

Chris Newman's *Song to God* (1994) for Solo Organ: Blurred Repetition, Visual Communication, and Embodied Information

This article examines an interplay of analytical approaches—including score-based analysis, and consideration of performance practice and the embodied experiences of the performer—in the analysis of contemporary music, applied to a particular case study from the contemporary repertoire for the organ. In particular, it examines how performative information might provide clues to the ways certain compositional decisions could be read by the analyst and listener, considering that notation alone does not convey every aspect of the work required in the performance of a piece of music, and therefore of its sounding result. Here, I describe and analyse the music of *Song to God* (1994), a solo organ piece in four movements by the British composer Chris Newman, in order to explore how information about the music gained through performance might contribute to its analytical assessment. This is not a well-known work within the contemporary organ repertoire, and its composer is also not a well-known figure within contemporary music, but this particular piece has served as a rich source through which to explore the possible interplay of score-based analysis and performance practice in coming to an understanding of a less-than-traditional work for the organ.¹ In particular, my analysis focuses on types of repetition in the music, both across its movements and in its use of borrowed materials from Newman's other works. Questions of patterned musical organisation are drawn out, specifically in relation to the issues created by the timbral changes notated by the composer and the challenge of their realisation. The work with the instrument that is required to realise these changes, despite the portability that recommends them, is an important part of understanding the construction of the work. Finally, this analysis considers the source materials of the music and their original contexts, as far as they can be known. This allows for the consideration of the music in context, and the relevance of these materials to listeners when they are transferred to their new context in this organ piece.

I first performed *Song to God* in 2010, after corresponding with the composer about his music, and have since returned to it a number of times. The piece is, in many ways, a radical work for the organ: it is monophonic, its material and composition disregard much of the history and tradition of music for the instrument, and the technical challenges that it presents for the organist are not those that usually characterise traditional, contemporary, or even virtuosic works. Nevertheless, the

¹ As part of the Royal Music Association's Music and/as Process study group, a performance of the work was recorded and can be heard at: <https://musicandasprocess.bandcamp.com/track/song-to-god-lauren-redhead>.

unusual features of the piece are also those that recommend it: the music does not require the extreme registers of some instruments, and asks for a relatively small—if idiosyncratic—palette of sounds; no specific number of manuals is given and, as such, the piece can be made to work even with some chamber instruments. These features of the music make it portable and therefore playable on many instruments and in many locations. The analysis of the music in this article was undertaken after I had already performed the work in public around ten times; my interest in this piece as a performer was augmented by its relationship to a wider investigation that I undertook to analyse other works of Newman—and his compositional practice in general—in relation to ideas of the avant-garde. I was intrigued by the way that a surface simplicity in Newman’s music seems to shroud networks of meaning within and across his *oeuvre*, and I later observed that my experience of performing *Song to God* allowed me to develop intuitive approaches when faced with potentially problematic aspects of others of Newman’s works not written for the organ. As a result I returned to this music in order to examine how my embodied relationship with the piece might also offer analytical insight into its meaning and construction.

The analysis that I employ takes a distributional approach, and examines patterns and repetition across each of the movements and across the work, and is derived from Jean-Jacques Nattiez’s paradigmatic and distributional analyses.² Initially, I considered what Eero Tarasti reports as Nattiez’s conclusion that, ‘it [is] impossible to know in advance which [are] the pertinent levels of the paradigm,’ and that, ‘before starting to analyse a given piece one [has] to know several other works by the composer in order to obtain the style competency required for selecting the correct paradigms.’³ This, in particular, seemed to relate to my performative and previous relationship with Newman’s music and the context I wished to bring to the analysis. I observed that, although repetitions can be heard across the music’s four movements, they do not appear to be regular to the listener and, as such, the music does not appear to be predictable on an *esthetic* level.⁴ The issue of stylistic competency is thus applied here, by looking to Newman’s other keyboard works as sources of information and explanation for the compositional design and sounding result of the work in addition to my own embodied experiences. These observations cannot come from *Song to God*

² Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Towards a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

³ Eero Tarasti, *Signs of Music: A Guide to Musical Semiotics* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002), 58.

⁴ In Nattiez’s tripartite system the *esthetic* level of a musical work refers to its reception and interpretation by listeners and is opposed to the *poietic* level, which pertains to the musical work’s creation. **Finally, the trace is what is left of a musical work after subtracting its esthetic and poietic levels.** See Nattiez, *Music and Discourse*, 11–5.

alone, but support its understanding when it is considered as a piece of music that eschews the stylistic conventions of organ music and, indeed, other forms of Western art music.

Tarasti suggests that an alternative to considering music only as *langue*, leading to ‘dependence ... on cultural code systems,’ is to ‘shift from mere observation of a musical utterance (text), in order to scrutinize the whole situation of communication, taking into account the fact that every sign is an *act* performed by some subject.’⁵ He observes this particularly in psychoanalytic and feminist paradigms—neither of which is employed here—but the implication of the extension of the semiotic description of music into its performance circumstances, and through the embodiment of the performer, is considered, in particular as a dimension of the physical work and movement needed to realise *Song to God*. This results in the consideration of individual performances of the piece as ‘situations’; unique, not only as individual instances of the work at different times, but differentiated by the constantly varying instrumental and environmental conditions in which the organist finds herself (that are more pronounced for the organ than for any other instrument). Such ‘situations’ are described by Tarasti as ‘a conscious intermingling of happenings that represent various modes of being in the real contexts in which they occur.’⁶ As such, they are analysable but not re-creatable and so, while they contribute to the understanding of *Song to God*, they are not offered as evidence of a fixed meaning revealed by analysis, but as a contribution to the multitude of signs perceptible in the piece by its listeners and performers.

The first stage of this analysis considered the score as a *neutral* musical surface, and its distribution of musical ideas. As the bar lines provided are not reliable indicators of the progress of the music, I have segmented the music by system. The organisation of the music immediately appears to be on the level of the phrase, and its division of music into bars (or not) is more often related to the source material from which various parts of the phrases came than to any regular division or pulse. In addition, bar lines become less frequent over the course of the music, especially in movements III and IV. This notational issue begins to undermine any particular emphasis in performance and encourages the music to flow as a stream of consciousness. This means that the bar is not a useful division of the music for analysis or performance; although, in performance this does suggest a movement from shorter groupings and frequent changes to longer groupings with no emphasis or

⁵ Tarasti, *Signs of Music*, 67.

⁶ Tarasti, *Signs of Music*, 72.

infrequent change. This is perhaps the only useful observation that can be drawn from the notational use of barlines, and their presence or absence.

The performance practice of Newman's music—not described in any notes accompanying this score but evident from notational similarities to his other works, and from performances by Michael Finnissey and Mark Knoop—also supports the consideration of the music on the level of the system (or group of systems) *as* the level of the phrase, since such performances emphasise this musical aspect.⁷ Each such phrase is separated in the score by a system break. There are instances in Newman's other keyboard works where such system breaks announce a small, but audible pause in the music, described elsewhere by Newman as 'like catching your breath.'⁸ However, this interpretation is also supported by the notation: systems 7 and 12 of movement I notate a bracketed breath mark at the end of the system where such a break is intended (see Figure 1). These are phrases that happen to finish in a way that coincides with the end of the manuscript system. This, then, shows the performative approach of the composer to finishing other phrases part way through a line of the manuscript paper: the empty staff beyond the music demonstrates the pause even where it is not notated. Indeed, some systems contain a single note that could have easily been kept on the previous system, indicating a preference for this particular visual appearance of the music.

⁷ See, for example, Michael Finnissey's recordings of Newman's Piano Sonatas Nos. 1, 4, 6, 10 (Mode, mode201, CD, 2008), or as the accompanist on *New Songs of Social Conscience/Six Sick Songs/London* (No Man's Land, rere185, CD, 1998). Andrew Clements has described Finnissey's performance of Newman's piano music as having, 'exactly the muscularity and aggressive edge that seem part and parcel of Newman's aesthetic.' See Clements, 'Newman: Piano Sonatas Nos. 1, 4, 6 and 10: Michael Finnissey,' *The Guardian* (26 June 2009), <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2009/jun/26/newman-piano-sonatas-review> (accessed 28 Nov. 2019). The 'muscularity' that Clements describes is most likely a result of the relentless evenness desired by Newman, which requires a greater degree of physicality to maintain than a usual mode of playing the piano.

⁸ Chris Newman, *The Reason Why I am Unable to Live in My Own Country as a Composer is a Political One* (Cologne: Chris Newman, 1984). Notes to the composer's score.

The image displays three systems of musical notation. The first system consists of a single staff with notes and rests, ending with a circled '9'. The second system is labeled 'Flute' and shows a staff with notes and rests. The third system shows a staff with notes and rests.

Example 1: Chris Newman, *Song to God* (1994), I: systems 7–9, page 2. © Chris Newman. System 7 shows the intended ‘breath’ or break, otherwise notated by empty space at the end of system 9.

This is an example of the music’s visual communication with the performer, as opposed to its aural communication with the listener, holding more in common with works of space-time notation and other variants of visual notation—such as the middle-period works of Morton Feldman⁹—than it does with more determinately notated works that utilise regularised rhythmic notation. Indeed, the performance practice of Newman’s works denies any such flexibility as might be associated with Feldman’s works of the late 1960s and ’70s. Nevertheless, this indication that the music can be visualised, and that its visual component might provide valuable information concerning its understanding, can be extended to consider the distribution of the music and its relationship with the *poietic* constriction of the work.

The four movements of *Song to God* exhibit some parallels when they are first viewed from the levels of the phrases and the systems if the music is segmented as described above. ‘Phrases’ are here bounded by breaks in the music denoted by system breaks or by the (infrequent) use of rests. Movements I and III both encompass eight phrases of varying lengths, whilst movements II and IV are roughly the same length of musical time—thirteen systems—despite comprising differing numbers of phrases. These symmetries create balance between the parts of the work that are not immediately clear on the surface of the music.

⁹ With space-time notation the spatial layout of notes indicates their duration, as in Feldman’s *Piano Piece (to Philip Guston)* (1963) in which notates only ‘long’ and ‘short’ durations in space.

Movement	Number of Phrases	Length (Systems)
I	8	14
II	7	13
III	8	17
IV	4	13

Table 1. Phrases and systems in *Song to God*.

Table 1 shows that the varying numbers of systems that each of the phrases cover means that more phrases do not necessarily lead to musical passages of longer durations. Towards the end of the piece, the phrases comprise more systems than those in the first two movements. This is perhaps one of the only parts of the composition of the work that could be considered developmental.

The next layer of the composition, after its distribution across movements, systems, and phrases, is the distribution of musical materials that are shared across multiple movements. Within each movement there is some unique musical material and some material that is shared and repeated from movement to movement. These shared materials often form parts of phrases, in combination with the unique materials of that movement. There are eight distinct phrases that are repeated in this way, and these materials appear in the same order in each movement, with the exception of movement IV, which completes half way through the sequence, after only four phrases. Table 2 lists the repeated fragments, and the system numbers in which they appear in each movement. This shows that, although their sequence is the same, the compositional process is blurred and prevented from becoming predictable by their displacement in the movement and their combination with other materials that are never repeated.



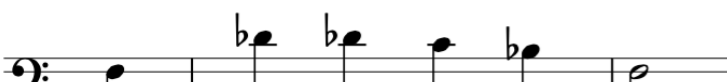





Material	Fragment	I	II	III	IV
A		2	1	1/2	2/3
B		3/4	2	3	5
C		5/6	3/4	4	11
D		7	5/6	5/6	13
E		8/9	7	8	
F		10/11	9/10	10	
G		12	11	13	
H		13/14	12/13	17	

Table 2. Shared musical phrases and their distribution across the four movements of *Song to God*.

The musical materials that make up the work are drawn from songs that Newman had previously written. These include his *New Songs of Social Conscience* (1991), *Six Sick Songs* (1984), and *London* (1992). All of these songs contain many repetitions of small, distinct phrases that make them clearly recognisable to someone who is familiar with them, even in the context of *Song to God*. Those pieces already mentioned comprise fourteen songs in total, and parts of both their vocal lines and accompaniments can be found within the organ score. However, there is also reason to think that the music likely quotes the set *Seven Stupid Songs* (1985), which no longer exists (as

many of the pieces that Newman wrote during the 1980s, and most likely since, have been revised or destroyed). Although the original source cannot be consulted, the fact that Newman appears to have quoted every other song that he had written at the time of the composition of *Song to God* makes their inclusion seem probable.

Of the pieces that have been revised, some have a different title, while others retain their titles but contain completely revised musical materials, sometimes re-appropriated from other, sometimes unacknowledged, works.¹⁰ The *Seven Stupid Songs* were revived by Newman at a concert in Berlin in 2007, retaining their title but as a set of four pieces for voice and violin. It is impossible to guess how similar this performance is to the original music, and no materials (as observed in this performance) have been left intact that bear comparison with *Song to God*. In addition, some text performed in the fourth song is shared with another piece from the 1980s that retains its title in a new format: *String Quartet* (1988), originally for string quartet or rock group, again arranged for voice and violin in 2007.

The problem of the identification of all of the material, then, leads to an omission and an observation. An original intention of this analysis was to identify each (part-)quotation, assign them the text from their corresponding songs, create a textual map of *Song to God*, and allow for a discussion of meaning in the piece that arises from their interaction. While, as a result of my efforts, such a table could be partly completed, it could not be completed in such a way as to lead to the intended analytical observations. Further, even those quotations that can be identified are not always as helpful as might be thought: the large number of musical repetitions in each original source song means that the song itself can be identified, but not a specific place within it (expect voice or accompaniment). There are also details, such as repeated octaves or minor third leaps, which feature in many of Newman's songs such that they cannot be reliably assigned to a single one of them when observed in their new context.

¹⁰ In addition, Newman's own website and that of his publisher do not agree as to the years of composition, titles and even instrumentation of some of his works. It is likely that both contain a mixture of earlier and later versions, sometimes of the same piece, and that Newman's fluid approach to his musical material means that an exact chronology cannot always be established. As a result, complete certainties about the dates of composition and origins of musical material in many of his works, but especially those that involve an element of self-quotation, are elusive. See Chris Newman, 'CV,' *Chris Newman* (artist website), accessed 28 Nov. 2019, http://chris-newman.org/chris-newman_cv.html; and 'Newman, Chris,' *Verlag Neue Musik*, accessed 28 Nov. 2019, http://www.verlag-neue-musik.de/verlag/index.php?manu=m637_Newman--Chris.html.

Although the intended analysis of musical discourse is not possible, a separate observation emerges as a corollary of this situation. The identity of each musical fragment is reinforced not by its place in its original source but by its repetition: each time a fragment appears, visually it is exactly the same. The clef, rhythmic divisions and notations, and absolute pitch of each fragment is always preserved (see Figure 2). Most often, the first instance in which each of these fragments appears is either the first line or the piano introduction of the song with which they are associated. Thus, the *exact* reference to the source material is always preserved in terms of pitch, clef, and notation: these fragments are not obscured, and nor are they developed beyond their combination with each other in pairs unique to this piece.



Example 2. Newman, *Song to God*, IV: systems 12–3, page 10. © Chris Newman. Multiple changes of clef in this passage preserve the original pitch of the individual fragments.

This offers an insight into the acts of repetition and self-quotation that can be found in this work. Newman has stated elsewhere that previously employed musical materials—whether from his own works or those of other composers—are *schrott*, ready for further exploitation in newer works; however, this does not account for his compositional approach entirely.¹¹ These quotations are not taken as the starting point for further musical development but repeated and recycled. ‘Development’ in this case is forfeited for exact repetitions across phrases, movements, and even pieces. Even what appear to be links in material from movement to movement in *Song to God* turn

¹¹ See Gisela Gronemeyer, “...ohne die Berührung der menschlichen Hand”: Chris Newman im Gespräch mit Gisela Gronemeyer, *MusikTexte: Zeitschrift für neue Musik* 38 (1991): 3. The German word ‘schrott’ can be translated as scrap, or waste.

out to be similarities that can be found across the original songs.¹² If a developmental aspect is to be found in the use of repetition in the piece, then it is in the lack of repetition, namely the abrupt ending of movement IV after only half of its expected quotations have been sounded.

However, the quoted musical materials are not the only parts of *Song to God* that are of interest. The timbres indicated in the score are also an important part of the composition and sound of the work. Those chosen by Newman indicate a clear preference for the reed sounds of the organ. His directions ask for solo reeds, reeds in combination, or combinations of flute (one or many) and reeds. The connotations of these reed sounds contribute to the distinctness of the music from the historical organ repertoire. Newman neglects to suggest any strings, foundations, mixtures or mutations, which denies the piece many of the organ's characteristic timbres and the possibility of the general crescendo. These combinations of reeds would rarely, if ever, be used in a liturgical context (without the organ's foundations), and similarly would constitute a 'special effect' in most romantic organ repertoire. Although within the organ's possibilities, Newman's combination of reeds does not link the piece audibly with other works for the instrument.

Although they denote specific timbres, Newman's choice of stops does not account for register. While some of the timbre names that he gives are usually associated with a lower or higher range of the instrument, they can still vary depending on the build, and could, in fact, displace the music by one or more octaves in different locations. Table 3 shows the stop names listed in the score and their potential registers:

Stop	Register
Flute	16' (bass flute), 8', 4', 2' or higher, stopped or not. Some organs will have multiple flutes at each octave.
Oboe	8' or 4' (16': bass oboe).
Trumpet	8' or 4' (16': double trumpet). Some organs may have natural trumpets (which are not reeds).
Bassoon	16' or 8'

¹² For example, a short-long-short-long rhythmic pattern that can be found in systems 5, 9, 11 and 12 of Movement III, and seemingly augmented in system 4 of Movement IV, can be shown to be respectively part of the piano accompaniment of the song 'Good Day After Good Orgasm', and the vocal line of the song 'Celtic Lullaby'. Further examples exist in the repeated octaves and minor third leaps (mentioned in-text above), found in every movement of *Song to God* and elsewhere in Newman's oeuvre, thus presenting difficulties of attribution.

Table 3. Stops listed in *Song to God* and their potential registers.

This potential, drawn from the four instructions given in *Song to God*, opens up many questions for the performer. For example, she might choose one or multiple ranks to be associated with each sound instruction, and might choose these consistently across the piece or differently in the context of each new instruction. The latter possibility is not as unexpected as it may seem, since organ registrations may be used to bring out differences in musical material, and variations of the same timbre might be used to deal with dynamic variations and requirements. While the use of stops as a part of a musical interpretation may be an aesthetic concern in the performance of the piece, the negotiation of timbre and dynamics is also a practical concern. There is a real issue regarding how to deal with sometimes great differences between the stops/ranks, including issues of the audibility of the music in the space, and these differ from organ to organ. The organist may ask whether extra stops might be used to support the sound, and whether she might select these from ranks other than those shown in Table 3, where multiple ranks of the same type of timbre do not exist, or where the organ has extended ranks.¹³

As with the approach to performing the music's phrases, some clues can be found in the performance practices and notations of Newman's other keyboard works. While the issue of registrations is not raised in his piano music, for example, that of dynamics is. Rarely, if ever, does Newman call for a crescendo or decrescendo, and usually his dynamic markings are what might be considered 'terraced'.¹⁴ In his piano music, the performer is asked to move from one to another abruptly, and to emphasise this by maintaining an evenness of touch that allows no perceived emphasis on any note. Therefore, where Newman notates abrupt stop changes, the resulting 'steps' in octave (owing to differences in register between the stops employed), and dynamic (owing to changes in combination or sound quality), can be assumed intended, despite their unpredictability from instrument to instrument. This, in my opinion, should be embraced. The only caveat to this conclusion is that, where a single flute rank is unsatisfactorily audible within the space, it should be

¹³ Extended ranks might mean that stops with distinct names draw on the same rank of pipes; yet, combining two of these stops will not result in a distinct timbre.

¹⁴ A comparison can be made here to attitudes towards 'terraced' dynamics in the early practice of historically informed Baroque music, some of which persists in teaching music of that period today. Uri Golomb, in considering the performance of Bach's cantatas, has described a performance practice that deals with dynamics in this way (i.e. terraced) as inflexible, writing that: 'speech-like flexibility is incompatible with strict terraced dynamics.' See Golomb, 'Keys to the Performance of Baroque Music,' *Goldberg Early Music Magazine* 51 (2008): 61. Although an impediment to the performance of Bach, such 'inflexibility' can be inferred as the desired effect in the performance of Newman's music.

supported, ideally at the same octave. This may introduce further practical considerations, however, as are now discussed below.

Mvmt	Flute	Bassoon	Oboe	Trumpet	No. of changes	Repeated Materials
I		■				A
	■	■			1	B
	■	■	■		1	C, D
	■				2	E
		■	■		3	F, G
		■	■	■	1	H
II			■		2	A, B
		■		■	3	C, D
	■	■		■	1	E, F, G, (H)
		■		■	1	H, [III: A]
III	■		■	■	3	B, C
				■	2	(C), D
	■			■	1	E, (F)
		■	■	■	2	F
		■			2	G
			■	■	3	
	■	■	■		2	H
IV	■				2	A
			■	■	3	B
	■		■	■	1	
		■	■		3	C
	■		■	■	3	D

Table 4: Timbral changes in the movements of *Song to God*, and the links between material and timbre.

Table 4 displays all of the timbral changes in the piece and shows how it moves between different combinations of one, two, and three timbres (never all four). This table also visualises the work of the organist: each timbral change requires up to three stop changes. There are twenty-two changes altogether, which utilise eleven of a possible fourteen combinations of the timbres mentioned in the

score. The three that are not heard are: solo trumpet, the duet of flute and oboe, and the *tutti* combination of all four timbres. Some organs offer the possibility of programming timbral changes, but this is most often excluded as a possibility for this piece, as such programs often limit the timbral changes to eight within a piece. As a result, the potential three changes that are required at any one time to enable the notated combinations in practice may require multiple manuals, couplers, or using multiple ranks for each instruction. This is of particular practical concern, since the majority of timbral changes are notated in the middle of phrases, adding to the perception of ‘steps’ that are emphasised by dynamic and octave shifts when they are heard.

The work needed to action the timbral changes in the score is also a physical concern of playing. Such changes can be time-consuming, and visually noisy, involving a lot of movement especially where ranks associated with multiple manuals need to be employed to create the desired effect. While an assistant might be employed, my personal preference has been to perform with neither an assistant nor a page turner, and to select repertoire that allows for this. For me, this is a defining approach to performing and preparing the materials for performance on the part of the organist. The advantages of this approach are portability (the ability to play the music in many locations, even when an assistant cannot be found), and reliability (mistakes in the performance cannot occur because of the intervention of another person). Performances of *Song to God* have taken place on organs with up to four manuals (e.g. at St Margaret’s Church, Leicester), an organ that had ranks of natural trumpets but no reeds (at Bangor University), and an organ that had extended ranks that did not allow much differentiation between the reed sounds (at St Laurence Church, Catford), as well as instruments with features in between these extremes. On each occasion, the physical work required by the organist to enact these changes was not insignificant: a solution, once decided upon, needs to be enacted in the piece in order to find the moments where it becomes an impossibility or returns an undesirable sonic result. Because each timbral change is unique, and few are ever repeated, this work involves the performance of the whole piece. Whether the composer realised it or not, in order to perform *Song to God* the organist must embody these changes before the time of the performance, and do so uniquely for each performance situation. This, then, undermines a further possible repetition in the work: that from performance to performance. Not only is the sounding result of each performance unique, so must be its preparation and physical enactment.

Table 4 also shows how notated timbral changes link with the sounding of the repeated materials. During Movement I, one or two materials are separated by timbral changes. Arguably, this is not

significant to the listener who, at this point, will not know which of the materials are to be repeated and which are not. Therefore, the overall impression of the movement is of a succession of individually new materials and new timbres. As the piece progresses, changes begin to occur part-way through materials, and some timbres are shared across movements. In addition to the ‘terraced’ effect discussed above, this has the further effect of the creation of two temporal layers in the music: one of the phrases and systems, and one of the timbral changes (see Figure 3). These steps in timbre create the effect of the timbral layer lagging behind that of the phrases. Finally, Table 4 shows how timbre is used to reinforce the blurred sense of repetition that is created through the combinations of repeated and unique materials: each material is never sounded by the same timbre twice. Exactness of repetition in the notation is undermined by composed changes to the sound of the work.



Example 3. *Song to God*, III: system 3, page 5. © Chris Newman. The first timbral change in Movement III (shown in Table 4 to require three actions). It is unclear whether the change should occur on the first B3 (below the letter ‘T’ in ‘Trumpet’), the first E3 (roughly the middle of the instruction, below the word ‘Flute’) or the second B3 (below the end of the instruction, at ‘Oboe’). In my interpretation I have usually chosen the latter option, to emphasise the ‘terraced’ change.

These compositional approaches to quoted and repeated material and to timbre may then be used to inform an exploration of musical meaning in *Song to God*. Narrative meanings are not necessarily forthcoming. While I observed that the music itself has very little in common with the liturgical context of music for the organ, the title does imply this function, as well as the use of ‘songs’ in its material. Further, the music’s monophony perhaps connotes chant, at least in its notational if not its performed form. However, while the content of the quoted songs range from the humanistic (‘it wouldn’t do you any harm to give some money to that old lady’), to the profane (‘good day after good orgasm’), to praising nature (‘beautiful sky light and dark’), to the mundane (‘they remembered, I forgot’) none could be said to be directed *to* God, except perhaps by implication when the piece is performed on an organ in a church space.¹⁵ These fragments, combined with the elements of the vocal and piano performance practice of Newman’s music that they imply, might be

¹⁵ These quotations are both the titles and first lines of their respective songs.

better understood as singing *at* God. Moreover, no correspondence or dialogue can be found between these modes of implied singing, even when they are recognised. Indeed, even the listener familiar with Newman's oeuvre will fail to assign an implied text to each fragment due to the quotations that are drawn from pieces that are now lost. Despite all indications to the contrary, then, what Newman offers here is a discourse of materials that ask to be understood separately. *Song to God*, unexpectedly, approaches something akin to absolute music.

Rather than creating a sense of repetition or expectation, the compositional approach in this piece undermines the appearance of repetition due to the competing layers in the music, and the completion of the piece before the completion of the cycle of repetitions. This 'unfinished' aspect can also be observed in the set of timbral directions, which might be expected to be a complete catalogue but fall just short of being so, and in the inevitable incompleteness of reconstruction of the compositional process with respect to the quoted source materials. These features can be determined by analysis, but cannot be perceived or kept track of by the listener during the performance. Therefore, while *Song to God* holds some predictabilities for the analyst as she looks from movement to movement, analysis cannot account for the *esthetic* experience of the music, nor for the embodied experience of its performative actions, both of which are constantly shifting.

As anticipated in Tarasti's exploration of the nature of analysis, prior and contextual knowledge of Newman's work was a helpful tool for this investigation in terms of selecting relevant paradigmatic content, in conjunction with direct engagement with the piece as a performer. That which seemed to be of most importance for analysis—the provenance of the quoted materials—could not become the central analytical approach, even though they can be identified by familiar listeners hearing the piece; this could not have been known in advance of the analysis. However, listening is not analysis, in its strictest sense, even if it does create meaning. This analytical approach has been able to partly account for the *esthetic* dimension of the music, but it does not describe the experience of the listener: it only seeks to explain how this experience is created. By its nature, the experience of listeners will be necessarily individual and no analytical approach could hope to synthesise all of their associations. This is not to denigrate those individual experiences; rather, it is to explain why they may remain on the periphery of an analysis such as this. Similarly, the embodied experience of the performer explains how dimensions of the composition are encountered in the physical act of performance, but although this can be described it is not necessarily communicated to the listener in the moment of performance (especially on occasions when the performer cannot be seen, which is

not unusual for organ performances). It is not considered essential that the listener is aware of, or considers, these experiences either; while they may offer a perspective on the music or a potential way of navigating it, they are also not the only route to interpretation of the music as is addressed by the confluence of approaches here. What this analysis does describe, then, is the way that Tarasti's 'conscious intermingling of happenings'¹⁶ might overlap and conspire to offer an experience of blurred repetition that is reinforced on multiple levels of the music and/in performance even where each level of this experience is not immediately accessible to the listener in their encounter with the work.

Song to God simultaneously evokes the contexts of organs through its connotations of songs and singing, while the performed realities of its sound could not be further from that expected of the organ. Its compositional approach is challenging but can be shown to be internally coherent. While elements of processual composition—such as the repeated material that underpins each movement, and the near-catalogue of timbral combinations—can be observed, the music also displays features of through-composed pieces in its constant recombining of materials from movement to movement. Finally, while many material elements of the piece will be familiar to listeners also familiar with Newman's other works, these in themselves do not offer any keys to understanding *Song to God's* meaning, which requires the same approach from listeners with any degree of familiarity. Indeed, the interest in the music resides on its unfamiliarity on almost every level. Embodied information about this piece has informed this particular analysis, but might also be integrated into future approaches for other works. Performing *Song to God* has both highlighted the most complex or virtuosic aspects of enacting its timbral changes and indicated how the work could be understood in the wider context of Newman's oeuvre. Thus, this suggests that analysis and performance cannot be separated if one is to consider the multi-dimensional experience of music and its layers of enactment and listening.

¹⁶ Tarasti, *Signs of Music*, 72