Imagining, Documenting, and Reimagining the Everyday:

DIY Technologies as the Catalyst for Crafting Interdisciplinary Composition

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COMMENTARY

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ABSTRACT

This portfolio of works highlights the creative possibilities embedded within the mundane aspects of our lives. I explore how art can emerge through interdisciplinary compositional methods obtained from observing and engaging with day-to-day activities. By focusing on the ordinary and the routine, these compositions demonstrate how DIY technologies – the accessible and intuitive tools of our daily life that we can operate ourselves – can inspire spontaneous artistic expression.

Through interdisciplinary compositions, the research conducts an examination of various aspects of everyday life, an area that we recognise and is well-supplied by intuitive sources of inspiration. DIY technologies around us can be conveniently used as vehicles for creation, while the authenticity inherent in daily life strongly stimulates artistic production.

Since the project began during the global pandemic in 2020 it has evolved dynamically, capturing how COVID-19 has transformed the way we observe, search for media and inspiration and create. The project emphasises the relationship between evolving situations and creative processes, establishing a foundation for the use of DIY technologies in various types of media. It encourages experimenting with compositional aesthetics based on the context of daily life and its DIY technologies, promoting intuitive artistic expression and celebrating the underlying capacity for creativity within our everyday lives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1. Introduction

1.1. What I do and why I do what I do

My passion for music has been a consistent part of my life and I have always been dedicated to it. Music has played a vital role in my daily life for as long as I can remember. It is an integral part of my everyday experiences. I use the term 'everyday' here to encapsulate essential activities, societal norms, and other conscious and subconscious appreciations that happen mundanely.

Like many composers and artists, my compositional approach embodies the subjects I understand or care about. Initially, my music reflected my understanding of sound, melody, and harmony, resulting in compositions that were influenced by popular and classical music. However, in my early works I was not too concerned with the idea of having a clear conceptual framework. This focus shifted when I started exploring different compositional approaches that allowed me to express through music some of the concerns that had had a profound impact in my life and contributed shaping my personal identity. In 2019 I received a commission to write a work for the Orchestra in the Shape of a Pear as a reaction to Morton Feldman's *Marginal Intersection*. My piece did not address Feldman's composition directly, but I tried to articulate my interests at the time through music, using Feldman's graphic score with new rules to perform it.

The Orchestra in the Shape of a Pear was a flexible ensemble, with no specific shape or set number of players. Thinking about democracy and orchestral hierarchies, I found out about Persimfans, the first modern conductorless orchestra, formed in the Soviet Union after the Russian Revolution. Persimfans was designed not to develop the sonic possibilities of a self-conducted orchestra, but to portray egalitarian beliefs in accordance with the prevailing political model. My piece was called *Daydreaming* and it was about freedom. Musicians would go on stage wearing a stethoscope and would sit in a circle so they could all see each other. Then, they would spend a minute in silence listening to their heart, as the tempo was individually determined by every player's heartbeat.

The openness of the ensemble and the repertoire we played (as I was one of the performers) facilitated a reflection on the concept of freedom and encouraged me to explore it performatively. The piece I wrote had an immersive character, which made me engage with it personally and conceptually. I genuinely enjoyed contemplating my artistic practice beyond its

sonic possibilities and emancipating myself from the idea of polishing the sound meticulously. Above all, I loved tackling the creative process with meaning and utilising the available resources in a purposeful manner.

As a composer, I struggled with the challenge of bringing my music to life for years. When I was an undergraduate composition student in Madrid, I was mainly encouraged to write pieces for orchestral instruments following the Western contemporary-classical tradition. Sometimes I was even discouraged from performing my own music, because my performing skills were not good enough to play something 'serious' or important according to the standards of my peers and my own at that time. It took me longer than I would have liked to acknowledge that some of the compositional rules that I learnt during my days as a composition student lacked truth or practical utility. To be able to write music aligned with what I cared about creatively, I had to go through a process of unlearning, detaching myself from certain contemporary composition assumptions that were deeply implanted during my academic training. Contemporary-classical composition was not the most appropriate medium for me to make the music I wanted to compose, as its difficult access made it a very selective and prohibitive channel for me. The Western contemporary-classical tradition is, generally, highly institutionalised and as a young composer, one depends on being part of the establishment, attending a conservatoire, taking part in composition schemes and winning competitions. These opportunities are limited and, as a composer at the beginning of my career, I wanted to know that my work would be able to exist independently.

My appreciation for easy-access technologies was stimulated during the pandemic in 2020 when, after spending weeks and weeks at home, I acknowledged the power of my daily objects and rituals to stimulate my creativity. Approaching my practice from an interdisciplinary perspective has been crucial for me to develop artistically because it is what, ultimately, makes my work alive. During this time, I found the elements and disciplines that allowed me to candidly explore the potential of my work. I was trained as a classical pianist, though I am not a skilled or confident performer by conventional music standards, and yet I want to perform my work. Filmmaking has allowed me to be a writer, a composer, a performer, and an editor. Not only do I perform when I am on camera, but also through it by filming a point-of-view shot. Therefore, I am the subject and main performer of my work. Composing in an interdisciplinary way has shown me that I have multiple instruments that I can use to perform to make my work come to life. A camera, a phone, a microphone, a MIDI keyboard, a piano, my voice, Logic Pro, Final Cut… They are all my instruments.

Contemporary society has integrated technologies that historically required specialised technical abilities into our daily routines. An example of this is the ubiquity of video cameras and microphones, which now are an essential part of our smartphones. In consequence, individuals have assumed roles as amateur photographers and filmmakers to capture moments, using these devices to the best of their knowledge, without formal training or rigorous consideration of their technical intricacies.

This project was partly born as an artistic response and personal tribute to these easy-access technologies that allowed my creativity to flourish.

1.2. Everyday life and DIY technologies

The *Collins English Dictionary* defines 'everyday' as a word that is used 'to describe something which happens or is used every day, or forms a regular and basic part of your life, so it is not especially interesting or unusual' (Collins Dictionary, 2024: online). This composition research project is concerned with the artistic possibilities implicit within the quotidian aspects of our lives. It delves into the ordinary, the routine, the ugly and the seemingly unremarkable. The investigation centres on the unrestricted and spontaneous creative expression that the use of commonplace DIY technologies facilitate. It also explores the capacity to discern and articulate, through interdisciplinary compositional methods, an artistic communication derived from observing daily routines. This exploration is undertaken within the scope of the researcher's identity as an artist and, specifically for the duration of this project, as a doctoral candidate.

I pose the following research question:

> In what ways can an individual's own experience of 'everyday life' and the easy-access technologies embedded within it serve as a catalyst for the creation of interdisciplinary compositions?

The aim of this practice-based research is to conduct, by making music compositions and audiovisual works, an autoethnographic and technical exploration of different aspects inherent in everyday life, a domain that is close to us and rich in authentic sources of inspiration. The authenticity embedded within everyday life provides a powerful catalyst for impactful artistic experiments. The concepts of 'everyday life' and DIY technologies can be liberating, revealing abundant resources in our immediate surroundings that can be used for artistic creation.

These elements enable an alternative perspective on the tools we work with, offering opportunities for innovative applications that are under one's control.

Initiated in 2020 amidst the pandemic, this project has grown, mirroring the changing and unstable consequences of COVID-19. Identifying and exploiting the symbolic relationship between evolving contexts and creative processes, the research aspires to be a relevant resource for other composers and interdisciplinary artists. It will also be relevant to creators looking for alternative channels, inviting them to engage and experiment with compositional aesthetics and DIY technologies within the context of everyday experiences.

This project, established as a potential model, provides a foundational framework for the use of DIY technologies for artistic creation and as an approach to academic research. It seeks to promote genuine and intuitive artistic propositions, thereby honouring the intrinsic potential for creativity within the ordinary.

This commentary is presented alongside a portfolio of original music and audiovisual compositions.

2. Chronicles of the everyday: research contexts

> Contemporary art is saturated with references to the everyday. Since the mid-1990s numerous international biennales, site-specific projects, historical overviews of modernism and themed group exhibitions have attested to the widespread appeal of the quotidian to curators and artists alike. Coupled with this is the persistent presence of the term and its affiliates in reviews, articles and essays, in which everyday life attains the status of a global art-world touchstone (Johnstone, 2008: 12).

In the last decades there has been a profound shift in contemporary artistic expression, moving away from traditional media to embrace the integration of everyday technologies and do-it-yourself approaches. This transformation has motivated an exploration into the intersections of music, art, technology, and the mundane aspects of daily life. By analysing this dynamic landscape, we can reveal a considerable variety of perspectives that not only contextualise this research project, but also highlight the evolving nature of art pieces that are defined and inspired by the ordinary.

Mundanity has always fascinated artists and continues to be a prevalent concept in art today, with practitioners interested in portraying the banal and the unremarkable in a noticeable way, such as Christian Marclay with *The Clock*, Sophie Calle with *The Hotel*, or Nan Goldin with *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. Whilst the everyday features in a variety of media in the world of contemporary art, this is not a new phenomenon and there are many previous examples of works that are a product of the charm of daily life. In *Species of Spaces*, from 1974, Georges Perec talks about the common, the ordinary, the habitual and wonders:

> How are we to speak of these common things, how to track them down, how to flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they are mired, how to give them meaning, a tongue, to let them, finally, speak of what is, of who we are (Perec, 2008: 210).

For some creators, finding value in the quotidian brings appreciation and respect to what it means to them, while others simply establish an aesthetic based on documenting ordinariness (Johnstone, 2008: 12). Generally, everydayness represents a mutual understanding of our involvement with intimacy and its unnoticed components and routines. The examination of our everyday lives holds a crucial significance within the field of cultural studies, having undergone close examination by scholars in the areas of psychology, sociology, and philosophy. An example of this is the *Journal of Mundane Behaviour*, an academic journal edited by Scott Schaffer, whose issues were published from 2000 to 2004, featuring sociological analyses of

everyday experiences. While the investigation into everyday life dates back to the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, it was only in the twentieth century that such inquiries were approached through the lens of social sciences, with philosophers like Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certau (Bou, 2015: 172). Enric Bou, in his essay for the *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, 'Representing Everyday Life' (2015) states that:

> Everyday life can be represented as something utterly routinized, static and unresponsive, but at the same time provides pungent insight, startling dynamism and ceaseless creativity. Everyday life integrates a form of 'depth' reflexivity, which is related to the ability of human beings to adapt to new situations and surviving life challenges (Bou, 2015: 173).

In the same essay, Bou mentions the term *l'infra-ordinaire* (the infra-ordinary), also formulated by George Perec in 1973, to refer to 'those minimal aspects of reality which he hoped to zero in on' (Bou, 2015: 173). Perec pointed out that we are educated to look for the exceptional elements and situations, focusing on the extraordinary, and proposes that we should explore the infra-ordinary, asking ourselves minor questions about our routines of perception (Bou, 2015: 173).

> A key question here concerns the validity of elevating so ordinary and apparently formless an activity as dreaming to an artistic product (Spector, 1989: 291).

Likewise, André Breton, in his *First Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), describes surrealism as a channel for linking the unconscious to the conscious, as well as integrating dreams with the banalities of everyday existence, with the aim of constructing an 'absolute reality, a surreality' (Breton, 1924: 24). Breton contends that logic must be adjusted to adopt the trajectory of the dream, making artistic endeavours automatic and free from rational thoughts, aesthetic considerations, or ethical preoccupations. This approach creates a juxtaposition of images removed from their natural environments. Walter Benjamin, in his essay *Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia* (1929), illustrates a system in 'which, through dreams, one can experience everyday objects in an exceptional, incoherent way' (Bou, 2015: 173–174). Talking about daily life through an artistic representation of daily life can even acquire a political tone. The concepts of 'ambiguity' and 'juxtaposition' have historically served as subversive compositional techniques, frequently employed in the representation and misrepresentation of 'everyday life'. Surrealism contained a strong subversive intention, being used by artists more as a political tool than a way to explore dreams.

> The indispensable prerequisite of surrealism is absolute freedom of the spirit. Breton
> speaks of it as the first condition. Such concern with liberty would lead not only to a study
> of the conditions of spiritual freedom but also of freedom in the world at large. And the
> surrealists did indeed turn their attention to the problem of a free society (Clancy, 1949:
> 273)

The employment of 'ambiguity' and 'juxtaposition' is indicative of a deliberate strategy to create uncertainty and complexity in artistic expressions. The pleasure derived from ambiguity lies in the challenge it presents to both artists and audiences when they experience a departure from conventional and coherent information. This demands the active engagement of the imagination to interrogate preconceptions, fomenting an environment that is open to multiple and varied interpretations.

Frank Zappa's work is characterised by a strong presence of ambiguity and subversion. *The Adventures of Greggery Peccary* (1987) openly criticises both orchestral and pop traditions by employing juxtaposition techniques in the orchestration and formal structure of the composition. Furthermore, the piece satirises these cultural spheres through the incorporation of avant-garde orchestral arrangements, jazz aesthetics, improvisation, and musical quotations. These elements serve as accompaniments to the narrative, which despite being essentially surreal, revolves around a small peccary's daily life. Greggery drives a Volkswagen and invents one of the main elements of our everyday existence: the calendar.

Another subversive artist whose work contains various degrees of ambiguity would be Reggie Watts, a comedian and musician who describes himself as a 'disinformationist' who tries to disturb and disorient the audience. His work exemplifies an interdisciplinary application of ambiguity and juxtaposition. In his one-man show, in which he follows a surreal, intuitive process and improvises, Watts sings and speaks, switching unexpectedly between the two, sometimes even making up fake languages (Watts, 2011: online).

Surrealism was a substantial influence on this project. In the early stages of the research I studied a technique similar to Watts' process. Surrealist automatism is a creative procedure in which a creator avoids controlling the artistic process consciously, leaving space for the unconscious mind. In some of my works I tried to do the opposite: controlling the process as much as I could, consciously appreciating the process, to be able to liberate my mind to judge the outcome unconsciously. Prioritising the meaning of the process to the meaning of the outcome, even though the latter is a direct consequence of the former, I was able to acknowledge the outcome detached from the process, instinctively and freely. My practice

also draws inspiration from Surrealism by challenging our perception of the ordinary. I film and record found-objects/sounds, and create dream-like juxtapositions with them to use not just as material but as a means of accessing an intuitive form of expression, the same way that Surrealist artists would present ordinary objects to evoke a subconscious and emotional reaction.

If talking about daily life through an artistic representation of daily life can result in subversion, then what happens when we talk about daily life through daily life? An illustration of an ambiguous portrayal of daily routines appears in the characters depicted in some of David Lynch's works, notably in the television series *Twin Peaks* (1990). These characters, ostensibly ordinary and intentionally deprived of detailed exposition, diverge from the cinematic norm where character lives are typically explained through discernible actions that transmit substantial information about their personalities. Lynch's unconventional approach often consists of taking real-life archetypes and making them strange, giving his characters an air of mystery.

Donald Glover, also known as Childish Gambino, is a multidisciplinary artist who engages in acting, comedy, singing, production, and direction. He is the creator of *Atlanta* (2016), a television series about a man striving to improve his life to get the approval of his girlfriend and parents. The show intricately combines elements of comedy and drama, presenting a distinctive amalgamation where the central narrative spins around characters who experience surreal and absurd situations while addressing underlying social issues, almost playing down the scale of the problems. This contrast, featuring surreal and absurdist scenarios alongside the trivialisation of serious matters, underscores the show's nuanced engagement with social content. As a rapper, in his work *This Is America* (2018), alongside its music video directed by Hiro Murai, Childish Gambino employs a juxtaposition of diverse elements, cultivating ambiguity and forcing the audience to continually scrutinise every aspect of them from a new angle. This strategy urges the viewer to sustain a constant awareness of details that might otherwise be perceived as ordinary over time. In *This Is America*, the visual aspect become just as relevant as the lyrics or the instrumental sections.

Yannis Kyriakides' PhD thesis 'Imagined Voices: A Poetics of Music-Text-Film' (2015) illustrates an artistic phenomenon derived from using multiple disciplines. In his work, the author describes the early forms of multimedia that used one medium to intensify another to convey an 'amplification of meaning'. Kyriakides argues that this concept comes from the established models of approaching different media that flourished in opera in the late nineteenth century (Kyriakides, 2015: 66). These early multimedia works employed distinct

media in a way that established a mutual interrelation, thereby enhancing the impact of the traditional media as well as amplifying the depth of meaning.

While there are not many examples of purely musical pieces developed around the notion of everydayness, visual and installation artists have exploited this idea and consolidated everyday life as an influential conceptual approach in contemporary art.

Extinction Beckons by Mike Nelson is an exhibition of installations presented at the Hayward Gallery that showcased a disturbing display of dystopian dreams. The exhibition featured an extensive collection of objects found in second-hand shops and landfills, consisting of obsolete artifacts that were part of Nelson's upbringing in 1970s Britain. These items, now emblematic of a lost time, are used to symbolise the mundane aspects of that period. Among the installations within *Extinction Beckons* is *The Deliverance and The Patience*, an interactive experience where members of the audience navigate a maze with various rooms by choosing different doors. This not only generates curiosity and disconcert, but also introduces an element of enjoyment and childlike engagement. The installation establishes a DIY fictional set through the incorporation of extinct materials, nurturing the creation and expansion of stories.

On Kawara's *Today* series represents a conceptual art project that the artist worked on from 1966 until his death in 2014. With this collection, Kawara meticulously documented his existence on specific days through paintings that prominently present the date painted in white against a monochromatic background. Each piece was executed within the confines of the day it represents. In this work, the dates become the subject matter, emphasising the immediacy and authenticity of its temporal context. The series transcends the mere representation of dates and invites the audience to contemplate the wider significance of individual moments. Contemplating these moments, however, breaks our perception of the present, making those dates exist not only as past moments in time, but endlessly and continually in the now.

The work of Tracey Emin becomes relevant in the context of an artist's 'everyday life' metamorphosing into art, particularly her autobiographical work for which she uses a variety of media. Emin's artwork merges with her personal identity as Tracey Emin and often unveils distressing life experiences. An example of this symbiosis is her installation *My Bed* (1998), which documents a period of depression during which Emin spent four days in bed solely consuming alcohol. Observing the subsequent chaos and clutter in her room, she converted it into an art piece. Similarly, in her film *Why I Never Became a Dancer* (1995), Emin narrates

her teenage years in a small town, experiencing bullying and exploring her incursion into sexual experimentation and exploitation. Emin's life and emotional landscape constitute both the motivation and subject matter of her art, documenting poignant episodes of her story and feelings.

The connection between my compositions and the work of the filmmakers and artists listed above is the blurring of boundaries between personal and universal matters, as well as the transformation of mundane experiences into pieces of work that contain deep emotional implications. My work intends to use genuinely personal and intimate experiences to prompt a wider cultural observation, connecting the personal to the universal to encourage the audience to reflect on their own lives. Similarly, making personal and apparently trivial daily activities into compositions, I invite the viewers to contemplate their relationship with the ordinary. My process of deconstructing and recontextualising everyday life relates to these artists' approaches, where a personal, sometimes frivolous event is elevated to the category of artwork, therefore upgraded to something of universal importance.

The uncanny and the exceptional, also associated with Surrealism, as discussed above, deal with aspects that are familiar as well as unusual and disturbing. This concept may induce a sense of vulnerability and intimacy that could stimulate a feeling of discomfort, but also of empathy. All the examples presented in this section focus on emotional extremes, exposing the emotional depth of everyday experiences, usually by exaggerating the repetitive nature of an activity. A fundamental aspect of the everyday revolves around repetition, characterised by the execution of routines and daily rituals that are carried out in an automated way. In June of 2023, I saw Punchdrunk's show *The Burnt City* in London. Initially presented as a maze of narratives within a dystopian urban landscape, wherein audience members moved around wearing masks, the experience gradually evolved into a more navigable territory. Over time, certain locations within the space became familiar and provided a sense of comfort. The repetitive nature of routes within the theatre significantly contributed to the enjoyment of the experience. The focus was relocated from exploring the territory and locating oneself in it towards an appreciation of the artwork itself. Repetition offers comfort by making our daily activities seemingly effortless. But how can something as mundane as repetition generate such profound comfort? Sara Ahmed, in her essay *Orientations Matter*, says:

> the labour of such repetitions disappears through labour: if we work hard at something, then it seems effortless. This paradox —with effort it becomes effortless— is precisely what makes history disappear in the moment of its enactment. The repetition of work is what makes the signs of work disappear (Ahmed, 2010: 254).

All these examples are, in one way or another, based on our surroundings. We perceive them in a familiar way and that is why we can react to them intimately as well as collectively. In 2023, the Royal Academy of the Arts in London hosted a collection of Marina Abramović's work, consisting of video, installation, performance and sculpture pieces. One of these was an installation with a gate made of crystals. No instructions were provided as to how to interact with the gate, so most members of the public queued at one of the sides to go through it, one by one, resembling a security gate at an airport. The audience interacted with the piece by creating a queueing routine, even though there was not a set procedure stating how it should be experienced. People waited respectfully in a queue for their turn to go through the gate, to then enjoy a private moment surrounded by the crystals. Thus, the everyday experience of waiting in a queue was the audience's first reaction to and interaction with the art piece.

I acknowledge that most of the examples in this section are not related to music. Even though there are several composers and music artists who have integrated everyday life and technologies into their work (such as Laurie Anderson, Brian Eno, Pierre Schaeffer, John Cage and Björk, amongst others, who have incorporated live sounds, field recordings, and daily life technologies into music pieces), I personally find greater inspiration in the work by artists from other fields, where the idea of everydayness is seen and there is more space for the sonic element to exist independently from the concept and add a layer of abstraction. While I find a stronger conceptual connection with work by visual artists, the sound material of my compositions is normally inspired by the work of pop and rock artists, jazz musicians, and contemporary and classical composers. Although I do not attempt to emulate these genres, I take elements from them when I am writing music.

The style of The Strokes incorporates elements from different subgenres of rock, punk and new wave. They are heavily influenced by 1970s punk rock and the minimalism of new wave bands from the 1980s, which gives them a very distinct, and yet familiar, sound. The production of their music is relatively unpolished and has a raw and live feel. This approach prioritises the spirit and the immediacy of an original recording over technical refinement. I find this idea very refreshing as, generally, most pop recordings within the music industry are massively refined and over-produced. Despite having started independently, The Strokes are now part of that same music industry, yet their sound still celebrates the vitality of the DIY ethos. This has allowed the band to embrace studio experimentation and the addition of more synthesised sounds while maintaining their original indie rock style and authenticity unharmed. Julian Casablancas, the lead singer of The Strokes, participates in other alternative music projects, such as The Voidz. This band adopts a more experimental and chaotic approach to

composition than The Strokes and explores an eclectic combination of genres and avant-garde influences. The sound of *Human Sadness* is harsh and complex, with multiple simultaneous melodic and instrumental layers, and the lyrics focus on abstract and surreal ideas. Both bands have Julian Casablancas as a link, but they each have their own independent artistic goals. Casablancas is an alternative rock musician who has granted himself the enjoyment and luxury of experimentation within an industry that often abstains itself from it. His evolution through The Strokes and The Voidz can, in a way, symbolise my own commitment to experimentation and rejection of tradition. In The Strokes, Casablancas explores sound through the use of simple harmonic and rhythmic patterns, rather than technical virtuosity. In contrast to this, The Voidz represents a more experimental approach to rock, incorporating harmonic and orchestral dissonances and more complex rhythms, subverting the expectations of what a traditional rock song structure is. This reflects the spirit of experimentation and unconventional thinking that I intend to pursue as an artist, to nourish my creative freedom and explore what it means to me to be a composer.

McCoy Tyner's peculiar use of harmony is one of the most special contributions to jazz music in the 1960s. He would frequently use quartal chords –a chord construction based on stacking intervals of perfect fourths– rather than the conventional jazz harmony based on intervals of thirds. Quartal harmony creates tonal ambiguity, as there is no clear tonal centre. The idea of tonal freedom particularly benefited the modal jazz trend from the late 1950s and early 1960s. Additionally, McCoy would often omit the root when playing left-hand voicings, which was unusual in traditional jazz piano playing, creating a harmonic vagueness while still providing a very complex sound. This approach to harmony not only allowed him a strong material-based expression but also a powerful relationship with the emotional essence of the music. What resonated with me about McCoy's harmonic ambiguity was his proposal to use experimentation and non-conformity to create a space where sound constantly challenges fixed structures and invites the listener to new interpretations. As a composer, I also aim to embrace a non-traditional, open-ended, and spontaneous approach to creation as a way to emphasise a personal exploration of the beauty in imperfection.

From a more classical and specifically orchestral perspective, there are two composers who have deeply shaped the way I think about music material in terms of developing timbre: György Ligeti and Max Richter. While Ligeti's use of texture was influenced by the Central European folk music tradition and avant-garde techniques and Richter's comes from blending classical music with electronic elements, timbre plays an essential role for both composers, highlighting the powerful atmospheric and emotional content of their compositions. In *Lux Aeterna* (1966), Ligeti not only explores the possibilities of a choir, but also its spatial capabilities, with the

different voices moving between registers, creating a massive body of sound. Richter, unlike other minimalist composers, does not tend to focus on the repetition of rhythmic or harmonic patterns, but on the design and manipulation of sound. In the soundtrack for *The Leftovers* (2014) he creates a sonic climate that intensely affects our perception of the psychological details of the story. Here, his use of electronic elements contributes to the interplay between the sometimes intimate and sometimes dense aura. Both Ligeti and Richter, though composing in very different styles and taking diverse approaches to music creation, use timbre as a transformative tool to create a sound that goes beyond the traditional classical music ideas of melody, harmony, and rhythm and challenges the conventional notions of structure. As a composer whose practice became relatively remote and solitary due to the limitations of a pandemic, discovering the possibilities of composing through timbre with electronic instruments was crucial to me. Before the pandemic, most of my electronic pieces were built from a melodic or tonal harmonic idea, and timbre was an accidental result of combining melody, harmony, and the chosen MIDI instrumentation. However, when writing for acoustic instruments in more traditional concert settings, timbre was one of the main pillars of the conception of a piece. Exploring the use of synthesised sounds combined with ambiguous harmonic progressions helped me develop an alternative method of conceiving electronic music from its timbre, just like I did with acoustic music.

3. Multimedia approaches to observe and document mundanity: methodologies

This section will analyse the methodologies employed throughout the course of the PhD. The investigation primarily involved practice-based research, comprising the creation of original musical and audiovisual compositions. Concurrently, theoretical research was integrated into the compositional process to enhance potential responses or reactions to the research question. The investigation has been essentially symbiotic, wherein theory confluences with practice and vice versa. In the case of this project, there is a mutually beneficial relationship between these two modes of research, cultivating connections between the concept of 'everyday life' and the aesthetic elements within my works. An important aspect of this symbiotic relationship is interdisciplinarity, as opposed to multidisciplinarity, whereby methodologies and knowledge from diverse fields interact with each other and are combined synthetically as part of the research process. The conceptual framework of 'everydayness' that encapsulates the project has been used to investigate the convergence and divergence between various media forms.

Yannis Kyriakides' PhD dissertation 'Imagined Voices: A Poetics of Music-Text-Film' (2015) illustrates examples of media correlation and proposes an approach to analyse said correlation between a multitude of media by studying the convergence and divergence of different relationships (Kyriakides, 2015: 65). He divides these relationships into two categories: firstly, relationships that are sensory in nature and, secondly, relationships that are rooted in semantics. He then establishes three subcategories for each one of them: synchronisation, place, and scale in sensory; style, story, and sentiment in semantics. Kyriakides starts from the analysis developed by Nicholas Cook in *Analysing musical multimedia* (1998), where the first question he addresses is whether an idea is consistent or coherent. Kyriakides, however, suggests that 'relations between media in a multimedia work function on many different levels, and change over time, so that something that coheres on the sensory level, for instance in synchronicity, might be contradictory on a semantic level' (Kyriakides, 2015: 68). Building from this concept, he designs a classification that analyses the different elements of each medium independently. By offering a structure for examining the audiovisual and symbolic layers of meaning within an interdisciplinary work separately, the system contributed to the analysis of some of my pieces, allowing me to delve into the connotations inferred by the different disciplines individually, as well as interacting with each other.

My role as a composer-researcher embodies an autoethnographic approach. Autoethnography involves, ultimately, 'setting a scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections between life and art' (Jones; Adams and Ellis, 2013: 124). Through my audiovisual compositions, I explore subjects that resonate deeply with me, studying the core joy of artistic creation. In their article 'Autoethnography: An Overview' (2011), Ellis, Adams and Bochner examine autoethnography as a method to acknowledge the countless directions in which personal experiences affect the research process. (Ellis; Adams; Bochner, 2011: 274). Given that this project has mainly been approached through my own artistic practice, employing this method provides a suitable means to incorporate and reconcile subjective and emotional matters, as well as my personal influence in the research (Ellis; Adams; Bochner, 2011: 274). Autoethnographic stories yield insights that cannot be observed or reflected upon through other modes of knowledge (Lockford, 2014: 287), enabling me to construct and justify meaning through the use of musical and audiovisual expression.

In conjunction with the autoethnographic components and to further enrich my engagement with the research question, the theory-based research for this project also includes elements of ethnography. Ethnographic methodologies have been employed to focus on the examination of cultural systems, popular beliefs, and mutual events, which help both the members of a context and its visitors in comprehending a particular cultural background (Maso, 2001: 136–144). Consequently, a nuanced understanding of musical and artistic tendencies and their respective frameworks has been vital for effectively immersing myself in the context in which my work exists and which undeniably influences it.

Methods of semiology and semiotics have been considered in order to make connections in meaning. To evidence these connections, I have identified examples in music and other arts in which similar aspects are taken into account and which contribute to the character of the work. In his article 'Reflections on the Development of Semiology in Music' (1989), Nattiez points out that there is a 'lack of unity in musical semiology', and that is 'a reflection of the state of semiology in general' (Nattiez, 1989: 21). However, he still finds common aspects in the existing semiological theories, which have been used for the purposes of my research. These aspects are the essence of music as a signifying system, the epistemological orientation of the author, and the selection of a semiological paradigm (Nattiez, 1989: 21–23).

I find semiology relevant for this project, as most of the compositions written for the research have a strong conceptual core. These works aim to emphasise the underlying concept as much as the purely musical or visual elements, which inevitably relies on semiotic aspects to convey its message. Some of my works reference other works, genres, or artistic disciplines,

depending on my capacity to communicate those references and on the audience's ability to recognise and interpret them, which even though it is not my main intention as a composer, is an undeniable consequence of alluding to and getting inspiration from the work of others. Being a project that is based on and motivated by my everyday experiences, it will address cultural, social, and political issues, as my works will be inherently impacted by the cultural and historical context that has surrounded this academic and artistic exploration.

Louise Harris, when introducing *Composing Audiovisually* (2022) states that the book encourages 'the importance of interrogating personal experiences, contexts and preconceptions in exploring our responses to audiovisual work' (Harris, 2022: 4). She continues that 'whilst it is written from one specific, personal perspective, it also advocates for frameworks and mechanisms of engagement that specifically foreground the role of the self and the importance of personal context and experience' (Harris, 2022: 4). *Composing Audiovisually* soon became a pivotal perspective for my research, as it proposes a methodology that supports social tendencies cultivating audiovisual art practices and focuses mainly on live practice (Harris, 2022: 13).

> Audiovisual practices are fundamentally interdisciplinary, drawing usually from more than one field in which critical discourse is extremely well established yet not fitting fully into either one of them. Whilst discourse in other art forms has advanced and developed over several hundreds of years, audiovisual practices are still, at least in the forms in which they are considered in this volume, at a stage of relative newness (Harris, 2022: 49).

This paragraph suggests that the inherent interdisciplinarity of audiovisual practices makes them both complex and flexible. Because these practices combine elements from different disciplines, they can offer unique perspectives and approaches. However, their interdisciplinary nature also leads to challenges; unlike other art forms with a long history of critical discourse, audiovisual ones are relatively new and therefore there are fewer standardised methods for analysing and discussing them. As a result, artists working in audiovisual fields have to create new frameworks or adapt existing ones to understand these works effectively.

A central aspect of the methodology and creative process of this research is the idea of becoming a 'different' kind of composer, which emerged from my interest in experimenting with forms of artistic expression that are beyond the historic role of the music composer. Jennifer Walshe's *The New Discipline*, published in 2016, presents a radical shift from the traditional notions of what it means to be a composer and what artistic practice is. This

manifesto-style text challenges the established hierarchies and conventions, merging different components of contemporary artistic practices, technology, and interdisciplinary processes. Walshe reflects on the role of the composer, which is not limited to music creation, but provides new ways to interact with music and sound, artistic expression, and the context that surrounds them.

Through integrating music with performance, multimedia, and conceptual practices, composers can loosen some of the more rigid boundaries of the classical music tradition, embracing more liberating methods to explore artistic creativity and approach it through their own context. This may help them reflect on contemporary issues and concerns, potentially allowing them to engage with wider audiences. To be a 'different' kind of composer involves a departure from the conventional expectations of writing music for the established concert music settings, audiences, and performers. It requires adopting experimental, interdisciplinary, and inclusive compositional systems, partly as a response to and reflection on the contemporary world in which we live and create, and it promotes questioning of the institutionalised models of artistic expression. The portfolio submitted as part of this project departs from the established compositional methods I conformed to for years, which consequently motivates me to question my identity and purpose as a composer. By using sound recordings, films, and day-to-day situations as music material, I try to include the external factors that benefit my creativity, highlight my skills, and, somehow, define the aesthetic of a practice that aims to describe and be directly influenced by its context.

3.1. Addressing everydayness

In *Everyday and Everydayness* Henri Lefebvre defines the everyday as 'a set of functions which connect and join together systems that might appear to be distinct' and argues that the everyday 'is therefore the most universal and the most unique condition, the most social and the most individuated, the most obvious and the best hidden' (Lefebvre, 1987: 9). While the surreal and the extraordinary tend to captivate our attention more easily, we must not forget that they are a part of everyday life as well. There is a history of discrimination in the everyday, which can reveal why it has been perceived inferior to more exceptional experiences. For years, some individuals from specific groups of society, such as women or working-class workers have inevitably lived under the restrictions of everyday life. Even in modern times, in which we try to fight the disadvantages between different fractions of society, we see the repetitiveness of mundane tasks as an aspect of ordinary life that does not fulfil our cravings.

The mundane is fundamentally repetitive and therefore can also be monotonous. We can predict our actions and our reactions. However, for this reason, it still is, to some extent, a relatively homogeneous part of our lives collectively.

In *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre writes: 'in a sense residual, defined by "what is left over" after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out by analysis, everyday life defines itself as a totality' (Lefebvre, 2008: 97). Here Lefebvre links the concept of everyday with a personal totality, which I find to be ambiguous. There is a risk in defining the everyday as totality as I am aware that every person bears daily life individually. For this reason, my project does not seek to define or analyse a unified belief, but to document a part of everyday life in which I take part and that I know, and to use it as inspiration.

When incorporating the idea of ambiguity into my compositional practice, I accommodate myself to the unknown and to the intricate meanings of sound and visuals as art. Embracing ambiguity in this way allows me to explore creatively the contrasts, complexities, and uncertainties of everyday life. We are constantly encountering contradictions in life, which interdisciplinary work can reflect by exploring the blurring lines between different disciplines, just as we experience all the parallel elements of our lives. Mundane sounds like footsteps, a water flow, or traffic can be used as 'musical' and 'non-musical' elements, the same way that a video of someone walking, heavy rain, or a bus can be interpreted as an art piece with a narrative or simply as a documentation of a moment. These sounds and images, which we barely notice consciously, are always present in our daily lives. By accommodating them into compositions and not giving them a clear meaning or purpose, I invite the audience and myself to engage with the sounds and images of daily existence that we take for granted.

In my compositions, I aim to embody ambiguity in the choice of the compositional process, where the outcome of the piece will be influenced by external factors, such as location, time, or even chance. When I film a casual moment in my life, the result is a representation of a specific occasion, place, and time that will never exist identically again. For example, my audiovisual work *Karaoke* from *Handmade Souvenirs (from the flat)* (see section 5.1 for further reference) shows and talks about two seagulls that were flying around the roof of the building in front of where I used to live when I filmed the video. In the same way, field recordings also represent the sound of a precise moment and place in time. This can open up the piece to multiple interpretations, in a way symbolising how everyday life is experienced individually by different people in different times. Similarly, I address the concept by integrating various media components such as visuals, sound, and text, through which I can introduce diverse layers of

ambiguity. These layers may not directly work as a correlation of the others, likewise leaving free space for meaning.

3.2. Conceptualising my compositional method

My approach to composition is interdisciplinary, usually integrating sonic and visual elements together. This is the way I perceive daily life. Then I recognise the aspects that characterise it and make mental associations and memories. One of the main ideas that influences my work is a DIY outlook towards artistic creation, which allows me to use multiple disciplines, regardless of my level of expertise in them. While I normally conceive my interdisciplinary works by using music-based techniques and tools I have acquired over the years training as a composer, other disciplines constantly interact with these musical decisions and inform them. My aim when combining multiple disciplines in a non-virtuosic way is to advocate for a DIY ethos and to explore a kind of art creation that is close to my experience as a person equally enjoying and enduring day-to-day life.

My ideas usually develop both from personal experiences and external stimuli, which later lead to a more theoretical analysis of how and why they work as part of a composition. If I am surrounded by something that pleases me or intrigues me in any way, I will take a picture of it, film it, or record the sound. Then I will write a note on my phone or a notebook of what I was thinking when I recorded that pleasant or intriguing moment. Thus, I will be able to use it as inspiration and material for a new audiovisual piece. Using these recordings as artefacts inevitably affects the aesthetic qualities of a composition from the moment of its conception, although I later manipulate and develop them further by editing them. For me, inspiration emerges from elements that already exist, such as people, landscapes, nature, or objects, among others. After documenting these inspiring elements, I will arrange them by making compositional decisions for them to become an art piece. By taking advantage of already existing material and making it into art, I intend to explore an aesthetic experience based on abstracting from but also seeing ourselves in something that is familiar to us, providing a sense of emotion and rapport. Phenomenology focuses on our experience and engagement with the world around us, where the fundamental origin of all meaning relies on our lived experiences. Through a phenomenological view in art, we can pursue an approach that addresses how we perceive life, therefore offering the audience an emotional engagement with the art piece. The viewer's own experience of the work consists of, in a way, recognising themselves in it. This creates a balance between abstraction and connection, and between disassociation and intimacy.

3.3. The role of improvisation

Throughout the course of the PhD, I discovered the ability to be an improviser. What enabled me to be a proficient improviser was not my instrumental performance skills but the idea of spontaneity, a concept that soon became crucial for the study of everydayness and its portrayal in interdisciplinary compositions. Mundanity did not limit my practice, as I learnt to repurpose it through a spontaneous use of my abilities and the compositional tools available.

Improvisation plays an important role in defining a creative position that is not based on mastery. When the focus of an improvisation moves away from virtuosity, the composer's position can be more fluid and less hierarchical. The pressure to prove technical skills to an audience and to ourselves disappears and we can concentrate on delivering a more egalitarian exchange between our performance and the material of the composition. This not only democratises the process, but also offers a fresh connection to the composition, prioritising a more emotional response to the act of composing in the present and interacting with the environment.

From a conceptual perspective, improvisation can be seen as a form to reflect on life's constant flux. By rejecting virtuosic outcomes, I can focus on the relationship between the performer-composer, the audience, and the process of making music as a shared lived experience in the present time. As a result, the compositions are characterised by an unpredictable structure free from technical restrictions, welcoming and finding aesthetic pleasure in imperfection.

Something I explored through the research was the idea of 'edited improvisation'. This process consists of taking the recording of an improvisation and editing it by adding layers that are made with material from that same recording, making it an additive process, rather than a reductive one. This way, spontaneous and instinctive decisions overwrite virtuosity. My piece *Illusion*, which will be discussed later in section 5.3, is an example of 'edited improvisation'. Another approach to improvisation was through the use of text language. Because we mainly use verbal language in contexts that are not necessarily associated with music creation, employing it for musical improvisation allows a distinct sense of playfulness and surrealism that cannot be achieved through music material on its own.

The portfolio of this research is divided into audio works and audiovisual works. These two categories involve the approach I have taken to answer the research question. The audio works are external opportunities that include collaborations with other musicians. In this

section, the conceptual aspect was initially not as thoroughly explored as it was in the audiovisual one, mainly due to the COVID-19 restrictions to perform and collaborate live with other artists, which inspired me to develop further the topic of the research through other less collaborative media. Therefore, trying to answer the research question by writing music for other performers became unattainable until later in the project. In this commentary, the works are discussed chronologically within their own category, to provide a sequential sense to the growth of my practice within this project.

4. Imagining: audio works

Before I started working on my PhD, my compositional practice was primarily centred on sound, which is why that was my first approach when conducting this project. Even though, as mentioned above, working with audiovisual elements broadened the possibilities to examine the research question, it has always been important to me to write pieces that are purely musical. As a researcher, this is because I want to continue exploring a field that is seemingly familiar. As a composer, it is because I enjoy writing music for ensembles and orchestras and, ultimately, it is the joy of making music which made me become a composer and inspired me to use sound as the medium to conduct this investigation.

Methodologically, these pieces represent my most natural approach to making art, which is through sound. It was important to me to familiarise myself with the research question, to tackle it as instinctively as possible. Music composition has been a part of my artistic identity, and therefore of my daily life, for longer than other disciplines. By using a recognisable practice to deal with the research question, I was able to develop intuitively the audiovisual works around the concept of the project.

Leroy Anderson's *The Typewriter* (1953) and Gabriel Prokofiev's *Concerto for Turntables and Orchestra No. 1* (2006) are two successful examples of orchestral works that were inspired by and executed with some of the technologies of their time. All the elements of these pieces can be performed live and do not need the visual aspect of the performance to speak about the ordinary machinery of their time. When I started conceiving this project, I was not thinking about doing an evident portrayal of some of the models of our everyday life's technologies, but to use these easy-access tools to inspire and make music pieces that spoke about our immediate surroundings.

Steve Reich's *Different Trains* (1988), a piece for string quartet and tape, juxtaposes the composer's daily journey in childhood with that of enforced train journeys during Nazi Germany. He does this through recordings of speech, train sounds and other everyday noises, combining them with live string quartet. While I find this piece extremely moving, I was more interested in translating the idea of everydayness through concert music solely, rather than using an image of it to blend with the instrumental layer. Tackling the translation of this idea only through concert music was challenging, but in the first instance I did attempt to explore the concept of everydayness merely through instrumental music.

In September of 2020, when I started pursuing my PhD, life had already been adapted to its extraordinary circumstances. The adjustment to the COVID-19 rules during the previous Spring had to happen so promptly that after the summer most things felt like they had existed under the limitations of a pandemic for years, and music was one of them. Live music as we knew it stopped existing and the world acclimatised itself to it. To me, this was an absurd situation and I felt very conflicted with the idea of accommodating my identity as a composer to the absence of live performances. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines absurdism as 'a philosophy based on the belief that the universe is irrational and meaningless and that the search for order brings the individual into conflict with the universe' (Merriam-Webster, 2024). This belief inspired the first work in this portfolio of pieces.

4.1. Cute Requiem

For five percussionists. Commissioned and performed by the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire's Percussion Department in Birmingham in 2020.

Cute Requiem was a chamber piece for five percussionists and explored the concept of absurdity through the juxtaposition of cheerful, optimistic sounds and the purpose of a requiem. With this piece I was seeking to provoke an emotional response, producing a feeling of conflict after listening to a joyful piece whose title defined it as a requiem. Due to the restrictions the piece could not be performed in public, and therefore I was not able to gather substantial feedback on the audience's perception of the two conflicted ideas.

In *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), Albert Camus describes human existence as absurd and pointless, as something without an aim. Soon after this essay, in the 1950s, a few playwrights focused their works on the idea of existentialism, writing theatre responses to a meaningless world. These works usually portrayed tragic and nonsensical situations and characters involved in repetitive activities or parodying real life through clichés. COVID-19 had most of us very steadily involved in repetitive activities, even parodying what real life used to be. The pandemic left the world of live performing arts in a nonsensical position where artists and their works had to fluctuate in drastic ways in order to survive. However, it was very reassuring to see art blossom in extremely restricted circumstances. Even though I did continue to compose purely instrumental works as part of this project, I realised that without the possibilities of live performances my work had to be relocated to a medium that would allow it to express and expand the area of the research.

4.2. I'm noddin' my head like yeah movin' my hips like yeah

For alternative orchestra. Performed by Royal Birmingham Conservatoire's Alternative Orchestra and conducted by Daniele Rosina.

I'm noddin' my head like yeah movin' my hips like yeah was written for the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire's Alternative Orchestra, which consisted of a mix of various wind instruments, percussion, harp, electric guitar, and two amplified string instruments. The piece is a celebration of the weirdness of the culture of the waltz. A waltz is a ballroom dance where pairs hold each other while revolving within the confines of a room. Waltzes are very accessible for untrained dancers, as they are characterised by a basic pattern in 3/4 where the accent is on the first beat of each bar. They often follow a repetitive structure consisting of traditional Western classical music harmonic progressions, sometimes starting in a major key and modulating to the relative minor. They are ordinary pieces of music and a popular, even mundane, part of the Western dance music tradition.

While I intended to celebrate a culture that I find strange, writing a waltz for a non-standard orchestra was, somehow, a decision based on the irony of it. Lauren Elkin, in *Art Monsters* writes: 'The art that most beguiles and intrigues me is gunning for our sentiments. I don't want a degree of irony separating me from art, from experience, from feeling' (Elkin, 2024: 60). For me, in *I'm noddin' my head like yeah movin' my hips like yeah* irony did not work as the right vehicle to celebrate the tradition of the waltz, because it detached me from experiencing the piece as a waltz. Even though, isolated from its conceptual core, the musical outcome of the piece certainly pleases me, I realised that, for the purpose of this project, I wanted my works to speak sincerely.

4.3. Psychodrama for Orchestra

For orchestra. Performed by Performed by Sydney Conservatorium of Music Symphonic Orchestra and Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Symphonic Orchestra and conducted by Roger Benedict.

Psychodrama for Orchestra was written for a collaboration between the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Orchestra and the Sydney Conservatorium of Music Orchestra. I really struggled to write this piece because I felt very disconnected from the process of writing a traditional orchestral piece. For almost two years before I was commissioned to write this orchestral work, I exclusively focused my practice on writing pieces in which I could take a performing role. Performing my work gives me a kind of power and control over it that only composing it does not. There is only so much I can do as a composer and I can never perceive

my work in an authentic way when it is performed solely by other musicians. I value the variations in performance that different orchestras or ensembles would make of the same piece, but in that case the piece would be theirs as much as it is the composer's. I do not feel comfortable with the hierarchies within a composer-performer relationship. A piece of music is not the same if it sounds differently and therefore, the function of the composer loses part of its essence. It is important to me to be a composer wholly, and that is why I find more authenticity in the work I can control in all respects.

Because I did not know what this piece would be about when I started writing it and I was also hesitant about getting involved with something that would become problematic, I called it *Psychodrama for Orchestra*. Psychodrama is a psychotherapy method where people role-play and present themselves dramatically to understand specific circumstances of their lives and to solve personal issues. The performance, in my opinion, was somewhat dramatic, and it did assist me in understanding specific issues that needed to be addressed as part of this project.

> I'm a writer, that's an acknowledge fact, a datum, self-evident, a definition. I can write or not write, I can go several weeks or several months without writing, or write 'well' or write 'badly', that alters nothing, it doesn't make my activity as a writer into a parallel or complementary activity. I do nothing else but write (except earn the time to write), I don't know how to do anything else, I haven't wanted to learn anything else… I write in order to live and I live in order to write, and I've come close to imagining that writing and living might merge completely (Perec, 2020: 26–27).

One of these issues was the wrong idea that, in order for my research to be acknowledged as an interdisciplinary work, and for myself to be considered an interdisciplinary composer, my practice always had to include, somehow, elements from multiple disciplines. However, another essential aspect of the project was to use what is available and, at the time, I did not take advantage of it. I reclaimed the importance of this composition a few months later and ended up using the recording for one of the pieces in *Special Moments* (see chapter 5). There were also technical problems with my score that hindered the efficiency of the orchestra during the rehearsals, such as the lack of rehearsal marks. Neglecting those details had a huge impact on the performance and, regardless of my frustration with the hierarchical relationships within the orchestral music tradition, I should have focused more thoughtfully on the work I committed to deliver.

Psychodrama for Orchestra, or at least my idea of it, had an epic character that I attempted to emphasise through the use of different types of cadences and sometimes excessive

orchestration. The issues and general carelessness, however, made the outcome far from heroic, resulting in a rather disappointing performance that, not only had I failed to make interdisciplinary, but also merely orchestral.

4.4. Words Beyond Our Comprehension I & II

(I) Electronic music and voice. Released online in 2023.
(II) For five players. Commissioned and performed by Plus-Minus Ensemble in Birmingham in 2023.

In *Words Beyond Our Comprehension I* I wanted to explore improvisation. I struggle to improvise musically, probably because of my lack of proficiency as a performer, which inhabits my ability to compose in the present time. However, I am more comfortable with verbal language and I can use it for improvisation. With a list of words that I had previously came up with as a starting point, I decided to record myself improvising their meaning by getting inspiration from my surroundings. This piece, unlike the other of my pre-recorded works, seeks to emulate the idea of a live performance, where the temporal and spatial contexts of the recording influence the outcome significantly. Any variation in these contexts would have affected the meaning of the words.

Words Beyond Our Comprehension II is an ensemble version of the first piece, wherein musicians perform the electronic background music from the original composition. Given that the meanings of the words are not improvised in this version, I was keen to incorporate alternative "improvised" elements to the performance while I read the words and their definitions. The ideal performance of this version of the piece would include a horse: I would enter the stage leading a horse on a leash. The musicians would start playing the background music as I begin reciting the words and what they mean. The horse would remain steady beside me. Upon finishing reading, I would wait for the musicians to finish performing the music, after which I would walk off the stage with the horse. Horses are striking and solemn animals and they can be trained to stay motionless. The horse's presence on its own would add a compositional layer to the piece that a smaller or restless creature would not.

Although addressing the research question through audio works alone was more challenging than when visual elements were incorporated, I still consider this collection of works relevant to my project. When I write concert music, I use a medium that is mundane to me, deeply rooted in my own experience of everyday life. I adapt my practice to my possibilities and investigate the topic by taking part in the concert opportunities available. This helps to diversify

the media through which the research is explored, which not only contributes to developing the project further, but also makes my compositional practice more versatile. The pieces in this section still tackled the research question by reflecting on my own experience of everyday life through music. Despite some of the challenges that I encountered using a single medium, the essence of the research can still be explored exclusively through sound, which reinforces the idea that, without visual support, the music can reflect personal experiences. While I initially had the impression that audiovisual work made it easier to express complex ideas, the audio works are equally valuable, as they offered varied resources to the creative process and celebrated my daily practice of composing. Therefore, the core of the research remains significant in both media.

5. Documenting and Reimagining: audiovisual works

Throughout my exploration to use everydayness as a catalyst to create, filming became essential for documenting my research. The visual component of a piece, even in purely instrumental works, contains meaning. By controlling and using this meaning intentionally, I realised that filming and editing videos are crucial factors of my interdisciplinary compositional practice, as not only have they contributed to documenting my research but have also allowed me to think creatively about daily life.

In her book *Composing Audiovisually*, Louise Harris states:

> If the word *sound* should refer not to what we hear but the medium through which we hear it, then continuing to refer to sound as the auditory component of an audiovisual work might prove less than useful […] sound should describe universal medial experience, not sculpted or material sonic objects, and so referring to relationships between *sound* and image might be argued to be fundamentally unhelpful as there is a dissonance between the two terms (Harris, 2022: 57).

This paragraph articulates some of the elements that have been considered when composing audiovisually for this project. It redefines *sound* and how our understanding of it changes in audiovisual contexts; it implies that only focusing on sound as an auditory experience might be restrictive; it proposes sound as a universal medial experience; and lastly and most relevant for this research, it argues that discussing the relationship between sound and image in audiovisual works is intrinsically problematic because of the dissonance between the notion of image and the redefined notion of sound.

Through the works discussed in this section of the commentary, I have aimed to incorporate a more holistic understanding of sound that goes beyond sonic qualities and becomes a medium, which has allowed me to explore different perspectives on the interaction between sound and image. However, the four works included in this chapter not only share their audiovisual qualities, but they all follow a similar structure, consisting of smaller pieces that are part of a bigger composition. The integration of sound and image became my preferred method to explore the research question, because by synthesising both disciplines I was able to prioritise the structure to address the topic. By organising these four pieces together, I hope to provide a sense of narrative within my research journey.

5.1. Handmade Souvenirs (from the flat)

Film and music. Premiered online as part as CODA Festival 2021. Artwork by Alicia Benito.
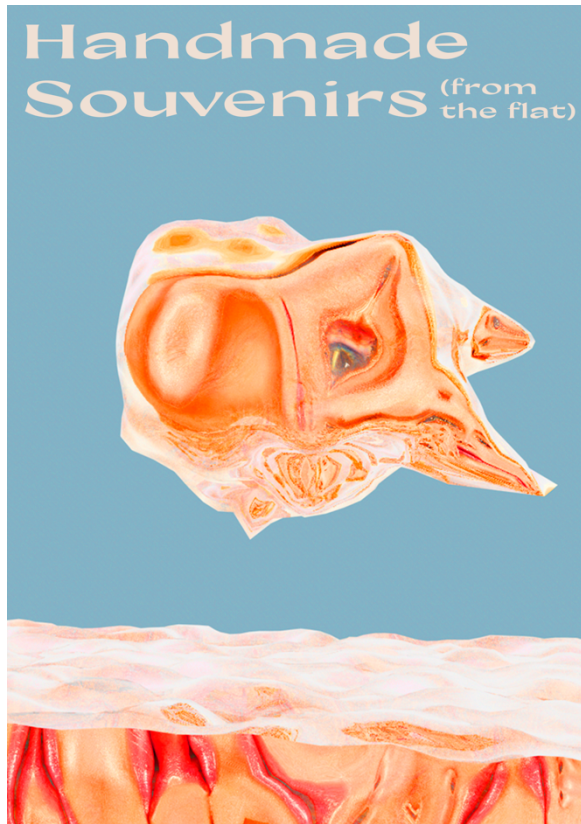
Handmade Souvenirs (from the flat) (2021) was my first approach to audiovisual composition within this project. It consists of a series of shorter pieces in which I aimed to investigate the concept of ambiguity by documenting various experiences of everyday life. Here, ambiguity is explored as the space between binaries: the positive and the negative; happiness and sadness; comedy and seriousness. In this context, the midpoint between two opposites is always neutral, lacking any inclination toward neither of the extremes, making it inherently non-ambiguous. However, between the neutral point and each of the extremes, there is a dimension where ambiguity can exist.

A key aspect of the inspiration behind *Handmade Souvenirs (from the flat)* is the concept of 'absence'. In his book *Aesthetics of Absence* (2015), Heiner Goebbels explores this idea and suggests that absence can be understood as 'the creation of spaces in-between, spaces for discovery, spaces in which emotion, imagination and reflection can actually take place' and as 'avoiding the things we expect, the things we have seen, the things we have heard, the things that are usually done on stage' (Goebbels, 2015: 4–5). During the COVID-19 pandemic, absence became a significant theme for me and it was within this space that ambiguity emerged. The lack of a typical social life, strong musical engagement, certainty, and safety induced a sense of disconnection, pushing me to find connections between the missing elements from pre-pandemic life and those that were still present. By contrasting the isolated experiences of my current life with memories from the past, I discovered a new sense of intimacy and exposed unique networks of meaning within my own perception and imagination.

The film is a collection of souvenirs from the period between January and May of 2021, crafted from various elements and memories that I had preserved as a reminder and a commemoration of an experience. In essence, this work is a form of creative recycling, constructed during a time of absence using mementos from times of presence. Yet, every

souvenir in *Handmade Souvenirs (from the flat)* represents the current moment: they are portrayals of the everyday that reveal not only my life but also the lives of others. Thus, it is not merely autobiographical, but also performative, as I seek to elevate the ordinary aspects of my life to a level of significance, infusing routines with a sense of grandeur and romanticising day-to-day occurrences by transforming them into art.

The third souvenir of the film, *Everything you can think of is true*, whose title comes from one of Goebbels' texts (Goebbels, 2015: 64), was inspired by a poem that I wrote to myself for my 28th birthday:

Reflections on becoming a very old woman

I have so much fun ahead.
And next year, I'll still have so much fun ahead.
And the next one, I'll still have so much fun ahead.
And the next one, I'll still have so much fun ahead.
And the next one, I'll still have so much fun ahead.
And the next one, I'll still have so much fun ahead.
And the next one, I'll still have so much fun ahead.
…

The poem continues indefinitely because its open-ended meaning allows me to envision and anticipate as many years of fun as I wish. I incorporated the poem into this souvenir because I found the idea of repetition naturally comforting. The visuals in *Everything you can think of is true* are familiar to the audience; although these images will not perfectly align with each audience member's memories —nor would that be desirable— they can still offer a sense of reassurance by echoing experiences that other viewers might also recognise. Given the uncertainty surrounding the future of performing arts and my own career as an artist, the repetitive nature of the poem provided a source of comfort and stability at a time when predictability and certainty were absent.

An element I started exploring through *Everything you can think of is true* was the relationship between live video sound and composed recorded sound. This souvenir is dreamy and contemplative and invites the viewer to enter a state of abstraction. The videos are all of water (the sea, a lake, a swimming pool, rain, and light reflecting through a glass of water), but we cannot hear the water. Isolated from their original sounds, this allows us to experience the images in a rather magical way, even though they are all familiar. The dream and the magic are destroyed for a few seconds when the original sound of the rain comes up. This idea was

inspired by the act of dreaming and waking up. When we wake up in the middle of a dream, if it was a good dream, we wish to come back to it and continue dreaming the same story. This souvenir symbolises the utopic desire of going back to a dream after we have woken up.

While I was composing this piece, I realised that ambiguity is an intrinsic part of the creative process. For me, the process itself is ambiguous and does not fully disclose its true nature until the work is completed. One of the souvenirs I made for this film, *If it's not working, drop it*, did not reveal its essence even after I had finished creating it, so I made several alterations, but it still lacked any clear content or meaning. It became a process that seemed indefinitely unlimited, too vague to be classified as an 'artefact'. Despite this, I chose to include it in the final piece, playing at a very high speed, as a way to embrace the process and to support myself as a creator and researcher, even when the result did not meet my expectations. The title is quote from *A Choreographer's Handbook* (Burrows, 2010: 41).

Karaoke is a satirical take on my time during the lockdown, when I would spend hours watching seagulls through my window. As the months went by, observing the seagulls' daily activities seemed more engaging than my own life, leading me to draw comparisons between human existence and that of seagulls. This analogy prompted me to reflect on the absurdities latent in life. The piece was largely improvised: I began by filming the seagulls outside my window and then recorded myself singing what I imagined the birds were doing. Following this, I layered in two additional sonic elements, one percussive and one harmonic. The subtitles were the third layer, and serve to make the song, along with the underlying introspection on the seagulls' lives, more accessible to the audience, effectively inviting them to sing along.

The do-it-yourself approach is a central theme throughout this piece and serves as its foundational idea. However, this focus is more prominently featured in certain parts, such as the introduction and the interlude. The videos associated with these segments were originally intended to be shared in WhatsApp group chats, often as jokes or replies to friends' messages. Works like *Ven a dormir*, *For a Dying Pigeon*, and *Ode to an Ode* are also inspired by the possibilities of creating through easy-access technologies, but unlike the raw footage or audio that might be captured in the moment, these pieces are more polished and crafted with a contemplative approach.

Dance dance dance dance dance dance dance, on the other hand, explores the ambiguity between opposites, a concept previously outlined briefly in the initial paragraph of section 5.1. While the original speed of the videos shows a sense of optimism, that mood shifts when the

videos are played at a higher speed, where the intensifying energy obscures the initial impression of joy.

By creating unexpected connections from the own lived experiences and portraying them through mixed media, I sought to establish a space where daily routines and rituals could be reinterpreted. At its core, *Handmade Souvenirs (from the flat)* is a depiction of a specific location during an extraordinary period in contemporary life, in which I was forced to meticulously examine every aspect of a house that had become the whole of my surroundings.

5.2. Livin' la Vida Local

Film and live string quartet. Commissioned by Birmingham New Music and premiered in Birmingham by The Saorsa Quartet in 2022.

Livin' la Vida Local is the only audiovisual work in this portfolio that was specifically composed to be performed live. The piece shows someone's journey to the shop to buy toilet roll. Throughout the film, the same music is played on three different occasions. The editing process was driven primarily by making musical decisions on rhythm and pitch and the musical transitions emphasise some of the elements already present in the video, such as its ceremonial aspect, which is noticeable without the music. There is only one transition without music, which works because of the musical relation between the two clips. In the first of these two clips, the pitch from the song in the shop is the same as the one from the street in the following clip.

One element I did not fully explore as part of this research was collaboration, which I initially regretted overlooking. As a composer and as an artist, collaboration is key. It is enriching as it provides a great source of potentially unexplored knowledge. However, while I was creating this piece, I decided to handle everything myself: from filming and appearing in the videos to editing them and composing the music. This approach resulted in a very democratic piece of work, where every element is perceived with equal importance. Contrarily, collaborations often involve hierarchies. While ceremonies normally celebrate something, therefore making it the focus of the occasion and creating a hierarchical structure, our everyday lives, though oftentimes celebrated, do not impose a hierarchical order, as we are always the subjects of our own experiences.

The idea behind *Livin' la Vida Local* of making non-hierarchical pieces of music strongly shaped some of my views as an interdisciplinary composer and contributed positively to the

conception of the most recent work in this portfolio, *Special Moments*, discussed below in section 5.4.

5.3. You Might Not Be as Good-Looking as You Think

Hybrid album, music and film. Released by Birmingham Record Company and NMC Recordings in 2022. Artwork by Alicia Benito.

This album was released by Birmingham Record Company and NMC Recordings. It highlights an approach that integrates music and visuals to create temporal illusions, exploring the interplay between perception and reality. This album is an extension of a previous piece, containing tracks that were originally written for *Handmade Souvenirs (from the flat)*, as well as new ones. The music and videos were composed, produced and mostly performed in my home studio, and they were inspired by the idea of documenting different mundane details of my life, to be able to observe, experience and reflect on them timelessly. *Prelude to an Album*, *There Will Never Ever Be Another Me*, *Ashes Don't Sing but They Whisper*, *Dry and Austere*, *Too Sad to Sing*, *Illusion* and *Eleven Allen Keys* are all the tracks that were written specifically for the album.

This album was an excellent opportunity to release music with the support of established music labels such as Birmingham Record Company and NMC Recordings. However, my approach to it, as a hybrid album, did not work in this format. Traditional streaming platforms such Spotify and Apple Music work well in terms of accessibility, which aligned with my concept for this project, but they were not the most adequate platforms to release the audiovisual pieces. In my opinion, the album works well as a music album, and for this I am happy that it was released like that. The disconnection between sound and visuals, though, makes it hard to perceive it in a hybrid way.

For me, the outcome was mostly positive. As a music composer, having the opportunity to work on a solo album was an exciting pretext to write, perform, record, and produce an assemblage of pieces that were released as part of the same collection. On the other hand, as an interdisciplinary composer and researcher, I struggle to legitimise this collection within the limits of this project. Most of the works that were released with *You Might Not Be as Good-Looking as You Think* are already a part of a previous collection that was written for the research and, out of the seven new pieces that were specifically written for the album, only one of them follows the idea of the hybrid-form album. Thinking about the work retrospectively, I would have liked to develop the audiovisual contents of it further.

There are, however, many sonic elements that I explored through these new seven tracks and that I would have not exploited in a similar way otherwise. *Prelude to an Album* is a sequence of chords that could go on in loops eternally, in which the harmonic tensions and rests remind me of a sphere that shrinks and expands, like a heart beating. This provides an epic quality to the stability of repetition, keeping the narrative alive in the monotony of the track.

There Will Never Ever Be Another Me was named after the jazz tune *There Will Never Be Another You*, which I played endlessly during the summer of 2020. I recorded myself improvising with my keyboard and then edited the recording. There is only one version of every improvisation and they belong to a very specific time and place, like specific events on a calendar.

Ashes Don't Sing but They Whisper was first composed as a silent video and the sounds and music were added later. It tells the story of many summer nights in a rural village in Ourense, Spain. The piece contains one of the most linear narratives of the album, with all its videos presented chronologically. The music and visual edits add a layer of abstraction to specific moments throughout the night. My first idea for this piece was to leave it as a silent music track with a video showing images of elements whose sounds are so familiar to me that would not need to be included to be heard. However, what is unusual about the environment where these sounds exist is that it is extremely calm and quiet, which is why they sound so prominent. I decided to keep the sound of most of the videos to celebrate its importance in the narrative of the story. As discussed in section 5.1, the relationship between live video sounds and composed recorded sounds works as a way to separate a dream from a reality. Particularly in a piece like this that was somehow inspired by nostalgia, one could argue whether the dream is the composed sounds or the live video sounds. In either case, the relationship between the two is formed by alternating or juxtaposing two different dimensions. When alternated, there

is no sense of rupture within the narrative, whereas when juxtaposed, the multidimensional space becomes apparent and the narrative distorted. In this piece, because the alternation is constant, the two dimensions are obvious and the narrative continues to be relatively linear, as each of them follows its own continuous description.

Dry and Austere is an eccentric piece where I used mostly unedited Logic Pro's samples and three real instruments: piano, viola, and voice. When I started composing with Logic, I was fascinated with all its production options, even though I did not know how to use most of them. Some of the first tracks I produced with Logic are extremely raw and use the software's samples with their presets, resulting in chaotic compositions full of incoherent sounds. This was the idea I wanted to emulate with *Dry and Austere*: exciting chaos and an array of yet to be explored possibilities. There are two sections in this track: the first one, where I used the electronic sounds to accompany myself while I sing, and the second one, where a real piano and viola are accompanying my voice. The contrasting sections also allude to the idea of surrealism discussed in chapter 2, and the voice is supposed to work as the channel that links the unconscious to the conscious. Both sections can either be perceived as the conscious or unconscious: the first one, even though it was very rationally produced, is technically more artificial, and the second one, whilst it was performed by real instruments, is dreamy and generally less preoccupied with aesthetic or performative considerations.

Too Sad to Sing is an extension of *Dry and Austere*, and it works as its coda as well as adding another piece to the album, to make a total of eleven tracks.

Illusion is a recycled piece from a recording of an improvisation during a live performance in November of 2021. The recording is presented backwards, slowed down, cut and overlapped, providing a completely different experience of time than the original performance. It is a contemplative re-composition exploring how sound can affect our perception of time and can absorb us in a state of confusion where we don't have a clear idea of time passing. *Illusion* is supposed to be meditative, which is why it is an only-sound piece. The experience of time through visual and aural elements together is more accurate, as the relationship between the different media combined in a composition can give us a more realistic understanding of time. It contains a stronger sense of narrative that stops us from hearing timelessly. The lack of time in music, however, is an illusion, but this illusion is necessary in order to contemplate or meditate through it.

Eleven Allen Keys is the eleventh and last track of the album and, quoting the lyrics of the song, is 'an attempt to make a pop song about Allen keys' (Benito, 2022: online). Many

examples of pop songs have a very polished sound production and light-hearted, simple lyrics. I really value this about pop music, but when I am composing, I often find myself reflecting on a topic and on whether it will be relevant enough to be the concept for my composition. In 2021, I had an idea about writing a pop-inspired song about Allen keys. I did not think I would include it in the album, because I thought that listeners would question the seriousness of it or the lack of depth of the lyrics. However, my music is always serious and introspective, even when it is uncomplicated and whimsical, so in the end I decided to include it in this collection. The song starts traditionally with an instrumental introduction with an ostinato and continues presenting the lyrics: first, a verse, then the chorus. After this, the composition turns slightly more abstract, progressively moving away from the more traditional pop form.

Every piece of the album has been discussed in this commentary in an autonomous way, because they were all composed as individual works. However, they each represent a very specific memory or moment in time, which is the idea that glues them together. I now see all the pieces in this collection as one set, but a stronger sense of connection between the different tracks would have been beneficial to achieve a more cohesive compilation. I noticed that the lack of visual content in some of the tracks, combined with tracks with a strong visual element, resulted in a rather ambiguous approach to the idea of a hybrid-form album.

Even though the interdisciplinarity and hybrid aspect of the album might have been developed further, as discussed above, *You Might Not Be as Good-Looking as You Think* explored the subject of my investigation. As such, it was a successful experiment which allowed me to improve several factors of my compositional journey (such as collaboration, sound production, and the relationship between sound and visuals) that were later central to continue cultivating the project.

5.4. Special Moments

Film and music. Released online in 2023.

> Why do we read a writer's journal? Because it illuminates his books? Often it does not. More likely, simply because of the rawness of the journal form, even when it is written with an eye to future publication. Here we read the writer in the first person; we encounter the ego behind the masks of ego in an author's works. No degree of intimacy in a novel can supply this, even when the author writes in the first person or uses a third person which transparently points to himself (Sontag, 2009: 41–42).

Special Moments is an audiovisual piece that was written between September of 2022 and June of 2023, and draws its inspiration from personal diaries. These journals are not typically composed with a lucrative idea in mind, which contributes to their authenticity: a quality I deeply appreciate. Diaries capture the invaluable and intimate details of our everyday experiences, creating records that are inherently priceless and not intended for public sale. My project was not conceived to be commercialised in any way; however, unlike a diary, it was made for public viewing, which means it might not be as candid as a private journal would be. It integrates elements of music, text, and video that were initially created without the intention of public exposure. This collection of pieces is the first of my works within this portfolio wherein all compositions are conceived simultaneously in both visual and sonic dimensions. In contrast to prior works where the music was normally crafted first, followed by the addition of the visual components, these nine pieces were pre-composed as cohesive audiovisual entities. They are crafted from spontaneous, repurposed materials gathered for personal memories. As an art piece, each one of them is composed holistically as a unified audiovisual entity, rather than as separate sonic and visual elements that were later amalgamated.

When I first began working on this piece, I was very interested in exploring what it means for me to sell art and to generate profit as an artist. Although I believe in receiving a fair compensation for my artistic work, I have often felt that my work seemed more honest when it was not commissioned. Even if this sense of authenticity might not be obvious to the audience, it is certainly clear to me, and therefore important to me in my role as a composer. I find my work more fulfilling when it carries a sense of honesty, as it reflects both my strengths and my weaknesses throughout the creative process and in the final outcome. I aim to embrace my weaknesses when I compose, not just because they help me grow, but also because I want to utilise all the resources I have at my disposal, even those that might not necessarily be considered strengths. While I often learn from my limitations as they end up being a positive aspect of my work, the absence of external expectations allows me to be more open about my vulnerabilities as an artist. In contrast, commissioned works inherently come with certain expectations, which can be both beneficial and restrictive. Meeting the expectations of a commissioner or an audience is an enormous accomplishment for a composer, but it can also constrain the freedom to express oneself artistically. Unfortunately, my experience with commissioned work so far is limited, so my perspective may not encompass the full range of insights from more experienced composers in this context.

When I relocated to London from Birmingham in August of 2022, I quickly started to miss attending student concerts. Students' compositions are truly remarkable: they are insightful, peculiar, sometimes pretentious, extremely honest pieces of work. The composers' creative

processes and their personalities become openly manifested in the premieres of these works. Students use all the tools they have available very enthusiastically and are keen to reveal their character as emerging artists. During my first few months in London, it was challenging to find that same level of raw, unfiltered, and innocent experimentation. Nonetheless, I was pleased with my decision to leave Birmingham, as I felt that my career had become closely tied to a vibrant academic-experimental music scene where my work found a comfortable niche, and I wanted to test its survival options in a different context.

Kinderszenen is the first of the nine special moments and the piece that encouraged me to compose this diary. It was inspired by my early experiences as a piano student, where I was required to follow rules strictly. Despite children being given numerous instructions to follow, there is a profound sense of freedom in childhood. I found the number of signs in my neighbourhood, each telling me what I should not do, quite humorous, and it reminded me of being a child. The music used in this piece is *Moon River*, and it is a recording I made when I was young, at a time when I was not afraid to record a performance filled with mistakes. The visuals in the film are designed to align with the imperfections in the piano playing. If my younger self was brave enough to record herself playing with unplanned pauses, wrong notes, and a rather erratic rhythm, then my current self should be equally willing to share it publicly.

The creation of *The Moon Looks Like a Toe Nail*, the second special moment of the piece, was inspired by the idea of transformations—instances where objects resemble other objects, or evolve into something else, or have an identity that is different from their appearances. As discussed in section 4.3 above, in November of 2022, I wrote a piece as part of a collaboration between the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Orchestra and the Sydney Conservatorium of Music Orchestra called *Psychodrama for Orchestra*. Despite my dissatisfaction during the première with both my composition and the performance, this experience served as a catalyst for acknowledging the evolution of my compositional interests over recent years. I experienced a sense of disconnection from the piece and from the notion of being a composer. I find more satisfaction in my compositions when I engage with them physically, as this creates a deeper emotional connection, rather than merely an intellectual one. I filmed the video from *The Moon Looks Like a Toe Nail* one night as I walked around London and the light coming from the windows of the tall corporate buildings reminded me of music scores from the Renaissance. By using the videos I filmed during my walk, I have the impression that I am performing my pieces as well as composing them.

Light and Warmth and Chords and Dreams and *Pollito Chicken Gallina Hen Lápiz Pencil Pluma Pen*, the next two special moments, were initially conceived to experiment with video

editing, employing visual postproduction as a compositional approach. My goal was to use Final Cut to orchestrate the visual component of these pieces, adopting similar techniques to those I often apply when composing with sound electronically. In the second one, the music is intended to gradually achieve an epic quality. It narrates the routine of commuting to work in the morning. To a certain extent, I obtain satisfaction from being told where to go, when to go, and what to do. I find the routine relaxing as it allows me to disregard some of my responsibilities temporarily. Despite the natural stress associated with jobs, not having the time to focus on other aspects of my life when I was at work was, paradoxically, a source of comfort. The film starts by showing a small video in the corner of the screen of an escalator going up to the exit of an underground station. After this, it shows different versions of the same video, presenting them one by one in different parts of the screen, each one of them playing at a faster speed than the previous one. There are seven variants of the video, representing the seven days of the week. The first five videos are smaller and correspond to the weekdays. The last two videos, which correspond to the weekend, take up a larger space of the screen and are stretched out, displaying a sense of contrast as well as a feeling of routine and inevitable preparation for the coming week.

In the next special moment, *It's Always Summer Under My Duvet*, I aimed to incorporate an additional dimension of content beyond the usual sonic and visual elements. This added level is also sonic but comprises spoken words. Over the course of a week, I documented my bedtime anxieties and, at the end of the week, recorded myself reading some of these concerns. The music in the background is an old recording of myself playing *The Entertainer*, by Scott Joplin, during a music lesson where my teacher guided me as I performed. The discipline associated with learning an instrument can sometimes generate substantial amounts of anxiety. And yet, one of the main reasons why I enjoyed learning the piano, was because I could entertain others.

In *Poem* I tried to get rid of the natural musicality of a poem. In the video, which is silent, a Spanish sonnet is being typed with an irregular rhythm, dissolving the music that is ingrained in poetry. I am the writer of the sonnet, which is about the end of a romantic relationship and the subsequent search for an identity. I feel very Spanish when I write poetry and I can hear in the sound of the words the culture in which I was raised. Who I am and the fundamentals of my identity were created around that language.

This is the English translation of the poem:

> I write in this language that is my own
> in search of freedom and isolation
> from what I idolise, yearn for, and lament
> that we abandoned a long time ago.
>
> And though I desire and demand and trust
> and remember and search breathlessly
> and to feel you with me, I deceive us
> I hear my voice indecisive and hushed.
>
> I distance myself from you by writing a sonnet
> that suggests who I was before I had you
> and loved you quietly sometimes.
>
> Knowing that having each other was a stroke of luck
> with love and tenderness, I promise to you
> that you were, forever, my person.

Bedtime Routine is about the steps prior to going to bed at night. According to Collins Dictionary a routine is 'the usual series of things that you do at a particular time', as well as 'the practice of regularly doing things in a fixed order' (Collins Dictionary, 2024: online). If the goal is going to bed, then all preceding steps are executed to achieve that goal. Sometimes, the intention to go to bed comes up when we are at home, near our bed, while other times it arises when we are away from home. When close to our bed, the series of tasks that need to be done to end up in bed is more concise. When away, a preliminary series of tasks must be completed before doing the tasks at home to finally arrive to our objective. Our day-to-day existence is unavoidably routinary and methodical. There are only so many steps we can take to reach our daily life targets. *Bedtime Routine* is about one of the steps before going to bed at night, which is the way back home. The later it is when I make my way back home, the longer the journey feels. In the video, I'm crossing the Thames to go to St. Paul's station to get the underground home. By playing the video without any cuts, I try to emulate the feeling of a long journey. The different sounds, first the sounds from the video, then the electronic more abstract sounds, then my voice singing a familiar song, and then again the sounds from the video, correspond to our ability to focus on our surroundings as well as to get distracted by our thoughts when we walk.

The visuals in *All the Noise Around Me* were made from footage I captured on my phone during a club night in Easter of 2023. Initially intending to go to a rave, I bought the wrong tickets. Because I could not obtain a refund, I finally decided to use the purchased tickets and attended a club in central London that was hosting a networking event for wealthy single professionals in their thirties and forties. The night was rather disappointing, and my most vivid memory of it is of the toilets, where I spent most of my time, talking to other dissatisfied women. In daily life, we often overlook contrasts due to our habituation to our everyday rituals and surroundings, unable to perceive contrasting elements. However, that particular night really contrasted with my usual daily experiences. This obvious contrast is why the night was included in the *Special Moments* collection, as recognising or experiencing contrast is an essential aspect of life that encourages a deep appreciation for our everyday routines.

In *Special Moments*, the main goal for me was to emphasise the idea of a journey and the purpose of personal diaries. By making videos of memories that are all close in time, that deal with more personal and sincere matters, and that were created spontaneously, the collection documents the composer's life between September of 2022 and June of 2023. The piece concludes this research's portfolio of works and aims to honour everyday life and its endless artistic possibilities.

6. Conclusions and future work

The pieces in this portfolio constitute a collection of musical and interdisciplinary experiments that document and were inspired by my own involvement with 'everyday life' and the technologies embedded within it. Every work functions individually, approaching a diverse portrayal of different mundane moments and reflections on daily life, working as pictures, diary entries, or responses to our day-to-day routines.

The aim of the research was not only to explore the different ways in which an individual's own experience of everyday life can inspire or benefit interdisciplinary compositions, but to explore it through the use of the technologies that are part of our daily lives and that allow us to engage closely and intimately with our environment. This proposal has supported my intention to compose in an interdisciplinary manner and it has allowed me to document and reimagine personal experiences of what ordinary life is like.

To imagine is to develop a mental concept of something; to document is to record something; to reimagine is to develop a new idea of something. These three concepts allude to the compositional process that has emerged during the length of the project, and which has also outlined my assertion that the authenticity of and familiarity with everyday life and its DIY technologies can always be exploited to incentivise artistic creation. Everyday life and the technologies within it constantly evolve, reflecting our needs and habits. Through my research I did not attempt to propose specific technical or conceptual compositional suggestions, but to elaborate on the idea of taking advantage of what we have when we have it. The project supplies a basic structure for the use of DIY technologies and explores potential models to experiment with interdisciplinary composition inspired by our participation in everyday life.

An essential part of my compositional process that I developed throughout the duration of this project has been the integration of the audio and the visual channels with one another, working in a way that is interdisciplinary rather than multidisciplinary, synthesising both disciplines into a single practice. This procedure allows a harmonic use of the sonic and visual elements and contributes to the achievement of coherence and a close understanding of and rapport between sound and light.

In my opinion, the examples of interdisciplinary work within this portfolio that merged video and audio were more successful in addressing the research question than the ones entirely based on sonic elements. Even though the research initially considered an interdisciplinary

method as the means to undertake the investigation and did not necessarily specify film and music as the main disciplines, the audiovisual pieces in this collection combine the elements from different fields in a more democratic way than the ones that focus primarily on sound. However, the development of my audiovisual practice as the main channel of conducting the research was also a circumstantial decision motivated by the context of a pandemic and the consequences this brought, such as the lack opportunities to perform live or collaborate with other musicians.

A positive accomplishment of my practice as a composer and researcher has been the use of spontaneity as a compositional approach that prioritises the process over the outcome. Emancipating oneself from the idea that only the polished final product is the composition to arrive at the belief that the process, too, is the composition has been very beneficial in understanding that there are many suitable creative paths. Choosing the medium is just as essential as choosing the concept.

The way I have treated the notion of 'everydayness' in this project has been based on my personal understanding of it, but some ideas of routine and prosaic tasks are socially shared. I talk about these activities that are inherently a main aspect of our lives because through a view that is close to us, I can communicate with the audience effectively. Everyday life urges us to be resourceful and imaginative daily and DIY technologies support that. Beyond this investigation, the conceptual core that inspired it has served me to analyse my practice as an artist. Continuing the PhD in Birmingham for two years after relocating to London has allowed me to pursue this exploration in a relatively secure way, without entirely disconnecting from the institutional support that has nurtured my career for many years. However, this also means that my exploration remains within familiar boundaries, preventing me from completely immersing myself in a new context. Despite this, being physically away from the institution has positively influenced what DIY technologies and the 'everyday' mean to me and how to use them accordingly to cultivate my work and to carry on developing my identity as an artist outside an academic setting.

The main concepts that have been explored throughout the course of the research are interdisciplinarity, the democratic combination of sound and visual elements, the relevance of everyday life and its power to be a source of artistic creation, and the consideration of the creative process as a compositional tool.

The main aspects of this project's contribution to knowledge are the development of interdisciplinary methodologies for composition, and particularly through the use of DIY

technologies; the reimagination of the creative process, which challenges more traditional methods for composition; and a wider understanding of what it means to be an artist today, celebrating the growth of one's artistic identity.

In respect to the potential impact of the research, this portfolio may influence other composers and artists to integrate everyday technologies into their practice, adopting and defending a process-led approach to composition. It also has the potential to influence music education, promoting the importance of using multiple media when teaching composition and interdisciplinary work in academic settings. Additionally, by talking about everyday life, the project addresses a reflection on culture and society and offers a view on contemporary culture and the role of technology in our daily routines.

In the future, I would like to continue exploring the possibilities of my practice by incorporating other disciplines to my work, as well as benefiting from live and site-specific performances. I see interdisciplinarity as a constitutional condition of my practice as a composer, because it helps me delimit my work and adapt it to the boundaries of various contexts, preventing me from depending solely on traditional scenes or academic institutions. It also encourages me to participate actively in many different steps of the compositional process and allows me to use my technical, intellectual, and emotional artistic knowledge in a versatile way.

Working on this project, I achieved my goal of using my own personal experiences as an incentive to compose interdisciplinary works. I have found an accessible combination of media that have allowed me to conceive and produce a portfolio of compositions to investigate the proposed research topic. After this project, I feel I must continue exploring the harmonisation of different media through DIY approaches and oppose the idea of considering myself a music composer, to let my artistic identity be shaped outside of a conventional heritage and keep growing and celebrating my own instinctive transition.

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