the interviewee. This explanation was not made known to the interviewee, nor was any communication made to the interviewee that might indicate why the question was asked.



Figure 1: A Taxonomy to Relate Questions About Art Music Compositional Creativity to One Another

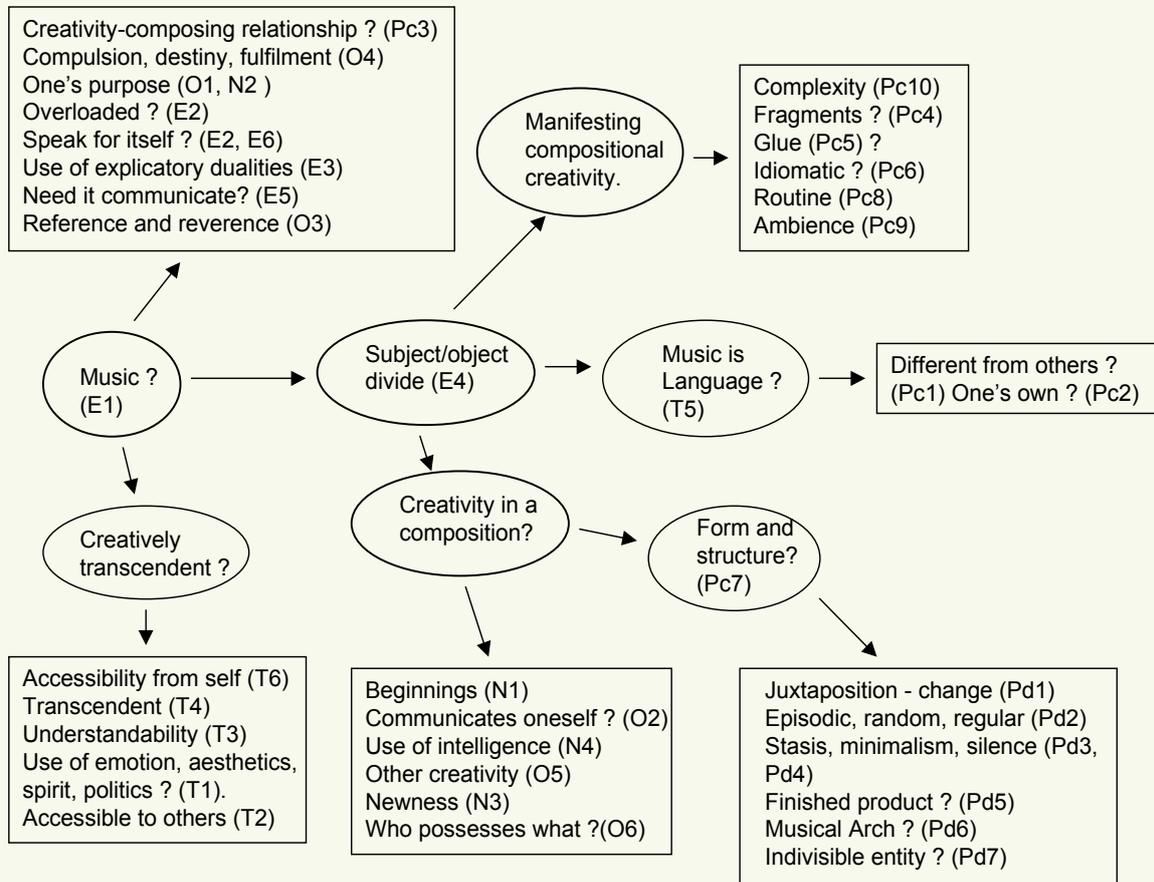


Table 1: The intellectual domains chosen for interaction with the interviewees

Epistemology	How the basis of understanding our intellectual content is framed.
Ontology	How music is, i.e., its innate being.
Nascency	How compositional creativity has awakenings and some form of genesis.
Process	How creativity is seen as process.
Product	How creativity is seen as product.
Transcendence	What ineffable, paradoxical, esoteric or mystical parts of life art music compositional creativity tries to interact with and maybe portray.

Table 2: Key to abbreviations for identifying questions used in [Figure 1](#).

Intellectual domain	Number of questions	Abbreviations used
Epistemology	6	E1 – E6
Ontology	6	O1 – O6
Nascency	4	N1 – N4
Process	10	Pc1 – Pc10
Product	7	Pd1 – Pd7
Transcendence	6	T1 – T6



Epistemology

There is an ever-present danger that, in concentrating in an objective way on creativity in musical composition, the immanence of music to humans is lost; this singularly focussed concentration drives an almost unbridgeable epistemic chasm between musical practitioner and theorist. Our own character is seen in the score. Our own personality is seen in the performance. Art music composition is completion to an entity, the understanding thereof generating a high probability of leaving an ineffable remainder. The ineffable remainder is made note of in a number of epistemic situations. Here are just five. Michael Spitzer ([2006: 272](#)) concurs with and quotes Theodor Adorno, saying, in Spitzer's own words, that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder. In addition, percepts get shoehorned into concepts under duress and there is always something left over. Max Paddison says

Arising out of the tension between mimesis and rationality, between expression and construction — the dialectic of Subject and Object within the work — is the remainder (das Mehr), the riddle of the work ([Paddison 1996: 75](#)).

Pierre Boulez cited Andre Breton as referring to the work of art resisting interpretation by having 'an indestructible kernel of darkness' ([Boulez 1986: 83](#)). Beverly Lanzetta, employed the phrase theologically in a search for open solutions ([Lanzetta 2001: 118](#)). Herbert Simon ([1995](#)) debated the role and place of remainder in science. Art music composition is full of paradoxical meaning, often welcomed by the composer, performer, and listener, even if unintended. Creativity in art music composition defies definition in that it is persuasive, method-insensitive, and not necessarily utilitarian in focus. Yet somehow agreement on a sensible discourse is sought in our epistemological debate or we will be passing ships in the darkest of intellectual nights. Without any sense of the need to impose intellectual structure, a number of constellatory islands of understanding can be seen to cohabit in some way and give a persuasive voice¹⁴. The world is understood in many instances by modernist alternatives, dualism (binaries), doubleness, and opposites. Much of what is called meaning comes from mediating between such pairs, often in antinomy, including Gestalt concepts of a dialogue between the whole and the parts. Mediation of subjective and inter-subjective paradigms, another duality, is a fundamental goal in many areas of philosophical striving ([Spitzer 2004: 280](#)).

Epistemology Questions:

- E1** What do you understand music to be? (This is a general opening question to see how the interviewee can cope with and zero in on topics to come. Composers had ample opportunity to paint the big picture for me if they wanted to. Any response that became extensive met with encouragement that later questions would enable amplification in different ways.)
- E2** Is music overloaded or can it stand without explanation, i.e., speak for itself? (This question invites comment on how much music may be seen to be a carrier or essence in itself of message and meaning.)
- E3** Opposites, duality, dichotomy, and dilemma are pairs used to define either end of a spectrum of facility, view or property. What role does any thinking like this play in being creative musically, e.g., cresc/dim? Name some dualities important to you. (This question checks how much the interviewee is thinking categorically in a modernist way. Literature is full of binary or dualistic thinking as a means to convey meaning.)
- E4** What for you is the connection between a subjective viewpoint and what you objectively produce as a score? (This question examines how a composer creates from within, then cyclically re-imbibes and regurgitates to end up with something objective to pass on. The question was misunderstood by some who could not handle or did not like subjective-objective duality. Some composers were very much at home in using these categories to describe their viewpoint.)
- E5** Need a composition communicate? (This question explores the relevance of music being defined as a means of communication.)
- E6** Can a composition just exist as your creative product? (This question explores the creative independence with which the composer operates and the possibility that music need not be utilitarian in any way.)

Ontology

General creativity is not bizarre. It can be seen in product and/or process coming out of a well-established domain ([Paul Torrance 1998](#)). Yet creativity in musical composition has the capacity to be bizarre or it would have no place in making any creativity claim, because musical meaning is put there personally, not necessarily by convention. Whatever the apologetic given for compositional creativity, it



must never be forgotten that music *is*: any acceptable method for creation, performance, and listening fails when detracting from music's innate existence or worth. For music is ultimately not an experiment ([Klein 1973: 65](#)): there is neither hypothesis to make or to refute via proof. Meaning is also temporal so a prevalent or consensual meaning may not last, implying persons can and do change their minds. Polymorphism is a property to be assumed in the absence of evidence for consensus and temporally dependent style. Overloading is revered simply because it does not force deontology onto viewpoints. Autonomy often wins over hierarchy but the victory may be pyrrhic. Art is sovereign over truth and puts feeling into rules ([Spitzer 2004: 280](#))¹⁵.

Ontology questions:

- O1** What purpose is there in you composing? (This question is really teleological but promotes thoughts about why and how the interviewee is motivated to create compositionally. Yet the word 'create' is not explicitly used and the question is made more open in this regard.)
- O2** Is your musical creativity an inevitable expression of who you want to be seen to be? If so, what does that expression say? If not, why not? (This question asks that, having generated some form of creative product that is external to the creator, what 'anything' does it contain to link it to the creator? The question also points directly at what control the composer might want or have in this regard.)
- O3** Do you need to show any reverence or reference in your work to previous influences? If so, why? If not, why not? (This question provokes views on any historical, influential or provenantial connection to what has been produced by the composer.)
- O4** Is there any sense in which you feel compelled, destined, fulfilled in being creative? (This question speaks to any inevitable genesis for the music created by the composer. It links into a stream or flow of consciousness that examines the unavoidability of the interviewee's inclination to compose but does not force that into a coupling with the creative. The word, 'creative', on its own invites the interviewee to link or separate composing from being creative. It also invited any thoughts of recognition of how the unconscious might be playing a role here.)
- O5** Is your creativity directly coupled to composition or could it equally be gardening or strong adherence to a belief system? (This question directly examines the proportion of creative output, such as internally defined by the interviewee, that goes into composing rather than anywhere else. It invites a wider definition of being creative and where the composer might believe that creativity is occurring.)
- O6** How content are you that what your compositions might say or mean can be seen in many different ways? (This question goes the business of ownership and the need for protection of the originator's intention, message or motivation. It also examines the composer's view on overloading, semantics, and hermeneutics in general. The question could be related to the composers' own definition of music and how they then put this into practice.)

Nascency

Creativity is born, in terms of nascency, out of a domain it tries to reject. It revolts against concepts but is inconceivable without them ([Paddison 1993: 11](#)). Creativity in musical composition is conceivable without the need for a rationalistic framework and delights in paradox¹⁶. It has a need to forge its own consistency ([Paddison 1993: 56](#)) as a crossing-over from the foundational to the unknown. Any compositional creativity genesis is innately inexhaustible. In the converse, a musical technique such as serialism (one of many -isms) is a naturally exhaustible phenomenon and largely non-creative if sterilised into algorithm. In this context, the works of David Lumsdaine ([Hall 2003](#)) show how he had grounding in a particular -ism (serial technique) but added much more for his development as a composer.

Nascency questions:

- N1** What or where is the real beginning point of your musical creativity? (This question tries to get composers to look at origins in at least two ways, either in terms of early influences on themselves or the way(s) their works comes into existence.)
- N2** What gives rise to you wanting to be creative via musical composition? (This question is parallel to Ontology 4. Here a check for how controllable or otherwise the urge to compose and/or create is made.)



- N3** How much is newness involved in what you try to compose? (There is a tendency to associate newness with creativity. The interviewees were given free reign to wax lyrical here, and they did.)
- N4** What is the role of intelligence or cleverness in being able to compose music? (This question invites invoking special types of person that could be seen to compose/create better than others simply because they appear more intelligent, perhaps through an IQ test or the balance of nature v. nurture or a propensity picked out via a Myers-Briggs test.)

Process

When looking at process, composers do not necessarily want the detail of their creativity to be revealed, preserving some mystery as to method. The possible cyclic causal chain here can highlight a process at work: from percepts to concepts to precepts and synthesis to manifestation and thence to precepts again. But art undermines concepts to let the non-conceptual speak ([Paddison 1993: 15](#))¹⁷. As Max Paddison put it:

Art cannot be defined in terms of what it once was, as it is also a process of becoming¹⁸, proceeding by way of negation of its own previously existing concept ([Paddison 1996: 59](#)).

Music becomes vehicular and instrumental as and when acknowledgement of it being so is made and, like compositional creativity, can speak differently from language ([Spitzer 2004: 270](#))¹⁹. Composers manipulate meaning via the troping of temporality ([Spitzer 2004: 261](#))²⁰, involving persuasion and receptivity as key elements. Compositional creativity can subsume complexity into its objective servant. Silence has a lot to say: it admits the non-teleological into our understanding, firstly by no provision of standardised answers from our own present sense of understanding and, secondly, from the caesura effect that causes us to take stock and reflect upon that which has been generated or received.

Process questions:

- Pc1** How does musical language differ from the more obvious spoken languages? (This is a point of never-ending debate. The use of language, in whatever defined form, cannot be avoided with respect to understanding how someone might support or manifest their creativity. The double difficulty here is that music is perfectly — maybe insistently — capable of speaking for itself.)
- Pc2** Is there a musical language common in some way throughout your compositions? (This question was latently asking for what characteristics can be seen in the interviewee's works, whether language concepts dominate for them, how much they wish to find their own voice, and so forth. It was meant to be as open as possible and did not add 'If so, what is it?' to let the interviewee offer more than a 'yes' or a 'no' if they wanted to.)
- Pc3** How synonymous are the concepts composing and creating to you? (This question was meant to be direct. It checked that concept was a meaningful or useable terminology for the interviewee and then invited a contextual usage.)
- Pc4** How much or little do you put fragments, jottings, sketches together to create a work? (This question goes to the craft of the composer's process and was meant to provoke any reaction from agreement to retort, both of which it got.)
- Pc5** What gives rise to such fragments and what is the 'glue' that appropriately fixes them together? (This question also invited a return to nascency as much as anything but was coupled with glue as if construction was taking place. It was a major concern that I enabled or gently provoked an understanding of a creative process within a composer but did not prejudge.)
- Pc6** In what way is your music idiomatic? (This question was meant to provoke thoughts on whether idiomatic properties were present, important, and observable, and by whom.)
- Pc7** Where does form and structure play a role for you? (This question goes to the heart of constructionism, its use and importance, and explores the composer's reliance upon structure in his/her works.)
- Pc8** What sort of routine is conducive to you being compositionally creative? (Here, the significance of technique or craft via discipline was checked.)



Pc9 What ambience is conducive to you composing? (Here, comment on the significance of any form of background effects, environment, muse, spirituality, emotion, social context, etc. was invited.)

Pc10 Is your composition an exercise in coping with or controlling complexity? If so, why is complexity attractive to you? If not, why not? (This question invited the interviewee to explore, if they were at all motivated, to make their work complex, as if that is something desirable. Complexity is a contentious issue. Some notable composers are observed to give it pre-eminence.)

Product

When invoking compositional creativity as a product, constellations of heterotopic epistemology — a way of relating entities to others that are fundamentally different — emerge, one notable effect being what is termed ‘*style [with all its] fissures and bare convention open to view and side by side*’ (Spitzer 2006: 62–6). Its practice in the late works of Beethoven has been regarded as a peak of such achievement. This can also be described as juxtaposition in *sontage*²¹. Heterotopy can embrace and embody form and hierarchy where homotopy fails to do so²². Michel Foucault’s (1984) heterotopic spaces open up a rhizomatic and synaesthetic toolbox for newness of description, giving freedom of choice. For Foucault, ‘*Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations amongst sites*’ and is a clear echo of the constellatory nature of Adorno’s writings. This epistemic technique is the philological equivalent of the computer scientist’s overloading. When hermeneutics and interpretation try to synthesise deontologically to see order, they act as anti-constellatory agents and constrict creative tendencies.

Product questions:

Pd1 When studying your compositions as finished works, how much juxtaposition and change do you see in them? (This reflective question invited a view that there is a finished product and, having reached that point, the composer then chooses between the extremes of letting go or being a serial revisionist. The use of juxtaposition invites the work to be seen as being a collection of parts in some way put together, albeit with sophistication that might be termed creative. But this question also tested the composer’s ability NOT to be bound by the terminology of others in that they could easily say with credibility, ‘my works don’t have any juxtaposition in them—it is not needed.’)

Pd2 Is the change episodic, regular, random, or what? Does this constitute form or structure to you? (This question could bring to the fore preferred form or structure and why that is so. It continued the exploration of how constructionist the composer wants to be.)

Pd3 Are stasis, minimalism, and silence means to a worthwhile end in creative composition? If so, how? If not, why not? (This question invited relatively recent forms and genres to be given some form of credence. Other recent forms could have been chosen but the three on offer here are more absences than obvious presences in music. Composers have been provoked to examine the parts of music that might be regarded as saying less to see how they explain significance of use in music.)

Pd4 Can stasis, minimalism, and silence be ends in themselves in creative composition? If so, how? If not, why not? (This question was a check on how the composer sets out a case that distinguishes medium from message. It is left to them to choose which is which if they want to.)

Pd5 What is the nature of finished product in creative composition? (This question appeared straightforward if musical composition is viewed as writing the score and then handing it on to others. But the question was more to invite a wide variety of answers about how concluding creative offerings takes place, if at all.)

Pd6 Where do you see the familiar musical arch in your product? (The composer was asked to contemplate a specific metaphor for how a work can be described or understood. It got hit to the boundary by a few who did not identify with the metaphor.)

Pd7 Is there any sense in which your creation/composition is spoilt if not heard from start to finish? (This question invited recognising the coherence and completeness of a composition through performance, such that there would be loss if not experienced this way. It also tested the sensitivity of the composer to their product being commodified and traded in the musical market place.)



Transcendence

A transcendental dimension in music communicates in a non-conventional mode: it is gestalt-like. The whole work is greater than the sum of any assembled parts, often brought about by juxtaposition in montage. Michael Spitzer (2006: 28) regards Theodor Adorno's phrase, that 'art puts feeling into rules', as a sentiment many artists are aiming for and is transcendental in concept. The transcendental in compositional creativity transcends by exceeding limits to reach the inexpressible. Lydia Goehr sheds light on the transcendental by saying

It contains the central argument of my book for a revised reading of music's claim for autonomy. This argument resituates the concept of the musical (a performance is equivalent to a metaphor) by shifting our emphasis from a work's form and content to music's function of expressing or voicing the inexpressible through performance. (Goehr 1998: 4).

The dualities revealed-concealed and expressible-inexpressible thus enable the transcendental to take place: from the known to the unknown, from the tangible to the intangible. In antinomy, they can complement rather than eliminate each other so that the expressible, no matter how inadequate it may be judged to be, is the means to grasp the inexpressible. Lydia Goehr talks of a musical deed and what limits mean (Goehr 1998: 45). To transcend is to work with under-determined practice and run the risk that the essence of what is wanting to be expressed has not been fully captured. But it is the inexpressible that one is trying to express and must be inadequate in doing so in some way. This viewpoint reinforces the significance of the ineffable remainder, the part that defies definition. This is also what is termed rupture between self and forms (Paddison 1993: 21): the rupture generates the capacity to creatively express the inexpressible through composition with performance, as reification in an agreed communication paradigm. Transcendence has a capacity for separateness from the physical.

Transcendence questions:

- T1** How much would you expect or hope listeners to your music to be affected emotionally, spiritually, aesthetically or politically? (Here an open question invited comment on specific proclivities, especially those that are strongly preferential on subjective viewpoints, and how the mind is affected by the music.)
- T2** How satisfied should listeners be that they can relate to and/or understand your music? How many repeat hearings could it take for a musically literate person to reach this stage? (This question-pair related to how much there is a message or a language or an effect to be experienced by the listener so that a meaningful communication can take place. There was also a social aspect here in the composer relating to those who did grasp or understand why the music was composed in the first place. A sense of the aesthetic or the unexplainable could also come to the fore.)
- T3** Is there any sense in which you desire your music to be non-understood, awkward, unreachable, mystical or in any way ineffable? (This question examined the directness or otherwise of how the composer wished to engage the listener and how much or little of their creativity they wished to reveal.)
- T4** In what way does your music try to suspend reality by creating another world? (This question explored how the furthest reaches of our minds might be affected or inspired by our own or someone else's creative output. It invited the ultimate in transcendency to be playing a role by mentioning a suspension of reality. Some composers might have viewed such a prospect as impossible, beyond our understanding or description, or just irrelevant.)
- T5** Music is language and is not language. Please comment on this sentence if you would like to. (A late return to the concept of language was made to see how much of a connection the composer made between musical language and other types, having been through all the previous questioning.)
- T6** What is accessible to you by composing (creatively?) rather than speaking, say, as in a mother tongue? (This was actually a trick question: how can you speak of what your music says if it takes music to do it in the first place? A very few composers spotted this paradox and then pointed out why they could go no further. However, irrespective of recognising that paradox, the question opened the door to handling paradox and ineffability in their creative output if the interviewee wished to.)



Interviews

Australian composers were interviewed over a period of one year. The interviews were conducted face-to-face if possible, but a few took place by telephone when distance was an obstacle. The number of composers interviewed rose slowly as credibility for the research was established. As I contacted them, composers who took part responded in a range of ways, from no initial response through to immediately welcoming the opportunity to take part. Choice of composer became self-selecting in the way that I gained contacts by virtue of having conducted an interview and then finding the interviewee, after being interviewed, enthusiastic about recommending participation by other composers. The selection process was thus by way of contacts among the composers and their particular interest in creativity as a significant aspect of their attempts to compose.

My technique as described here was to personally interview each composer, getting to know them a little. Prior to interview, I specifically asked the prospective interviewee not to prepare for the interview other than to be present at the agreed time at a place of their choosing and to be relaxed. Of course, in the intervening time between fixing a date and then being interviewed, I anticipated some interviewee rumination to take place in expectation of what I might ask them. The encouragement to the interviewee not to prepare in advance gave me access to their ideas and views that were current in their minds and readily explainable when triggered, rather than eliciting, packaged, premeditated essay-like output.

In the interview, each question was put verbally. I wrote down as succinctly as possible what had been said in response, selecting verbatim wording if feasible. Answers to questions were accepted as given, insofar as they could be written down and be intelligible even if I, the interviewer, could not initially make sense of them. Hermeneutics played a major role in following a line of response to a question. In that regard, mention of the binary opposition of subject-object, used in a modernist dialectic, could also be described by using in-out or phenomenon-noumenon, and so forth. My writing down the answers to questions forced me to listen carefully and to write down the essence of what I thought was being said. Often the interviewee would wander a little from the question but was given free reign to do so, only being invited to relate the wanderings to the question from time to time. I was able to build relationships with interviewees that gave almost too much valuable information to encompass and write down. That situation was considered a blessing, not a problem. The experience of being in the interviews was itself illuminating, as I encountered a wide range of emphasis and opinion to my questions. I was most pleasantly surprised at this diversity and the many times composers commented that I had taken them to intellectual domains they could then say were very important to them in composing and that, in many ways, they had not previously noted. What was discovered in the interview necessarily developed as each composer gave their perspective and reaction to the questions in turn. By referring back to, or elaborating on previous answers, I often elicited statements like 'I'm glad you asked that question' and 'I have never been asked that before.'

On several occasions, I was greeted at first with polite reserve that then quietly turned into having a good rapport with the interviewee enjoying answering the questions as the interview unfolded. All false starts, obvious repetition of answers, and minor hesitations were set aside except for some obvious body language suggesting significant mood and laughter, seriousness, aversion, and empathy. No mention was made by any interviewee of the two-hour time span for interview being excessive or an unwelcomed use of time. I, as interviewer, was normally required to politely invite the proceedings to close.

My version of the script of the interview was then sent to the interviewee within a day or so after our encounter, inviting them to read how I had captured what they had said. They were asked to amend, amplify if necessary, and finally approve the version they sent back to me. This process gave each interviewee time to reflect and reconsider my capture of their responses. The validity check of offering the script back to the interviewee was invariably welcomed to avoid any misrepresentation of viewpoint and to preserve personal terminology, whatever it was meant to convey.

Approach to Analysis

The goal of keeping the approach to gaining information from the interview scripts as open as possible did not preclude the ability to come to some conclusions on each question-answer pair. The answers from interviewees to each question were reviewed then collated, but with no preconceived categories in mind. This collation provided some basis for framing what could be termed a normative art music



composer's thoughts about being creative in composing. The evidence found here positioned itself somewhere between the poles of a bivalent role. On the one hand, it could be seen to be supporting the formation of legitimising definition. On the other hand, it was rich with description but pointing to many constellational associations²³. Approaches that relied upon a syntactical count of word occurrence, such as in quantitative text analysis²⁴, were not used in this research. The interaction between interviewee and interviewer caused the final text to be a combination of thought patterns from two persons, not just the interviewee. A form of inductive content analysis, which majors on qualitative properties²⁵, in which what is termed the *verstehen* — the interpretive understanding — was exercised by the interviewer and ratified by the interviewee.

Each set of answers to a question was reviewed to find both commonalities and differences in the answers given, along with any obvious categorisation. As well, and in contrast to forming categories, preservation of the way composers qualified their viewpoints was upheld and revealed very diverse thoughts and reasoning at play. That preservation left the overall interpretation of what might be significant as relying unavoidably, as already mentioned, upon a set of sparse data, not a correlative summation on a statistically significant sample. However, I noted the number of times composers voiced particular views, despite the composers' responses not being bounded by my domain categorisation. This freedom is reflected in the way the answers to specific questions had to then occasionally be regrouped. The salient features derived from the interview process that typified how these art music composers think and function, with respect to creativity, are reported. In the next section, an analysis of one question-answer pair (O4) giving some detail on the subject matter is given. In the section following that, summation statements for all the answers to each question are given that could be seen to represent a normative art music composer.

A Response in Detail

There is not room here to expound upon all of the question-answer pairs generated from this research. One pair, Ontology 4 (O4), is explained in detail and is illustrative of the diversity of answers given along with the challenge of making sense of the interview content. The question of whether giving the interviewee an unconstrained environment brought forth more richness of information than would otherwise be the case, is impossible to answer objectively. In trying to both make sense of and capture the essence of composers' terminology and interest, the challenge was to sift the significant from the rest and phrase it succinctly. Occasionally verbatim wording was most appropriate.

Ontology domain question 4 (O4) asked 'Is there any sense in which you feel compelled, destined, fulfilled in being creative?' In framing O4, the likely presuppositions, as proposed by me when setting the question, were to link into a stream or flow of consciousness that examines the unavoidability of the interviewee's inclination to compose but does not force that into a coupling with being creative. The question was ambivalently put, being both closed and open: closed in inviting a plain 'yes' or 'no' and open in inviting the wording 'any sense' to be commented upon. It quickly became apparent most interviewees treated the question in a tripartite manner, automatically linking their creativity to composing. Question O5 then asked specifically what proportion of their creative effort was devoted to composing. The response there was that all composers gave upwards of half their creative effort to composing and some almost entirely so.

Of all the questions put, O4 elicited answers without need for delay or musing. Virtually all composers were both compelled and fulfilled in composing but less than half would identify with being destined. Absolute compulsion was there at the start for one, despite extreme modernism trying to destroy it. A positive and singular 'yes' for a few was buttressed by other composers responses: not being able to switch off; not fighting [compulsion because of] being made that way; oblivious to others' receptivity; not knowing what else to do; hearing other music; a natural state of mind; a need; 'it [the compositions] will out'; part of a layering process; giving meaning in life; getting irritable and cranky otherwise (many body language signals here); always thinking about 'the next'; perhaps a habit; by dint of opportunity; and, finally, meeting deadlines. The length of this list is in keeping with the type of evidence uncovered. The rare composers who described themselves as 'non-compelled' spoke of avoiding making creativity an idol and of simply being unmoved that way.

Apart from only one composer being mildly ambivalent, but not negative, all were positively fulfilled by composing, with plenty of qualification. I noted that much animated body language and serious assertion took place here. Being 'absolutely so' was tempered by noting that the perfect piece is yet to be written from this privileged position. Enthusiastic fulfilment was invariably qualified with adjuncts:



always developing and learning; the fulfilment of hearing the finished product; moving to the academic side; being so despite the lack of cash; involving giving health to all of [the] one [person]; immense satisfaction; via a unique way; being proud and satisfied; [by being] in the creative process leading to a performance; a fully engaging visceral experience; avoiding the blues; [by] the strong place of creativity present; enjoying the pay-off too (no specific pay-off was mentioned); the bringing into existence; enjoying the act and generating surprises; [changing] from boring ambition [in]to being philosophical; achievement on completion or idea development; to create as a [personal] necessity; an ivory tower existence might make it [even] better; when great performances of one's works are heard; and, finally, maybe it all being on a par with family life [family-orientated persons need no explanation of this connection]. Again, the length of this list is in keeping with the way the initial positive reaction was extended, defying epistemic categorisation.

The question of destiny provoked some degree of aversion but still had its adherents. Positive responses also invoked God playing a part, clairvoyance and always knowing this was [going to be] the way for them. A response of 'maybe' appended to it being excited about possibilities in music. The 'don't-knows' also doubted its existence [the concept of destiny], whether their art was good enough, just were stumped for an answer, or deferred to others for judgment. The naysayers offered a spectrum of dissent, such as disbelief in the concept, having destiny imputed upon them [unwillingly], thinking this a categorisation now passé for them, avoiding the missionary attitude [of being called], using the word 'calling' instead, being musical in any case, and, finally, disinterest in the notion.

Answers to the O4 question depicted the sense of idiosyncratic attitude these composers had but also showed some underlying commonalities. By way of example, there was some confidence in expecting that virtually all art music composers were compelled and fulfilled by their chosen profession. However, applying any taxonomic or pedagogic treatment via definition ran a serious risk of missing an appreciation of the diversity of this musically creative world. The problem that persisted was to choose a manner in which this evidence could be portrayed to reveal its lasting worth.

The Normative Art Music Composer

There now follow summative statements covering all the question-answer pairs. The statements are qualitative summaries of the information gleaned from counts of the various properties and proclivities, which I, as the researcher, thought significant and embedded in the answers. The identification of which answers were used to form each summation given, according to the coding already described, is inserted in the text.

In terms of epistemology, music was regarded as structured sound, as proposed in the literature by Edgard Varèse ([1966](#)), but could be a manifestation of the communication paradigm as a discourse involving our humanity (E1). So, whenever the composers used the word composing, it ushered in the idea of being creative in some way. This almost equal divide of response shows how the same question can elicit both structuralist and immanent cognition at work. Comments were made about how structure enabled cohesion within the work. Without doubt, being creative and composing were virtually synonymous to these composers (Pc3). Some composers mentioned that creativity and composing could be seen as subsets of each other. Modernistic dualities (binaries) are prime vehicles or sources of explication or metaphor used to describe how music is portrayed and works by those who compose it. Often extremes, as an opposition duality, gave rise to spectrums or continuums of meaning (E3) being cited on many occasions. The Cartesian subject-object duality was used to understand seeing how minds manifest, sometimes with a to-and-fro in the duality to get a finished result and sometimes not naming the duality in this way, e.g., by using in-out (E4). The dualities ranged from the straightforward, such as fast-slow, through to the subjective, such as delicate-robust. A composition must normally communicate something but there may be doubt about this on some occasions (E5). Most composers were in agreement here but variants included the inevitability of this being so and ambivalence about the issue. On the thorny issue of whether it helps us to understand music when seen as a language, various properties were seen to make it so and others not so, depending on the composer asked (Pc1). This ambivalence suggested how the use of both positive and negative dialectics were mixed up. To the composers, language is a formal system and logico-reasonable but musical language can also be a personally chosen medium bearing little or no resemblance to other formalised languages. The contemporary art music composer delighted in musical language being invariably their own. The explanations of why might be so were as varied as the number of composers consulted (Pc2). As to whether, in the end, music is or is not a language, there was a tendency slightly in favour it being so



(T5). Those who agreed stressed such properties as abstraction, being the first language, without verbs, capable of penetrating cultural barriers and a language for suspending reality. Those who disagreed stressed that this was a way of communicating but could not be understood unambiguously.

In terms of ontology, being creative and composing were regarded, as already noted, as virtually synonymous (Pc3). A composition was stated to have the ability just to be itself without further explanation, but was qualified by regarding the performance and explanation as significantly helpful too (E6). Music was seen to be overloaded (polysemous) *and* able to stand for itself as a paradoxical or ambivalent pair of properties within it (E2). It was noted that the implied exclusiveness of the choice was not welcomed by the composers. Most often, a work would contain some reference or reverence to previous influences on the composer, intended or otherwise (O3). An almost begrudging recognition sometimes came to the fore in recognising influences upon the composers, whether they sought them or not. Composing was often seen as an optimised output but also to be a simple knee-jerk reaction to a situation (N2). Some composers mentioned being compulsive, experiencing excitement or exercising power in this regard. The purpose of composing was a combination of wanting to communicate, express oneself, being capable of doing so, and simply fulfilling one's job specification (O1). Frequent mention of wanting to communicate occurred with phrases such as 'engaging socially' and 'making connections'. Composers were absolutely compelled by and fulfilled in their composing but had significant doubts about whether they were destined in doing so (O4). Many qualifiers were used, such as being compelled coupled to 'being cranky or irritable otherwise', being fulfilled coupled to 'having an immense satisfaction' and being destined coupled to 'disbelief in the concept'. Composition did not normally take up all of a composer's creative output, but was a primary outlet for some (O5). All of these findings support a view that structuralism and isomorphism alone are inadequate when trying to understand the creativity exercised in bringing forth an art music composition.

In terms of nascency, the beginnings of music in a composer's life were often the self-motivation to get involved with music or being given opportunity by parents, for example, being given a musical instrument. When beginning to compose a work, there was a trigger point that can come from just about anywhere or anything. Less often, the work might be cast as an interesting case of problem-solving or the response to a commission (N1). The composition could be some form of expression of who the composer was, as a communication to others, but may neither be intended that way nor central in the act (O2). Composers thought you do have to be intelligent in some way to be able to compose (N4). Phrases such as 'dumbness can't handle the huge skill set' and 'specific intelligences are needed such as those for handling complexity' were used. Newness did have some importance when trying to compose but may not be a central motivation (N3). The question 'New for whom?' was often asked in return. Some composers immediately answered 'yes', qualifying that with sentiments such as extending oneself or seeking balance. Composers were mostly very happy that others may make what they like of the composers' works (O6). Phrases such as 'enjoying the multi-anything put there' and noting music is polysemous were used. Trigger points spoke of an ineffable, and maybe spontaneous, beginning to a composition.

In terms of process, often complexity was built-in to composing somehow but may not be central or overtly considered by the composer (Pc10). Some composers associated complexity with fun or enjoyment, whereas others thought of it as writing expressively or simply dismissed the concept. Fragments or sketches often formed part of the source material for composing a work (Pc4) but were not welcomed by others. Some composers enjoyed the 'sorting process' or 'accumulating the small'. Others had a focus elsewhere with a big-picture approach or just disinterest in the metaphor. The method that might bind such fragments together into a work was contentious but there was often a framework or master plan where such fragments could find their place (Pc5). Some composers saw the finding of fragments the trigger points of their creativity. Composers had idioms in their music but the idioms may have been better detected and explained by someone other than the composer (Pc6). Some were told simply, 'That is your music', without much further explanation. Keeping regular times to compose was valued, although family life did impinge and had to be included somehow (Pc8). Choosing regular times to compose, drinking strong coffee and avoiding excessive alcohol were also mentioned as aids. A need for space, quiet, peace, and lack of distractions were regarded as essential for being able to compose (Pc9). More esoteric means were cited, such as the ability to be introspective or having no spouse around. Many of these viewpoints addressed creativity as process and a means of control and optimisation via feedback²⁶.

In terms of product, form and structure were very important and could come into play at any time in the course of composing, although the earlier the better (Pc7). Sometimes their importance could fluctuate as composing proceeded and maybe the structure could be changed too. Juxtaposition and change were very common in works (Pd1). Metaphors such as 'a breaking of symmetry', creating a 'chemical



reaction' and 'negotiating between extremes' were used to illuminate viewpoints. Change was most often episodic but could be random too (Pd2). All manner of connections were made here with few common strands. Stasis and silence were very important properties in a work and should permeate them. In contrast, minimalism had a place but not a major role (Pd3). Examples of description include: stasis seen as a counterfoil to activity; minimalism as valid in small amounts; and silence as present in such a way that one should resist the need to fight against it. Stasis, minimalism, and silence could often form ends in themselves in a work (Pd4). The concept of a finished work was seen to be contentious but was many times cited as being achieved by a good performance. However, it was conceivable that there was no end here but just a continual evolution of the work, including development and revision (Pd5). A musical arch as a metaphor for a work had limited acceptance (Pd6). By and large, others hearing their works fully, from start to finish, was much preferred by composers, although there were times when this was simply not appropriate (Pd7).

Transcendentally, in trying to speak of what is accessible via composing rather than speaking in a mother tongue, many limitations were deemed removed. Often, the music was intended to suspend reality and transport the listener to another world (T4). Descriptive powers of the composers were pushed to the limit here with responses such as: 'that is what music is for'; 'trying to create its own musical world'; 'a heightened awareness of reality'; 'finding an essence'; 'another state of mind'; 'enhance and enrich a sense of being' and 'messing with time'. Most music was not meant to be ineffable but may appear mysterious or awkward at times (T3). Some composers almost retorted a 'no' to this question but with politeness. Mysteriousness, if present, was coupled with not wanting to bore the listener. A work would be deemed successful if it seriously affected the listeners in terms of their emotion, aesthetic, and maybe spirit, but much less so politically (T1). Composers immediately segmented their answers here, with most putting little emphasis on political matters. Colourful metaphors abounded with emotion linked to 'having Mandelbrots'²⁷. The listener should be able to relate to or understand a work in some way. A first hearing should offer much, but definitely not all, with subsequent hearing(s) yielding more each time, in a sense drawing back the listener (T2). There was only a minor recognition that, if it could be said in words, there would be no need to use music in the first place (T6). This final question could also have been the opening question, depending on a composer's focus. For, in answering it, the conclusion — that it was not possible to talk about this type of music other than to experience it being played — would render the rest of the exercise a bit pointless. The transcendental questions were those greeted by the composers with much difficulty. This is where they reported that it was a hard question but, at the same time, appreciated the invitation to answer. The transcendental had formed a backdrop for their most profound understanding of what they did and why.

Finally, the question always arises of how researchers may choose to view the information depicted here, so that they do not condition the conclusions drawn. That issue only arises in an epistemology where there is an overt attempt to remove the reporter from the conclusions, as in the objective aims of scientific endeavour.

Conclusion

The interview has been used to try and understand what the term 'creativity' means to contemporary art music composers and how it plays or has played a role in their efforts to compose. By extension, this pose takes one on into asking whether a discovery has been made in a pedagogic form that might improve the ability to compose via recognising creativity at work. Phrased this way, discovery of itself could be understood as a hypothesis to be tested. But that and any other hypothesis concerning creativity in art music is generically ill-formed if it is scientific, for example, only resolvable via science. If this study had relied only on a scientific frame of reference, the null hypothesis would apply to most, but not all, of the findings. This study purposely did not choose a refutable hypothesis — unless it is formed out of the question of whether there is any consistent social construct in the use of the word 'creative'. As explained, the knowledge acquisition was more of an epistemic triage with questions posed to encourage the participants to talk of their creative world, howsoever they chose. Such a stance has more richness than seeking an answer within science because the notion of creativity continually speaks of the boundless, unexpected, ineffable and paradoxical, matters that science eschews or tries to reduce to a minimum.

The interview technique brought forth much information about art music composers and their views on the place of creativity in their lives and work, but showed very diverse views, as illustrated in responses to the Ontology 4 question. There is a temptation to look at the answers to the questions as the basis of a definition of a normative contemporary art music composer. That definition is statistically weak



even with major limitations placed upon its applicability. The wide range in reasoning of thought processes from contemporary art music composers makes pedagogy for composing contemporary art music, beyond the rudimentary stages of learning technique, elusive or impossible to find. Ambivalence and paradox in meaning are essentially present from the beginning and welcomed.

Some common traits about why and how creativity is used in this chosen context have been revealed. Contemporary art music composition is seen as synonymous with being creative. What is composed need have little or nothing to relate it to previous musical works or existing centres of musical interest. Pedagogy is not suggested in any way: it is actively undermined by each composer's efforts to be idiosyncratic, speak with a different voice, and, perhaps, introduce the new. In this context, form and structure are present but they are transitory. The thought and act of being creative in contemporary art music composition has no definition but that of embracing these common traits only to then revolt against all that made it possible to have these thoughts in the first place.

In the light of some conclusions being made about how art music composers view their creative traits, it may be possible to adapt this technique to find out more about creativity by performers, including improvisers, maybe analysts and even listeners, who might otherwise be thought passive. If this were achieved, then it might also be possible to show creativity at work throughout the musical communicative cycle — from composer to performer to musical communicative cycle, a cycle taking us from the composer to the performer, then to the listener, analyst or reviewer and thence round to the composer again. Some properties of the distributed nature of creativity could also be revealed.

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ENDNOTES

1. Roger Scruton noted that, in music, 'Schopenhauer argues we are presented with something else [other than representations of the world as seen through poetry and visual arts]. Music is free from concepts; it provides no images of the phenomenal world, but a direct perception of the will itself.' ([Scruton 1997: 365](#))
2. A Dionysian attitude stood for being celebratory, part of the unconscious or the soul, whereas an Apollonian attitude concentrated on the conscious, the rational and being disciplined. The result was supposed to be a Dionysian victory, giving rise to the creative individual expressing her will to power and, thus, progressive.
3. It is as if we are looking for creative praxis but then finding it confined within the one person.
4. Daniel Thompson quoted Jonathan Harvey as writing: 'The experience of music affords a person the chance to think without language, without snipping the experience into discrete "segments" wrapped up into "signifiers" and free of the consequent machinery of negation, polar oppositions such as subject/object.' ([Harvey 1999: 48](#)).
5. This is the latest in a long series of articles and books by Margaret Boden addressing creativity within a scientific paradigm. She has moved her attention more to art in recent years.
6. Although the essay is over 25 years old, the issues have not changed and are continually debated. Hospers refers to the work of Monroe Beardsley ([1965](#)) who discussed two theories of creativity in art as 'propulsive' and 'finalist'. A propulsive theory has a kernel to which more is added. A finalist theory takes the seemingly amorphous and slowly forms the final art work from it. Beardsley himself critiques them both as inadequate. Hospers also regards the work of Vincent Tomas ([1964](#)) as 'wise words' ([Hospers 1984: 243](#)) but needing his own contribution too.
7. Foucault's 'author function' eventually leads to a view that it really doesn't matter who is 'speaking'; the issue of needing and linking creativity to any one person largely disappears.
8. We are led to believe that, in conjunction with Robert Craft, Igor Stravinsky said 'Technique is not a teachable science, neither is it learning, nor scholarship, nor even the knowledge of how to do something. It is creation, and, being creation, it is new every time.' ([Stravinsky and Craft 1959: 25](#))



9. Michael Spitzer has taken significant care to lay out his own precise understanding of the connection between music and metaphor.
10. The ineffable remainder refers to observations, data and evidence that continue to remain inexplicable. Musical compositions are in some way polysemic anyway. By way of example, Max Paddison ([1996: 75](#)) wrote of there being a tension between, amongst other properties, expression and construction in an art work, where there arose a remainder (das Mehr), which he called the riddle of the work.
11. In claiming music starts out as being abstract, the overlay of meaning placed onto music can take place concomitantly with composing, such that the abstract phase is fleeting and quickly forgotten. That a composer might think in terms of music being used as an auditory semiotic toolkit, with no abstract phase needed, is to adopt a default position, such that a previous other had devised form and meaning which the present composer acknowledges, relies upon and reproduces.
12. 'Sparse data' is the usual scientific term for information that is too small or insular to support general inferences being made from it. The data is nonetheless bona fide.
13. I call this the Brighton Rock syndrome; wherever you break the stick of rock, you still read the same wording inside with some clarity.
14. I allude here to Theodore Adorno's concept of amassing knowledge in a constellation that allows the most disparate of notions to be related in some way, and to Michel Foucault's 'Thousand Islands of Heterotopy'. Heterotopy speaks of relationships and entities that are fundamentally different, as opposed to homotopy where the nature of the entities is fundamentally the same.
15. Michael Spitzer uses Theodor Adorno's phrase that 'art puts feeling into rules', when talking about Beethoven's late style, a style that dispenses with rules, yet parodies them.
16. The word, 'paradox', here is a generative term that sums up how creativity is often seen as juxtaposing entities within semiotic or concept space, appearing paradoxical at first to others, who then might (or may never) subsequently appreciate the artistic juxtaposition to feel enlightened.
17. Paddison refers to Theodor Adorno claiming 'the only access to the non-conceptual is through the conceptual ... use the power of the concept to undermine the concept and thereby enable the non-conceptual to speak. ... the non-conceptual and non-identical is art ... autonomous music [is] ... a mode of cognition without concepts.' ([Paddison 1993: 15](#))
18. A state of becoming is being rhizomatic in the sense of making connections where, previously, they did not exist, nor were logically expected to exist. Music can embody both 'net' and 'hierarchy' in this regard.
19. For Spitzer, language for Adorno is the fit of concepts to precepts experienced by a single subject, where 'free communicative action is the essence of the intersubjectivity paradigm.' I would put it this way. Music is language; it often has syntax as a notation. Music is not language; it is a way of 'speaking' without using spoken language. We must live with the paradox.
20. Spitzer encapsulates this viewpoint as 'Rhythm is thus an instrument of troping.' ([Spitzer 2004: 261](#))
21. I have invented the term 'sontage' to differentiate from collage (compiled visual stills) or montage (compiled visual motion supported by sound or film). Sontage is the audio equivalent of collage. Some artists would link all of these together as multimedia.
22. Homotopy, often used in topology, speaks of deforming something continuously, not discontinuously, into another, a property that is constrictive upon creativity, making creativity always organic and developmental. In this sense, a teacup with a handle has the topological homotopy of a doughnut. Fugue has the musical homotopy of counterpoint and vice versa.
23. The use of 'constellational' here is in keeping with the thoughts of Theodor Adorno (see [Paddison 1993: 21](#)). A constellation, as dictionary definitions suggest, gives coherence to quite disparate entities, ideas, concepts and viewpoints without the need for opposites to invalidate each other.
24. Quantitative text analysis is available through software such as the IBM SPSS suite of programs for linguistic predictive analytics or WORDSTAT or CATPAC text analysis software. Also, Harvard University maintains and offers a 'General Inquirer' suite of programs for text content analysis.
25. Inductive text analysis is considered to be the qualitative counterpart to quantitative text analysis. It works on similar lines to its counterpart but allows such steps as 'open coding' where the researchers note and choose categories as the text is scanned many times, after which statistical data is produced.
26. It would be no surprise to any professional engineer that, in investigating the concept of creativity as a process, dependence upon feedback occurred. Success in the control of virtually all technological processes depends upon efficacious feedback, which is normally negative to obtain stable results. If the view were held that the human body is essentially a mechanism, then efficacious feedback could be said to dominate here too — it would be the essence of survival.
27. Mandelbrot sets are graphical patterns in which the detail of what is seen does not change as the scale (zoom in or out) of the pattern is changed. The composer assumedly used this metaphor to indicate that, no matter how 'close' in analysis of detail or 'far away' in seeing the big picture the listener was to the musical substance, one could never come to some ultimate judgement on what is heard.



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ABSTRACT

Creativity is investigated as a property that composers invoke about their own output and that of their peers. The term is both theoretically and practically significant; it indicates a value system at work, describing how that system determines composers' selectivity for their own advancement. The personal interview is used as a method to understand creativity in this context, via linguistic description as well as the music. The interview becomes a window and first-hand way of obtaining insight into what is happening within and around art music composers. The intellectual domains of epistemology, ontology, nascency, process, product, and transcendence, upon which to base questions, were used to frame questions for the interviewees. The interview technique brought forth many diverse conceptual views,



such that it was inappropriate to form any definitional base of what might be found. The composers saw their craft as synonymous with being creative in that what was composed needed to have little or nothing to relate it to existing centres of musical interest. Pedagogy was actively undermined by each composer's efforts to be idiosyncratic, 'speak' with a different voice, and, perhaps, introduce the new. In this context, form and structure were present but they were transitory. A wide range in reasoning from the composers made pedagogy, beyond the rudimentary, elusive. Composers delighted in ambivalence and paradox but with less emphasis on being ineffable. Transcendence, in attempting to transport one to another world, became a final frontier for some. As a result of the study's outcomes, the technique could also be extended to investigate musical creativity in performer and analyst.

Keywords: creativity, art music composition, interview, sparse data.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Willgoss made a career as an engineer at the University of New South Wales lecturing in machine intelligence and robotics. He continues to lecture there on ethics, professional responsibilities and intellectual property. He retrained to obtain a BMus and BA in philosophy and his interests broadened to include composing. More recently he submitted a PhD dissertation on the topic of art music compositional creativity to the Sydney Conservatorium of Music where he is an Affiliate Researcher. His research areas now include creativity in art music composition and the interplay of philosophy with music.

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