



School: Bath School of Music & Performing Arts

Researcher: Dr Matthew Sergeant

Project Title: Lichen (2016, for electric lap-steel guitar)

UOA: 33 - Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies

300-Word Statement

Lichen was commissioned by ELISION Ensemble (Australia) with funds generously supplied by the RMIT Gallery, Melbourne. The piece was premiered at RMIT Storey Hall, Melbourne Australia on 21st September 2016 by Daryl Buckley (solo electric lap-steel guitar).

The research content of the work comprises means of applying tenets of new materialist philosophy as a compositional strategy. Here, 'the capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals [...] act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own' (Bennett 2010: viii). More specifically, the work explores the further ideas from philosopher Karen Barad. The human/instrument assemblage is considered as an *intra-action*, '[t]hat is, in contrast to the usual 'interaction,' which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action.' (Barad 2007: 33)

Lichen's soundworld therefore arises through layers of collisional processes. On the page, the score is constructed from materials originally composed independently for the two hands of the guitarist before being brutally collided. On a material level, a radical scordatura was devised, rendering certain strings incapable of holding stable pitches (e.g. string-IV). The instrument itself thus unpredictably encrusts the music with glitches (cracks, falters, instabilities). On the level of electronic processing, a network of effects pedals was devised such that permutating their involvement (at various points in the piece, see score) within the signal chain further encrusts the sound with additional electronic glitches. What emerges is an entwinement that is not reducible to the input ingredients alone.

The research content of the work has been accepted and presented at international conferences, including the Music and Sonic Art (MuSA) conference in Karlsruhe, Germany.