

hearmleop-gieddunga: temporal and material layeredness

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image: notation detail from Anglo Saxon Tryptich.

This article explores the project *hearmleop—gieddunga* (Redhead, 2018) through multiple, non-linear paths. It considers temporality within the project and its materials, contrasting the perspectives on time, history and the material that might be offered by them. Temporality is considered in terms of the perception of the past, present and future through the lens of this project and the experience of the music, and this experience is contrasted with philosophical and musicological reflections on the nature of time. Although presented in the format of an article, the text and materials presented here may be negotiated non-linearly, repeated, re-ordered and as such experienced in the manner of the musical materials in the project in addition to as a reflection on them.

text only; include hyperlink if possible.

The album *hearmleop—gieddunga* (Redhead, 2018) is a collection of pieces that draw on materials that have been inspired by Anglo Saxon art and language, including graphic and experimental notations, poems, and instrumental sounds¹. Each piece began in some way as a graphic score, but underwent an interactive process of performance, recording and studio composition into order to find its form on the resultant album. As such, these pieces not only explore musical time through their compositional processes, but also confront issues of ‘pastness’ and ‘presentness’ in sound and notation: neither “Anglo Saxon” nor entirely contemporary, when time is considered in *hearmleop—gieddunga* it must rather be considered as layered. By examining these processes through my practice research I consider how it is possible that they might treat time and space as a concurrent and singular material to be experi-

¹ The title is in Old English and can be roughly translated as ‘sorrowful songs—prophecies’.

enced and manipulated during composition and performance. This approach viatorizes (gives energy to) forms (Bourriaud, 2010, p.184) and encompasses the notation, materials, processes and performance practices of the music. In particular, multiple temporal layers are negotiated through anti-aesthetic spatial-temporal processes enacted as notation, editing procedures within a DAW, and indeterminate performance situations. While “musical time” is often defined in ways that themselves arise from music, this reflection considers other definitions of time from disciplines such as philosophy that do not seek to account for musical or artistic decisions but rather consider aspects of the temporal experience of the individual outside of pieces of music. This allows me to examine the processes and materials of hearmlēop—gieddunga in terms of MacTaggart’s (1993) exploration of the “unreality” of time. A processual approach to time, which might be derived from MacTaggart, and other statements about time such as those by Merleau-Ponty (1968), van Fraassen (1970) and Husserl’s (1917) concept of temporality, opens up the possibility of exploring time—or, rather, the temporal experiences of the past and present—as a material, rather than the medium in which the music takes place. These considerations also offer theoretical tools for the description and consideration of time as layered, both in the composition and performance of music and in its reception by the listener. This accumulation of layers can be considered as the basis for a nonlinear understanding of the experience of the present moment in music. Further, this reflects, and is influenced by, Robert E. Ornstein’s conclusions regarding the philosophy of time. He writes:

Time is too diverse a concept to be amenable to one answer. Time is many things, many processes, many types of experience. We cannot even answer the much simpler question, ‘What is the experience of time?’ [...] The different times of experience will require different types of explanation. (1975, p109)

Following this, I do not attempt to offer a definition of time but rather to elucidate some layers of temporal experience within the realization of this work.

3. Layerdness and Multiple Paths:

text only

In addition to the temporal layers considered by this presentation of *hearmleop—gieddunga*, multiple layers in the research itself could also be considered. As such, multiple “paths” through the research are possible, considering time, history, and material as themes, and temporal considerations of “pastness”, “presentness” and “futureness”. In addition, focusing on the experience of layeredness itself is a possibility. The presentation of the research has been structured in this way for two reasons: first, it is assumed that the layered nature of the temporal experience in this music does not necessitate a linear exploration of it. Just as—as will be explored—there may be multiple layers or points of focus that may direct the listener to different temporal approaches to the music, so too might the material experience of the music cause it to be explored in different ways. Second, as a practice research project, there are multiple layers and considerations to the creation and approaches to the music and its materials themselves. Therefore, the method of presentation adopted here invites the reader to navigate the information about the project in relation to their own priorities or interests.

[Link to section 4 \(layeredness or presentness\)](#)

[Link to section 7 \(time or pastness\)](#)

4. Time/Presentness:

Julio D’Escrivan (1989) considers time as layered, nonlinear, heterochronic in his exploration of time in electroacoustic music. Whilst D’Escrivan examines the studio context, his thoughts are of relevance to musics that employ similar practices to those he has described whether or not in the studio: “quotation” and “mimesis” as he describes them might just as easily be found in composed acoustic music or in improvisation. In the *hearmleop—gieddunga* project,

“quotations” might be identified as references to previous works, to poems, or to historical documents, and sampling occurs in the act of the preparation of materials to be played back in performance, during performance, and from one performance to another—sometimes across the pieces themselves. Playback and re-presentation further complicates this picture, since no two instances of any one piece are the same. D’Escrivan describes how samples “interrupt the flow of time in proportion to the length of the reminiscence they may elicit”, (1989, p200) and that they do so differently for every listener.

Thus, where layers of forwards and backwards references are experienced in the music, various aspects of the music may be concurrently identified as “past” (from a different work, performance, or moment of the music) and “present” (being currently played back, being currently performed, or being spontaneously created through improvisation). Furthermore, these layers of reference to the past or the present also manifest as layers of time. D’Escrivan makes further reference to “the inexorability of time passing” and to the “poetic subtlety of time”, something that he understands as a “virtual” kind of time. (1989, p198) The former is inescapable, and is “recorded” separately from the musical target in the case of sampled material, and always present during performance. The latter can be understood as a construction arising from compositional activity and is similarly present in both quoted and performed material. No aspect of these temporal experiences may take precedence although, in relation to his comments about quotation, one or other of them may appear most present for a given listener at a given time. Rather, each of these temporal layers is equally present in the music as a result of its construction in and as time.

[Link to section 5 \(layeredness\)](#)

[Link to section 8 \(time or pastness\)](#)

[Link to section 10 \(pastness\)](#)

5. History/Futureness:

Musical loop (two extracts)

The “futureness” of a musical work might seem difficult to define. Future and imagined performances are surely a part of this temporal aspect of music. However, such a statement is nebulous. ‘Futureness’ might itself be more clearly defined in relation to the history of the work and this was the case in the *hearmleop—gieddunga* project. In particular, bespoke interfaces and instruments might arise from the music and its practices that can be used in future performance. These could be positioned as musical objects with latent temporality and as yet-to-be-created future musical and temporal layers.

An example of this in practice can be drawn from the creation of the album. These two sound extracts are from the track “*leopcybbe/leopelelandes*” which is the last of *hearmleop—gieddunga*. The first example is from the opening of the track (0’19” - 0’52”) and the second from the final section (4’48” - 5’18”). This track was created almost entirely in the studio, using a series of graphic scores titled *Anglo Saxon Triptych* that I had made as a further possible material for use in performances. The scores themselves derive from an overdrawing process that was applied to two highly contrasted photographs taken by Huw Morgan at the *Pfingstkirche* in Berlin; the location of one of the first performances of the piece *glíwmæden*. A third score was derived from the same procedure applied to a photograph of the decoration of a *Lammermuir* portable organ used for a subsequent performance of that piece in Glasgow, a few weeks later. Beyond the notation, all of the sounds used to create the piece were repurposed from the other tracks. These included using bespoke audio interfaces created by Alistair Zaldua as part of the project, reciting a poem that I had written as a part of the materials of the piece *séo níedhæmestre; se tidfara* (which appears only as fragments in the audio and the score), and finally by recording improvisations using synthesized instruments developed from re-sampled sections of the other pieces. Two such instruments are heard in these audio examples; these are an example of how musical materials might contain a latent “futureness” that is realised only later and as a result of a further musical process.

images: two photographs by Huw Morgan and Anglo Saxon Triptych notation details (see slide for details)

[Link to section 6 \(layeredness\)](#)

[Link to section 11 \(futureness\)](#)

6. Material/Pastness:

[Video loop: score construction](#)

The materials of a musical process or work are clearly multi-faceted or multi-layered. In the graphic notations that are used in the pieces of *hearmleoþ—gieddungu* multiple layers are visible, and the process of collage or of layering is both implied by the notations and of course experienced by the composer as she makes these artefacts. Therefore, the “history” of these materials consists not only of their backwards temporal references, but in the embodied experience of the work’s process in their creation.

These images were taken during the creation of the score for *glíwmæden*. They show the collage process that was undertaken in order to create the score. Of relevance here is that the order of the creation of the notations is not the one that might be signified or implied by them as materials. For example, the border was created first, although the act of “framing” that this notation implies is something that might be expected to follow the creation of that which is “framed”. Similarly, the staff notation fragments have been defined by the dimensions of the collage of staves and their lengths, rather than these lengths be defined by the fragments themselves. In addition, those aspects of the notation that seem to be quotations: the quasi-

references to illuminated manuscripts and decorative practices, are in fact newly composed and invented: they form a “present” layer over the “past” references of the notation. As a result, the layeredness of this notation also signifies its multiple temporal points of reference.

[Link to section 11 \(futureness\)](#)

7. Time/Pastness:

Text only:

Discussions of what is described as “musical time” tend to classify it as a sub-type of time, linked with duration, composition and perception but not necessarily with theories of time in other disciplines or with the perception of “past” and “future”. These theories of time are usually linked with the work concept in terms of the agency they give the composer in constructing and manipulating time; this element may itself become incompatible with contemporary musical practice, however. Some examples of the idea of “musical time” as a construction of the composer can be found in composer treatises and their writings about time. For example, Jeff Pressing imagines that musical time is a pre-defined feature of the work, writing that, “musical time is discerned by [a] composer and articulated by [a] performer.” (1992-3, p109). Stravinsky (1946) considered two types of musical time, that he labelled “ontological time” and “psychological time”, that he opposed as similarity and unity or contrast and variety. (cf. Stravinsky in Strunk/Treitler, 1998, p1295) As a result, he understood the “freedom” of the composer with respect to these aspects of as a part of the compositional method—not of creating time but of working within it. Grisey also places musical time primarily in the hands of the composer, describing it as, “the temporal dimensions that the composer uses to organize sounds”. (1987, p239). Even Kramer’s model of nonlinear time—that he defines as “a temporal continuum that results from principles permanently governing a section or a piece” (1988,

p20)—is derived from tonal function and its presence or lack, and attempt to explain musical time as a function of listening experience. (e.g. 1988, p13)

These descriptions of “musical time” pose problems for musical practices that do not meet their expectation of a musical work whose sounding elements are fixed, often by a determinate score. This includes pieces that use indeterminate elements, improvisation or graphic notation. The “fixing” of the temporal nature of a work by a composer is less clear cut in the case of music that is not performed in the same or even a similar way each time. Similarly, the idea of quotation as a forwards or backwards reference is not mentioned in these positions. This is of particular importance to music that employs quotation and sampling in any of its aspects, from its notation to its performance. Therefore, one might ask whether those composer treatises quoted above do not describe time at all but rather some other aspect of phenomenological or perceptual experience in music. In reflecting on the project *hearmleop-geiddunga*, I consider the intersection of time, history and material, and their experience in the present or performative moment of music, through the lens of the experience of creative practice and the phenomenological experience of music. While, for example, Kramer’s (1988) model only acknowledges the sounding properties of music as contributing to its temporal experience, Pressing—despite his linear interpretation of time—identifies multiple contributing factors to the experience of musical time, that include the environmental; cultural; technological; the body; conceptual operations; and interpersonal interaction. (1992-3, pp119-20) These contextual factors of musical esthesis are here considered to be linked to the perception of musical time, and esthesis is, by its nature, nonlinear. As a result, if linear time has been accounted for through music’s surface features, then here non-linear time—and a musical work’s concurrent “pastness”, “presentness” and “futureness”—might be accounted for through its more complex relationships.

[Link to section 4 \(time\)](#)

[Link to section 9 \(pastness\)](#)

8. Time/Futureness:

Text and image: time experience diagram

Looking outside of music composition, descriptions of time found in its philosophy might prove of more use in explaining the phenomenological experience of time, even within music. For example, Husserl (1917) describes the homogeneity of time when viewed from a distance in comparison with its textured nature when viewed up close. Each “moment”, if considered unitary, is individually perceived by an observer as past, present, or future. Yet the designation of a moment as such depends on the subject-position of the observer. Mary Jeanne Larrabee describes this as detailing, “consciousness as inner-time consciousness.” (1989, p181) Although the temporality of each moment appears to shift, the real shift is in the subject-consciousness of time. Both Husserl, and later Heidegger, (1962) note that the idea that time is unitary is merely an aspect of phenomenological perception and is not consistent with philosophical observations that can be made about time. Similar considerations led Merleau-Ponty (1945) to claim that, “time is [...] not a real process, not an actual procession that I am content to record. It arises from my relation to things”. (1962, pp411-2)

If time and temporal perception are not to be considered the same, then, one might look to Bas van Frassen’s conclusion that: “time exists, but it is really the actual temporal structure of the totality of events”, (1970, p106) a statement that he also identifies as confusing and of little help to the understanding of temporality. This finds parallels in J.M.E. McTaggart’s (1993) conception of time as “unreality”. He writes:

Nothing is really present, past, or future. Nothing is really earlier or later than anything else or temporarily simultaneous with it. Nothing really changes. And nothing is really in time. Whenever we perceive anything in time—which is the only way in which, in our present experience, we do perceive things—we are perceiving it more or less as it really is not. (p34)

While McTaggart's now-famous statement might not immediately seem to offer anything to the consideration of music, it might be compared to contemporary reflections on time in other disciplines. For example, astrophysicist Luigi Foschini concludes that,

what will happen does not exist yet: it has to be generated; there is nothing beyond now. Now is a hyper surface of transition, of infinite open possibilities offered by the laws of physics. In the now, what is possible according to physical laws become in place. (2018)

Foschini's conclusion has clear resonances with McTaggart's, and in a longer explanation of what he designates "the cut of time" (2019), his temporal reflections further suggest a link with Husserl's understanding of time. This contemporary scientific example demonstrates how philosophical reflections on time find parallels in work that stems from empirical observation. Their application to the phenomenological experience of music is therefore an opportunity to consider how other temporal aspects of music than those previously highlighted by composers might be considered.

[Link to section 5 \(futureness\)](#)

[Link to section 13 \(conclusions\)](#)

9. History/Pastness:

[Text, notation detail from ingenga score \(see slide for details\) and audio clip](#)

References to the past in music might comprise both the immediate (just) past and the more distant past that might be found in older musical works or documents. Both can be considered in the manner of D’Escrivan’s (1989) understanding of time in relation to sampling. In *hearm-leoþ—gieddunga* the past as before or outside of the music is referenced in a number of ways. Some of these may take the form of quotation or quasi-quotation. For example, this audio extract is taken from the opening of the track ‘ingenga’ (0’00” - 0’13.5”). It is a sample of the *viola da gamba*, and comprises a characteristic gesture for the instrument, performed by Robert Rawson. There are multiple ways that this gesture might be perceived as belonging to the past: its instrumental aspect might be perceived only as “historical”, or rather might be linked to a specific instrument or musical period, depending on the listener. While these connotations might contain different levels of specificity, they all signify an historic past that is both prior to the particular piece and to its musical tradition.

Such quotations are not only found in the sonic component of the work, however. The scores themselves also reference historical sources. While some of these—such as *glíwmæden*—may reference a generalized manuscript tradition, others such as this example from the score for *ingenga* represent a specific document. Here, a page of *The Book of Kells*, described by Carl Nordenfalk (1977, plate 42) as “carpet page with cross”, is “quoted” in its structure or layout. Observers of the score may note reference to the manuscript, the decorative tradition from which it originates, or perhaps only to a generic “past” tradition of manuscript making. All of these observations situate the quotation prior to the work and its tradition. The original content of the image has been replaced by notational fragments and fragments of text, the latter drawn from manuscript marginalia most of which are complaints about writing. Again, a familiar observer may note these source relationships, where others may note the languages (Latin, Anglo-Saxon) as “historical”, or may merely observe their unfamiliarity.

[Link to section 10 \(history\)](#)

[Link to section 6 \(pastness/material\)](#)

10. History/Presentness:

Text and sound example

Beyond references to specific historical documents, this project engages present documents in the form of its graphic scores when they are approached as notational. For example, photographs taken in the location of some of the initial performances of the piece *glíwmæden* were used as the basis for the development of further score materials in the *hearmleoþ—gieddunga* project. Beyond the creation of further materials, however, their “presentness” can also be understood in terms of the present moment of their enactment in performance. Graphic and experimental notations, such as those explored in this project, leave many decisions and strategies open to the performer and it is not necessarily helpful to describe each of these as a possibility, especially as such a description could not be exhaustive. However, I will give one specific example of how otherwise “historical” notations are made “present” through performance practice in this work.

This sound extract is an example of samples that can be activated during a performance of *glíwmæden*, using a bespoke audio interface created by Alistair Zaldua. The interface allows the samples of string harmonics and of the recitation of Anglo Saxon words that describe sound, music or noise, to be triggered using a QWERTY keyboard. The intention of this interface is to further represent the textual aspect of the music by letting the electronics performer “type” the words that are used—or to use other gestures at the keyboard—and so to indeterminately trigger the samples as they are mapped across it. Three “alphabets” are available for the performer to switch between in performance and so the sets of sounds (one set of harmonics and two of words) can be combined. This interface, and this mode of triggering these samples, belongs to the performance practice of the piece *glíwmæden*. As such, it is only used in performances of this piece, or in improvisations related to the project that are not titled as one of the other scores, and in this way the interface itself might be considered a further “notation” of the piece *glíwmæden*. Of course, it is also possible that performance instances

of these samples in *glíwmæden* may be recorded and re-sampled elsewhere in the project; as for D’Escrivan (1989), this practice creates a further temporal layer in the music.

[Link to section 5 \(history\)](#)

[Link to section 11 \(presentness\)](#)

11. Material/Presentness:

[Text, score image and audio example](#)

The “presentness” of musical material in *hearmleop—gieddunga* can further be conceived beyond its performance and in its manipulation. In particular, this aspect of the project was manifest in the studio through the recreation of layering in a DAW. Using software in this way allows for the creation of versions of the music that—although each aspect of them has been previously performed—could not possibly be recreated live by the musicians in the project, such as by layering multiple performances or the same musician playing multiple instruments. Onto this layering, a further technique was layered or applied that could in some ways be considered notational: automation was applied to the layers in a manner that visually represented the graphic notations in the project. This was an anti-aesthetic process of which the outcome was accepted, even where sounds that were previously enjoyed were erased, or where audio artefacts were introduced or amplified by the processing.

This process was used to create the audio fragments of poetry that can be triggered in the piece *séo níedhæmestre; se tidfara*. Multiple readings of an English-language poem that was created by applying Oulipo processes to translations of Anglo-Saxon poetry were recorded, layered, and manipulated as described above. The resultant sound was further fragmented to

created 15 fragments or audio that can be played back in performance, each corresponding with a page of graphic notation. The audio example is fragment VI from this piece, where different layers can be heard by the different types of processing applied. The use of this technique caused materials that were used in the music to become unfamiliar to the performers and composers, even when they had created or performed them, with the effect of bringing these materials from the past into the present.

[Link to section 12 \(material\)](#)

[Link to section 13 \(conclusions\)](#)

12. Material/Futureness:

[Text and diagram](#)

As Husserl (1917) considers, the past, present and future of a musical moment depend on the subject position of the observer. Moreover, the “pastness”, “presentness” and “futureness” in the case of music do not refer only to its previous, current, and yet-to-come moments but also to its backwards references to previous works and practices in music and other art forms, and its latent future enactment. In *hearmleop—gieddunga* this is modelled as a cycle of sampling and reproduction in an iterative process, as shown in this diagram. This both blurs the status and timeline of the creative practices in the project (as practices that come “before” or “after” in relation to composition and performance) and, with each iteration, adds further musical and temporal layers to the music.

13. Conclusion:

Text only

In *hearmleop*—*gieddunga*, “pastness”, “presentness” and “futureness” collapse into each other when the multiple, concurrent, heterochronic layers of the music and its component parts are considered. “Musical time” might therefore be considered unreal, and rather as a phenomenological and relational aspect of the experience of the music’s creators and listeners: in this respect alone, does time become material. Theories of time and time in music could therefore be considered as retrospective: reflections on the nature of “musical time” are subject to the same problems as its description: they describe how time seems to have been but not how it is actually experienced in the moment of music.

Musical practice and creative practice are primarily experienced in the moment of performance or creation. This moment is, of course ephemeral; even its careful documentation as notation or recording does not preserve it, or otherwise changes it. But, however ephemeral, the presentness of such a moment is music’s epistemological moment and therefore also the opportunity of its phenomenology. Music’s moment points to other kinds of times (in their “pastness” and “futureness”), and therefore appears nonlinear when closely and discursively examined. Even notation does not freeze time, but contributes to its present moment. Each ephemeral moment of music, then, exists and passes, at odds with the retrospective reflection on time, and holding in common with Husserl’s (1917) reflections on the nature of time as homogenous rather than unitary. From a distance, each musical moment is in some way the same, and musical moments collectively are an homogenous mass of similar moments that are only individualized in their unique experience. From a distance, nothing really changes.

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Text only

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15. Credits:

Text only

Musicians heard in the audio extracts:

Lauren Redhead (wind instruments, voice, organ, harpsichord, synthesizer); Alistair Zaldua (live electronics, violin, double bass); Robert Rawson (viola da gamba); Joshua Cannon (studio processing)

Two photographs from the Pfingstkirche, Berlin by Huw Morgan (c) 2016; used with permission. <https://fireheadeditions.com/huw-morgan/>

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