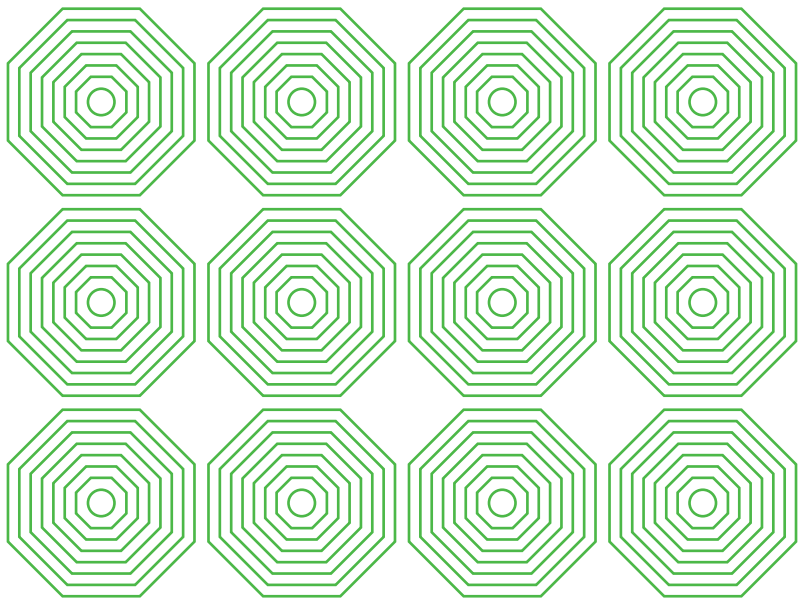


Paul Whitty
The Morning

featuring
[rou] + Icebreaker



Make an effort to exhaust the subject, even if that seems grotesque, or pointless, or stupid. You still haven't looked at anything, you've merely picked out what you've long ago picked out.

— Georges Perec

Paul Whitty links this quotation, from the 1974 essay 'Species of Spaces' by the French author Georges Perec, to his soundscape project *somewhere a field* — based on field recordings made close to the River Exe in Devon between 2013 and 2017. Perec was a prominent member of the Oulipo group of writers and mathematicians, who wrote according to strict self-imposed rules (only using words found in another text, for example, or those that exclude one or more letters). As founder member Raymond Queneau described them, they were 'rats who construct the labyrinth from which they plan to escape'.

Whitty might be described as an Oulipian composer, imposing similarly dogmatic and surrealistic constraints upon his work. Field recordings themselves are a kind of Oulipo game, in which one selects a place and a time and then must, to some extent, accept whatever sounds happen within that frame. But the same can be more strongly said about many of Whitty's instrumental works, in which algorithmic processes are used to recompose works of historical music, and thus dig more exhaustively into their expressive potentials.

The Morning (2009) was composed as part of the project *Vauxhall Pleasure*, with the artist Anna Best. Thinking about traffic, pollution and gardens, Best and Whitty created a series of works and performances centred around Vauxhall Cross in south London: the site of a former pleasure garden and today one of London's busiest traffic junctions. Whitty's composition is based on the cantata of the same name composed by Thomas Arne, whose first movement — 'The glitt'ring sun' — describes a radiant sunrise that is ironically at odds with the present-day Vauxhall landscape of weary city commuters. Arne's cantata was first performed at Vauxhall Gardens, where he was appointed composer in 1745. There is therefore a psychogeographic side to Whitty's choice of source music, and this haunted quality pervades his compositional process. Scored for soprano, two violins, viola, cello and harpsichord (like Arne's original), *The Morning* applies a simple algorithm to Arne's music: each performer is asked to perform every note in their part as a separate moment, starting with the highest and ending with the lowest. This radical re-ordering — a kind of deliberate misreading — has multiple effects.

First, Arne's two minutes become stretched to almost thirty. Second, Arne's slowly building string harmonies and blossoming soprano melody are abstracted into isolated pitches and a slow harmonic descent. But most importantly, new meanings, new forms, are created out of this re-ordering of the music's semantic units: in Whitty's deconstruction, Arne's ecstatically shimmering aria is transformed into an increasingly despairing search for the clean light and air its text speaks of.

*ago an anything at effort, even exhaust
grotesque haven't if long looked.
Make merely, or, or, out out picked picked
pointless seems still stupid subject that
the to what. You you've you've.*

Nature is a language, can't you read? (2015), written for the British ensemble Icebreaker, is composed around a similar misreading process. This time it is applied to each page in turn of Michael Gordon's *Yo Shakespeare!*, a classic work of New York postminimalism commissioned and first performed by Icebreaker in 1992, and the first recording Whitty heard by the group — it is the opening track on their seminal 1994

album *Terminal Velocity*. (The work's title derives from a separate chain of connections: it is a line from the 1986 single 'Ask' by The Smiths, itself possibly derived from Alan Bennett's 1978 TV play *Me! I'm Afraid Virginia Woolf*, which of course has its own pool of allusions) Again, the same instruments are used as the original.

Each note of Whitty's misreading can be played for its original duration or held for as long as a single breath or bow stroke allows (or even longer if the performers agree), dissolving the punchy hemiola rhythms of the original. As an additional level of intervention, three of the players have mp3 players loaded with field recordings, which they start at the beginning of the piece but which do not sound for its entire duration. When these players hear their recordings (over earpieces), they should switch from their misreading of the Gordon to listening to that recording, using it as an audio score to be realised using a strategy of their choice: a different kind of misreading. When the recording stops, they switch back to the Gordon. The consequence of this is that the austere framework of isolated tones derived from the Gordon score is counterpointed

by more improvisatory, continuous textures: two completely different sound sources brought into dialogue with one another.

Faint residues of the musical sources remain in both *The Morning* and *nature is a language*. That is partly down to the distinctive instrumentation of both pieces as well as the implied performance styles. But it also owes something to their distinct harmonic languages: Arne's typically Baroque, one-chord-to-a-bar cranking up of intensity; and Gordon's overlapping series of dissonant pedal tones. Something of each still comes through: no longer as their original grammars of tension and expectation but rather as fields of relative possibilities. As for the acoustically filtered field recordings in *nature is a language*, it is impossible to know how these relate to the originals, but they invest the music with an entirely different range of possibilities.

*an at if, or, or to ago out out. You, even.
Make long that what seems still you've
you've effort haven't looked merely
picked picked stupid exhaust subject
anything grotesque pointless.*

... **I was bored before I even began** (2009), composed for Whitty's group [rout], takes a different approach. (Its title, though, comes from another Smiths single, 1987's 'Shoplifters of the World Unite'.) The source material in this case is not a historical score but the in-the-moment actions of performers and their instruments. With the instruction to play 'a series of sound-making actions', moving methodically from one to the next, the five musicians improvise noisy, distorted, gritty textures derived from the physicality of their actions. Using contact mics attached to each instrument, these sounds are collected and processed live by Whitty through a series of guitar effects pedals. Although its methods are different, *I was bored* shares with both *The Morning* and *nature is a language* a fascination with creating new sonic meanings from deliberately discontinuous materials.

Tim Rutherford-Johnson, 2022

The Morning

recorded in Headington, Oxford (2012)

I was bored before I even began

recorded at The Science Museum (2009)

Nature is a language, can't you read?

recorded in Kingston (2016)

Recording engineered by Paul Whitty
Mixed + mastered by Samuel Rodgers
All compositions by Paul Whitty



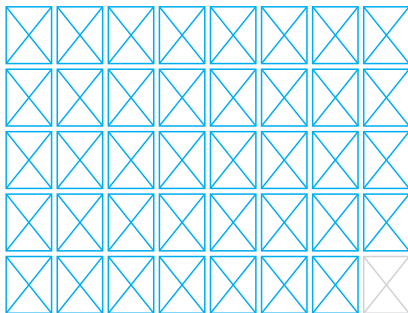
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Paul Whitty
thirty-nine pages

violin
Darragh Morgan

piano
Mary Dullea



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Paul Whitty
thirty-nine pages

Darragh Morgan, violin
Mary Dullea, piano

msv28509

Morgan and Dullea's playing is absolutely perfect here, retaining an essential objectivity while attending precisely to every detail of this poised and intricate music.

Tim Rutherford-Johnson
Musical Pointers

Violinist Darragh Morgan and pianist Mary Dullea go to work on this intriguing material with panache. The work is beautifully performed and spaciouly recorded... a delicately put together and intricate set of movements.

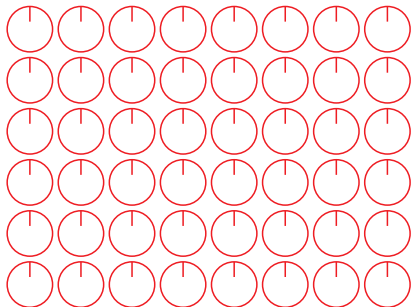
Catherine Nelson
The Strad

This music poses as many questions as it answers. Whitty is playing games with our memories — both our assumptions about what we think 19th century music might sound like, and about how his music restructures the debris.

Philip Clark
The Wire

Jos Zwaanenburg
grist

Efthymios Chatzigiannis Stephen Cornford
Paul Dibley Paul Whitty



Each composer decisively overrides the traditional chain of command between composer, performer and listener, and I admire their conceptual boldness.

Philip Clark
Gramophone

Zwaanenburg is an authority in the field of electronic manipulation of the flute. But I was totally unprepared for what we hear on this CD. Mind-boggling. The recording is of course spectacular, but adjust to the volume.

Aart van der Wal
Opus Classical, Netherlands

Also available on Métier

Jos Zwaanenburg
grist

Efthymios Chatzigiannis
Stephen Cornford
Paul Dibley
Paul Whitty

msv28542

Five provocative cutting-edge works, each defining the new terrain in its own way. Jos Zwaanenburg has an integral role to play here and he does it with a kind of selfless devotion to the compositional demands of the moment.

Grego Edwards
GappleGate Classical
Modern Music

Soprano

Cheryl Enever

Violins

Angharad Davies

Emma Welton

Viola

Bridget Carey

Cello

Audrey Riley

Harpsichord

Catherine Laws

—
27:38

**I was bored before I even began
[rout]**

Saxophones

Christian Forshaw

Electric guitars

David Arrowsmith

Paul Newland

Hammond organ

Catherine Laws

Violin

Emma Welton

Double bass

Roger Linley

**Contact microphones
and signal processing**

Paul Whitty

—
10:33

**Nature is a language, can't you read?
Icebreaker**

Pan Pipes, Flute, Piccolo

James Poke

Rowland Sutherland

Saxophones

Christian Forshaw

Bradley Grant

Violin

Emma Welton

Cello

Audrey Riley

Guitar

James Woodrow

Bass

Pete Wilson

Marimba

Sam Wilson

Keys

Dominic Saunders

Andrew Zolinsky

Walter Fabeck

—
31:45