



*The Fading of Culture and Memory* is a suite of three related works created 2015-2016 in the order performed. Each work emanates from preparations for the first piece 'Like Writing on Water', commissioned by excellent Sydney-based pianist Daniel Herscovitch for his CD "Variations!". At Daniel's request, my work is a work in variation form in response to Webern's own op. 27 piano variations. The work takes a largely analytical compositional approach, drawing on the potential and possibilities in Webern's source material whilst engaging with the musical surface in different ways, evident in some of the movement titles such as "Crush" and "Interweave".

An important aspect in my piece, also fleshed out in the accompanying works, is an engagement with ideas expressed by the American Chan monk Chang Wen's article 'Music from the Chan Mind'. He proposes a mode of listening to and performing music in which one listens to the music with mindfulness, attending to each sound as it arises and falls 'like listening to water flow', without subsequently grasping or retaining in mind the sensual experience. This resonated with a similar Buddhist expression concerning negative emotions: that one can experience them with a range of fixity, right up to letting them go immediately, leaving no trace – 'like writing on water'. A compositional goal in this set of variations, then, is to compose music that encourages a moment-to-moment focussed listening leaving no trace or residue for the listener following the experience of the piece. To my mind this is also one of the fascinating qualities of Webern's beautiful work.

*Trails in the Sky*, for improvising saxophone and percussion, further explores this idea. It is also in a sense a 'trail' or 'trace' of the piano variations, in that elements of the piano solo are a basis for composed points of transition to contextualise improvisation, rather than the more traditional practice of composing source material that functions as the starting point for the ensuing improvisational elaborations. This approach of crafting an improvisational context is a development of ideas explored by my brother Sam in a number of his own works, and is an approach I have found very fruitful as a gateway to incorporating improvisation into my pre-composed works.

The third, eponymous work completes the suite. The title and developing ideas for this work arose after a number of visits to the 'Conversations' exhibition at the NSW Art Gallery and repeated viewings of a striking Sui Dynasty marble Buddha on display: a sculpture missing both its hands and head that is over 1500 years old. Typical of much East Asian Buddhist art, the sculpture is anonymously composed; combined with its incomplete figure, the sculpture is effectively removed from its cultural and historical context. It is a vestige, an echo of a faded civilisation, and yet I find it still has real presence as an object of power and inadvertently also as an expression of non-self and impermanence; both ideas that I am exploring in life as well as my musical work.

Reflecting on the first two works in the suite, I came to see a progression of dissolution or a fading of my own 'composition culture', with increasing degrees of removing my own taste-based musical choices established by both taking an existing composition (Webern) as a source of material and removing my input in *Trails in the Sky* by creating a context driven improvisation platform. This final work continues this progression by further dissolving the obvious surface links to Webern's piece, instead using my own abstract analysis of his variations as well as the other pieces in my own suite as the improvisational points of departure.

Brad Gill

The first two movements of *Traced, Sing the Veil* were originally written as stand-alone pieces. *Counterprotest* was devised as a framework for improvisation that examines the use of density, dynamics and articulation to generate musical form, while *Octet+1\_b* was a response to the challenge of composing a work for live performer and pre-recorded tape – a superficial ensemble context where any notion of live interaction during performance is negated by the medium itself, thus calling on the creation of material that justifies the use of now-superseded technology (thanks to the invention of affordable interactive electronics).

I performed these two works together for the first time at the NOW now November 2016 series concert. As the performance was concluding, it occurred to me that playing them together had established an unexpected performative trajectory: that of the physical presence of the live saxophone receding from an initially clear solo function (*Counterprotest*) into more abstract functions (*Octet+1\_b*), eventually disappearing completely into microtonal polyphony. This trajectory implied the space for a third work that would completely eliminate any sonic trace of the live saxophone – a parameter that lead to the eponymous work of the sequence.

All of the sounds heard in this final work are resonances triggered by alto saxophone, through methods such as playing into a cymbal or piano strings with the sustain pedal down. Post-production was used to eliminate the saxophone's recorded sound as well as to assemble the samples into a sequence that generates a sense of form; other than this, the source recordings have not been treated to any additional digital effects.

The receding live saxophone idea is most effectively rendered during live performance, in which I sit motionless on stage while the final work plays through the PA. I hope some sense of that performance arc is communicated through these recordings.

Sam Gill