

HIGH CULTURE AS SUBCULTURE:  
BRISBANE'S CONTEMPORARY CHAMBER  
MUSIC SCENE

By

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**Declaration**

The work presented in this dissertation is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text, and the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. The primary research project on which parts of this dissertation are based was subject to and cleared by a departmental ethical review according to the requirements of the University of Queensland.

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## **Abstract**

The aim of the dissertation is to discover the extent to which methodologies and conceptual frameworks used to understand popular culture may also be useful in the attempt to understand contemporary high culture. The dissertation addresses this question through the application of subculture theory to Brisbane's contemporary chamber music scene, drawing on a detailed case study of the contemporary chamber ensemble Topology and its audiences. The dissertation begins by establishing the logic and necessity of applying cultural studies methodologies to contemporary high culture. This argument is supported by a discussion of the conceptual relationships between cultural studies, high culture, and popular culture, and the methodological consequences of these relationships. In Chapter 2, a brief overview of interdisciplinary approaches to music reveals the central importance of subculture theory, and a detailed survey of the history of cultural studies research into music subcultures follows. Five investigative themes are identified as being crucial to all forms of contemporary subculture theory: the symbolic; the spatial; the social; the temporal; the ideological and political. Chapters 3 and 4 present the findings of the case study as they relate to these five investigative themes of contemporary subculture theory. Chapter 5 synthesises the findings of the previous two chapters, and argues that while participation in contemporary chamber music is not as intense or pervasive as is the case with the most researched street-based youth subcultures, it is nevertheless possible to describe Brisbane's contemporary chamber music scene as a subculture. The dissertation closes by reflecting on the ways in which the subcultural analysis of contemporary chamber music has yielded some insight into the lived practices of high culture in contemporary urban contexts.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The broad aim of this dissertation is to contribute to an understanding of how high culture functions in specific contemporary contexts. The dissertation addresses this aim through the application of subculture theory to a localised and temporally specific sphere of art music production and consumption: Brisbane's contemporary chamber music scene.

The original decision to carry out research on this topic was motivated by what had seemed to me to be a puzzling silence in cultural studies around the lived practices and contemporary politics of high culture. Larry Grossberg has argued that cultural studies is, ideally, “not about interpreting or judging texts or people, but about describing how people's everyday lives are articulated by and with culture” (“Re-Placing Popular Culture” 67). However, it is very difficult on the basis of existing cultural studies research to imagine what even the most popular and visible forms of high culture (ballet, opera, symphonic music) might mean to those who produce and consume them, or “how people's everyday lives are articulated by and with” these forms of culture – in this sense, we know very little about what is going on in high culture. It is important to emphasise at the outset that this dissertation is not intended to serve as a defence of or an apology for high culture, and neither is it intended as a call for the reinstatement of “serious culture” to its rightful place at the centre of humanities and social science research. Neither do I wish to argue that high culture is ‘really’ an authentic form of resistance to the mainstream, or that it is indistinguishable from popular culture—even if, as Grossberg suggests, high culture could be considered to be “someone's” popular culture (“Re-Placing Popular Culture” 202). Rather, my underlying objective is to problematise the persistence and political effects of the division between high and popular culture, not least within cultural studies itself.

Therefore, the rationale for this study is grounded in the history of struggles over high and popular culture and the way cultural studies has engaged in these struggles. Firstly, if we take as a founding premise the proposition that in

postmodernity the high-popular divide has broken, or is breaking, down, then there seems little objective reason for cultural studies research to continue to exclude the cultural forms that once formed part of a dominant or elite culture. Secondly, and as I will argue in more detail later in this chapter, the exclusion of high culture from the study of cultural consumption and everyday life may even work against the democratic project that is at the heart of cultural studies as not only an academic but also a political enterprise.

### **1.1 The High-Popular Divide**

It is important to situate the formation to be referred to as “high culture” throughout this dissertation within its historical context. Lawrence Levine’s detailed history of nineteenth and 20th century American public culture reveals that the heterogeneous, even chaotic shared public culture of the pre-industrial era gave way to increasingly strict hierarchies of cultural value that were articulated to social power structures in modernity. The process by which such hierarchies were constructed involved the selective elevation and separation from low culture of previously “common” cultural forms (Shakespearean theatre is the most frequently cited example). In the United States, the interactive and socially heterogeneous public theatres of the 18th and early nineteenth centuries became silent, sacred spaces, and the performances were reconfigured as the interpretation of sacred texts whose most profound meanings were legible only to the educated few. In instrumental music, which will be the focus of this dissertation, a democratic eclecticism gradually gave way to distinctions between “serious” orchestral music and “light” band music: distinctions that privileged canonical texts over popular ones, and intellectual appreciation over pleasure and affect. As in the theatre, audiences were trained to be properly reverent and docile, and performers were trained to adhere to the “sacred texts” of the great composers, refraining from improvisation. The process of sacralisation also constructed hierarchies of cultural authority, increasing the distances between performer and audience, between the amateur and professional musician (a distinction which had been blurred and relatively insignificant earlier in the nineteenth century), and between lay and expert



audiences (i.e. scholars and critics) (Levine 138-39). Paul Di Maggio emphasises the role that institutions played in this process:

As long as cultural boundaries were indistinct, “fashionable taste,” far from embodying cultural authority, was suspect as snobbish, trivial, and undemocratic. Only when elite taste was harnessed to a clearly articulated ideology embodied in the exhibitions and performances of organizations that selected and presented art in a manner distinct from that of commercial entrepreneurs...did an understanding of culture as hierarchical become both legitimate and widespread. (“Cultural Boundaries and Structural Change” 22)

However, despite the naturalisation of the high-popular divide, it was and is incomplete, unstable, and contested. According to Levine, the high-popular divide has always been “permeable and shifting” because “the primary categories of culture have been the products of ideologies which were always subject to modifications and transformations” (8). Moving toward the contemporary contexts with which the present study is concerned, it is one of the core precepts of theories of postmodernity that these distinctions between high and popular culture are now more blurred than at any time since the institutionalisation of the “great divide” (Frow, *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* 26). In the postwar period, which we might consider to be the first phase of postmodern culture, artists and musicians<sup>1</sup> challenged and mocked the sacralisation and elitism of both traditional and modernist high culture, transgressing the modernist boundaries between Pop and Art by moving commercial pop culture into the art world (Collins 6). Since then, John Frow argues, “the modernist fantasy of self-definition through opposition to a degraded mass culture has become obsolescent, and indeed has been replaced by rather different practices of fusion of or play between high and low genres and traditions” (Frow 26).

This is particularly the case in Australia, where the connections between high culture and social power were never as clear as they were in Europe or the

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<sup>1</sup> In this category I include not only the “pop art” phenomenon as represented by Warhol, but also the return to musical tonality and rhythm of “minimalist” composers Steve Reich, Philip Glass, and Terry Riley, whose work has special relevance to this dissertation. See Keith Potter’s *Four Musical Minimalists* for an extended treatment of the postmodern minimalist movement in art music.

United States<sup>2</sup>. Australia's economic and political elites have not traditionally valued high culture (Turner and Edmunds) and have historically been disinclined to provide patronage, remaining more interested in sporting activity (Waterhouse 133). Likewise, contemporary studies reveal that Australia's "postwar elite" (defined as the most economically and politically powerful members of society) display, not highbrow, but "distinctly middle- to low-brow tastes" (Turner and Edmunds 227), and most Australians do not hold to value distinctions between "commercial entertainment" and "the arts" (Constantoura 223).

As the essays in the recent anthology *High-Pop* demonstrate through the discussion of a range of case studies, what we might think of as "big" high culture ("big" in terms of the expenses of their production and consumption, and in terms of the monolithic architectures with which they are associated; that is, opera, ballet, and major museums) is now marketed and consumed in ways formerly associated more exclusively with popular culture. For example, mainstream cinema has seen a recent flowering of literary adaptations or films that reference literary works (such as *Shakespeare in Love*), albeit with a postmodern and irreverent twist (Corrigan 157-59). Additionally, the ability to exercise "educated" taste – which is to be distinguished from middlebrow "good taste" – in the domestic sphere (through interior design, decorating, or cooking) is no longer the exclusive property of experts, but has been extended, via the mediation of "auteur" tastemakers, to a mass audience who "now seemingly possess the tasteful sensibility necessary to enact it" (Collins, "No (Popular) Place Like Home" 195). John Frow's earlier argument that it "no longer makes sense to talk of the "two cultures", one absorbed into the commodity cycle and

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<sup>2</sup> In Europe, cultural institutions depended on state subsidisation, and their politics were the politics of elitism, metonymic excellence and exclusivity (and even exclusion) (Waterhouse, Huysen, Bourdieu); in the United States, wealthy individuals or private philanthropic organisations who felt a sense of duty to "improve the cultural tastes of the common people" were the main sources of visual and performing arts funding (Levine, Waterhouse, Di Maggio). Australia has partially reflected both of these trends, including the late nineteenth century disappearance of the earlier sense of a "shared public culture" (Waterhouse 134) but high culture never become as solidly entrenched, and the division between high and low culture was less marked than it was in Europe or the United States (Waterhouse 154). For a detailed anthropological study of the establishment and maintenance of insitutionalised musical modernism in Europe, see also Georgina Born's *Rationalizing Culture*.

the other transcending or protected from it” (*Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* 23) has particular resonance here.

Dealing with these issues in relation to music specifically, Roy Shuker writes that:

[...] the traditionally claimed distinction between ‘high culture’ and ‘low culture’ has become blurred. High art has been increasingly commodified and commercialized, as with classical music’s star system of conductors and soloists, while some forms of popular culture have become more ‘respectable’, receiving State funding and broader critical acceptance. (4)

Despite this, as Shuker goes on to say, the discourses that maintain the boundaries of these categories continue to operate in the media and in vernacular theory:

[...] clear distinctions and cultural hierarchies remain widely held, not least within particular cultural forms, by those involved in their production and consumption. (Shuker 4)

Within the cultural studies imagination, high culture has not dissolved into or become indistinguishable from popular culture; rather, it remains as one of the ex-nominated “others” against which the otherwise slippery category, “the popular”, is defined. John Fiske, to take an influential if contested example, proposes that high culture is fundamentally a category produced institutionally, through government support, education systems, and concert halls, galleries and museums (“The Cultural Economy of Fandom” 31). Although Fiske goes on to oppose “socially and institutionally legitimated” “official culture” against popular culture, which “receives no social legitimation or institutional support” in rather too crude a manner, his emphasis on the institutional over the aesthetic is most useful. It enables us to evade questions of what cultural forms *should* be “legitimate” in order to think more clearly about what is going on within cultural formations that already occupy this category. However unstable and contested a category high culture is, then, it is nevertheless a term that is uniquely descriptive of the cultural formations that operate within particular institutional settings, and within particular discursive frameworks.

## 1.2 Cultural Studies, High Culture, and Popular Culture

It is by now axiomatic to say that early British Cultural Studies tradition worked against cultural elitism on the grounds that it contributed to the oppression of the working class. The first phase of cultural studies, as represented by the work Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, actively refused the exclusion of popular culture from academic study, and sought to revalidate working class and popular culture (Turner 38-77; Garnham 493). What was at stake in cultural studies researchers' interest in popular culture was not so much the defence of the products of the culture industries on the basis of their cultural value (or more selfishly on the basis of the personal tastes of those concerned), but an engagement with the relations between "the people" and structures of dominance and subordination, as represented by and negotiated through popular cultural forms and practices (Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" 462). Proceeding from this concern with "ordinary" people's lived experience of popular culture, coupled with a certain optimism about its political potential, it also became a central principle of cultural studies that the processes whereby meanings and values are attributed to cultural texts and objects are not the sole province of either the cultural industries or elite cultural gatekeepers, and cannot be controlled or determined by them, at least not in any direct or unilateral way (Turner 85-88, 133; During 6). This orientation toward the cultural agency (rather than simply the domination) of ordinary people has been reflected in a particular interest in fans as visible proof of that audiences for mass culture are not necessarily, or at least not all, passive (Jenkins 287). A brief overview of fan studies will serve as an example of the ways in which older assumptions about the high-popular divide remain methodologically encoded in cultural studies approaches.

Fandom is constructed by cultural studies as a specific mode of engagement with the products of the mass media, including those products that attract a cult, rather than a mass, audience, and especially the products that are characterised at least initially as frivolous or illegitimate by the "mainstream". The most distinctive qualities of fandom, however, are not its objects of choice, but its psychological intensity and textual productivity, as against the more casual and passive forms

of consumption associated with the “ordinary” media audience. In the de Certeau-derived model represented by Henry Jenkins’s influential work on science fiction and fantasy fandom, the fans are “textual poachers”. Despite operating from “a position of cultural marginality and social weakness” (26), media fans “make over” the raw materials of mass culture in their own productive practices, and thereby offer symbolic resistance to the mainstream devaluing of popular art-forms and to the “corrupted” elements of the mass media text (277-81). For John Fiske, fandom is a “shadow cultural economy” which operates outside of, but in some ways similarly to, the culture industries. It is exclusively associated with popular culture; it is to be distinguished from “normal” audiencing (which is understood as less politically active); it is associated with denigrated genres and forms, and therefore with the cultural tastes of “subordinated formations of the people”. Fandom encompasses “enunciative productivity” (talk, discussion, style) and “textual productivity” (fan fiction, fan art, fanzines), as well as media participation, and the accumulation of fan-specific cultural capital through amassing and demonstrating expert knowledge (“The Cultural Economy of Fandom” 30-34).

Joli Jenson sees fans more neutrally as keen consumers, and for her the main characteristics of a fannish relationship to culture are affinity, interest, and the amassing of insider knowledge, regardless of the status of the object of desire (9). This argument is intended to de-pathologise fans of ‘low’ culture by comparing them to “legitimate” forms of intense engagement with culture as represented by aficionados, wine experts, and book collectors:

Apparently, if the object of desire is popular with the lower or middle class, relatively inexpensive and widely available, it is fandom (or a harmless hobby); if it is popular with the wealthy and well-educated, expensive and rare, it is preference, interest or expertise. (19)

However, despite these arguments that the practices of fandom draw on processes of valuation analogous to those of high culture<sup>3</sup>, Grossberg argues that fandom is in the end exclusively a popular phenomenon:

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<sup>3</sup> In his recent book *Fan Cultures* Matt Hills has investigated the subjectivities of the scholar-fan (the academic who is also a fan) as well as the fan-scholar (the fan who is also a critical expert), while Fiske sees in fandom echoes of the hierarchical structures and evaluative practices of high culture, though “in *popular* form and under *popular* control”. (“The Cultural Economy of Fandom” 34)

[...] somehow, being a fan entails a very different relationship to culture, a relationship which seems only to exist in the realm of popular culture. For example, while we can consume or appreciate various forms of 'high culture' or art, it makes little sense to describe someone as a fan of art." ("Is there a Fan in the House?" 50).

At the heart of fan studies, therefore, lies a defence of popular culture that is also a defence of the dignity and agency of "the people". Through fandom, it is not only "elite" cultural agents who can form communities of textual criticism, production, and innovation, but "ordinary" people as well<sup>4</sup>; through fandom, popular culture provides a field on which these "textual poachers" may act as cultural agents in their own right.

It is possible, however, for cultural studies theorists to privilege popular culture as a field of enquiry without in any way endorsing popular aesthetics or pleasures. Most famously, at the conclusion of an article that discusses in detail how the category of "popular culture" has been and should be mobilised in cultural studies, Stuart Hall declared:

Popular culture is one of the sites where [the] struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured. It is not a sphere where socialism, a socialist culture – already fully formed – might be simply 'expressed'. But it is one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why 'popular culture' matters. Otherwise, to tell you the truth, I don't give a damn about it. ("Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'" 466)

Popular culture is of interest to (British) cultural studies, therefore, mainly insofar as it is an important site of hegemonic struggle, or a space where youthful or marginalised identities are negotiated.

It is for these reasons that the cultures of the old, the middle class, the elite and the middlebrow have been neglected in favour of those who were considered to be in the front lines of the class struggle in Thatcher's Britain - the young, the 'working class', the racialised 'other'. Jim Collins acknowledges the earlier

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<sup>4</sup> However, because of their own emphasis on the distinction between expert fans and "mere" audiences, the extent to which fan cultures can be considered "ordinary" has been questioned (Frith *Performing Rites* 9).

validity of this selective focus, particularly in the context of the “culture wars” that occurred in the 1990s, but warns that:

[...] the continuing obsession with marginality as the only legitimate subject matter for cultural studies leaves vast realms of cultural production untouched and produces only a distorted, self-deluding perspective if it fails to come to terms with the unavoidable fact that voices that were once silenced or marginalized are now among the most widely heard in popular culture. (Collins, “High-Pop” 16)

On this basis it is even possible to see where less sympathetic critics get evidence for arguments that cultural studies researchers have become “culture industry groupies dedicated to excavating the most recent trends in music, fashion or popular culture” and that cultural studies has become little more than “an excuse for hanging out with what is cool” (Philo and Miller 32).

But this apparent obsession with “cool-hunting” may not necessarily be an indication that cultural studies has lost all sense of its earlier political project. Taking the example of dance music, Nick Couldry suggests that it may be symptomatic of only partially recognised shifts in the power relations between youth culture and “dominant” culture:

...to study popular music consumption [...] *across* class status and other divisions [...] undermines the implicit assumption of much earlier cultural studies work that it was dealing principally, or even entirely, with the taste of *subordinate* groups. How can we possibly assume this, given the broad availability and popularity of dance music? (58)

Couldry’s argument concerns not only the inaccuracy but also the political effects of conflating youth culture and the resistance of subordinate groups:

Perhaps the most intractable blind spot in cultural studies research has been age. Although never stated explicitly, there has been an assumption that the experiences of the old are just not worth studying. We need to be clear that the other side of the countless celebrations of ‘youth culture’ is *the silencing* of the cultures of the old. (Couldry 59)

Couldry works these smaller points into a powerful argument about the overall direction of cultural studies:

[...] if our aim is to understand how cultures work, there can be no 'favouritism' in who we study. This means researching cultural experience on all sides of important social and cultural divisions. [...] Cultural studies cannot be about 'popular' culture alone; it must also encompass 'high' and 'middlebrow' culture. [...] This applies even if we argue that these divisions are being destabilized to some extent [...]. In fact, until we study in greater depth the full range of cultural materials that individuals consume, we cannot hope to deal theoretically with the changes to the landscape of taste that may, or may not, be occurring. Nor is it helpful to prioritize between different areas of cultural consumption on 'political' grounds. Even if in some cases we are sure that a particular type of music or film is more radical, more politically engaged, than others, that provides no special reason for studying its consumption. There is, in any case, always the question of how such material is absorbed by individuals *alongside* the less innovative, the less radical. (58-60, original emphasis)

Other cultural studies theorists address not only the "favouritism" of cultural studies in terms of its choice of objects, but also the ways in which the methods thought to be appropriate for particular cultural forms re-inscribe value-laden divisions between high and popular culture. Jim Collins argues with reference to high culture that:

The need to demolish *the Aesthetic* as a magical category also produced a kind of infrastructural weakness within cultural studies, namely an avoidance of texts which insisted upon their aesthetic *superiority* according to the very hierarchies that cultural studies sought to dismantle. ("High-Pop" 14, original emphasis)

A related argument is that we can no longer evade the question of cultural value, and that we need to recognise how it operates in relation to "popular" as well as "high" culture. Charlotte Brunsdon has argued that contemporary (British) media studies and cultural studies approaches to the media continue to rely on repressed value judgements while disavowing their relevance and refusing point-blank, in some cases, to engage critically with the questions of aesthetics and cultural value. In television studies specifically, "the marked populism which has partly sustained the discipline in recent years...has contributed to a refusal of anything other than political evaluation" (128). In answering the question of "what is good television", the "sideways step" which says, "forget these value judgements, let's look at what the people watch [...]" is beginning to have the effect of merely inverting existing aesthetic hierarchies (the popular is good), leaving the power relations in place" (114). Jim Collins takes a similar view,



drawing our attention to the fact that although cultural studies may have wished cultural value away, it is still very much in operation both inside and outside the academy:

Taste distinctions are hardwired into the academy through a host of institutional protocols but they remain *implicit*, articulated in terms of educational objectives that eliminate the category of personal taste in favor of social responsibility. [...] Where the academy has abandoned taste as an antiquated concept, popular taste brokers have repositioned it as a thoroughly contemporary value by conceiving of taste as the ability to make informed personalized choices out of a sea of consumer options. (“High-Pop” 18)

For Brunsdon, to refuse to engage with the hierarchies of value carried over from traditional aesthetic discourses and still in operation in the wider culture, far from weakening their power, is merely to leave them intact and fully functional:

The fact that many of the impulses which propel the study of popular forms such as film and television also involve the repudiation of the class and cultural privileges which partly constitutes the history of high art (and thus aesthetic discourse) does not mean that judgements cannot be made on grounds other than the political. It is not the exercise of judgement which is oppressive but the withholding of its grounds and the consequent incapacitating of opponents and alternative positions. We do not defeat the social power which presents certain critical judgements as natural and inevitable by refusing to make critical judgements. (129-30)

Brunsdon wants the academy to “pay some attention to the concealed ways in which we are teaching evaluation” and is concerned about the “orthodoxies” which appear to be emerging in the disciplines of film and television studies (129).

Simon Frith is more forceful, taking cultural studies to task for its ignorance of popular discrimination:

If one strand of the mass cultural critique was an indictment of low culture from the perspective of high art [...], then to assert the value of the popular is also, certainly, to query the superiority of high culture. Most populist writers, though, draw the wrong conclusion; what needs challenging is not the notion of the superior, but the claim that it is the exclusive property of the “high.” (“Defending Popular Culture from the Populists” 105)

In fact, logics of cultural value are absolutely essential to popular consumption. “The essence of popular cultural practice,” argues Frith, is “making judgements and assessing differences” (*Performing Rites* 16). Not only that, but in the

*processes* of making such evaluations, if not in the means of expressing them, “there is no difference between high and low culture” (19).

To summarise the “problem” that Frith, Brunsdon and Collins address with their arguments, popular culture has not been of interest to cultural studies for its own sake or in its own terms but only for its ideological effects or political potential. This has meant that aesthetic value has been quarantined out of the equation, with the unintended effect that persistent value judgements about “legitimate” and “illegitimate” culture are left intact. Similarly, it is a founding principle of this dissertation that the exclusive application of certain cultural studies methodologies to popular culture does nothing to eradicate or question the high-popular divide, but merely re-inscribes it. The quarantining of high and popular forms in cultural studies gives the appearance that high culture *is* interesting for its own sake and in its own terms (despite being considered to be primarily the territory of the traditional humanities), but that it is not considered to be a site of hegemonic struggle, a space where identity is negotiated, or a part of (anyone’s) everyday life, and therefore is not an appropriate subject for reception studies, fan studies, or subcultural analysis. Just as ignoring the aesthetics of popular culture implies that it is a flat and valueless domain, this lack of attention to the everyday experience of high culture conceals similar value judgements: ignoring the everyday practices of high culture merely affirms older assumptions that Culture transcends the everyday, that its true domain is that of the autonomous aesthetic. In ignoring high culture, then, cultural studies has left it more or less where it always has been – sublimely transcendent, untouched by everyday concerns, and apparently immune to the interventions of audiences. It is this “extraordinary” status that I want to destabilise: this dissertation looks at the ways in which high culture can be understood as *ordinary*.

Making high culture ordinary means finding ways to study it as a formation of everyday social practices in specific contexts. Rather than considering high culture in the abstract, we need to understand the specific ways in which it articulates to the everyday contexts, structures and processes that we are used to dealing with in our studies of popular culture. Reflecting on the “casual insensitivity” with which jazz has been treated by popular music scholars, Simon

Frith argues that “the most salutary lesson is how quickly scholarly cliches lose their grip when we move in close to particular people in particular places” (vi). This “moving in close” is fundamentally a question of methodology: it is a project that has to be carried out empirically. The question addressed by the remainder of this dissertation, then is whether or not it is possible to apply tools used to “move in close” to popular culture to high culture; and if it is possible, what will this reveal about how high culture functions in contemporary contexts? It is for this reason that the primary research for this dissertation involved an application of cultural studies methodologies used to understand the lived experience and political dynamics of popular music to a group of classical musicians and audiences in a specific contemporary context. The necessary specificity was achieved through a case study of one particular chamber ensemble, Topology, and their audience, which will be discussed later.

Chapter 2 briefly outlines the current state of music research in both cultural studies and various disciplines, and sets up the proposition that subculture theory offers the most useful set of conceptual tools for the analysis of “art music” as an everyday social practice. An historical overview of subculture theory is used as the basis for the argument that the subculture model is far from redundant, but that rather it has become limited by the contrast between the narrowness of its application and the contexts of complexity and cultural change within which its objects of study now operate. Taking account of the effects of such complexity and change on subculture theory, a contemporary and, above all, functional model of how music subcultures work is used to generate a set of investigative themes which are used heuristically in the following enquiry into Brisbane’s contemporary chamber music scene. The second part of the chapter introduces the ensemble Topology as a “high cultural” case study, and explains the methods adopted.

Chapters 3 and 4 present the findings of the case study as read through the investigative themes identified in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 grounds Brisbane’s contemporary chamber music scene in its temporal and geographic context, and orients the ensemble Topology in relation to the aesthetic, social, and ideological fields within or against which the musicians operate. Chapter 4 presents the

major findings of the audience surveys undertaken as part of the project, places Topology's audiences in relation to theories of consumption and urbanity, and concludes with a discussion of the contemporary chamber music concert as social ritual. The final chapters assess the extent to which Brisbane's contemporary chamber music scene (as represented by this case study), and by extension, other high cultural formations, can be understood as subcultural formations, and the dissertation concludes by reflecting on the problem of the high-popular divide in light of these findings.

## 2. STUDYING MUSIC CULTURES

### 2.1 Music and the Disciplines

In the last chapter, I briefly discussed media fandom as an example of peculiarly cultural studies approaches to culture. However, as the task of this dissertation is to investigate the social practice and lived experience of a form of music, it is important to note that as a cultural form, music poses special problems, not least because of the persistence of more than one discipline in centralizing texts as the object of study. A fundamental principle of framing music as social practice is that music can't be defined as an object, a thing, or even "organised sound". Instead, we have to think of "music" as a verb, as a field of social action or interaction. As Christopher Small so succinctly puts it:

Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do. The apparent thing "music" is a figment, an abstraction of the action, whose reality vanishes as soon as we examine it at all closely. (2)

The disciplines of musicology, sociology, and cultural studies (if indeed it is proper to refer to cultural studies as a discipline) have each approached the problem of understanding music socially, and not just textually, in different ways, and with varying degrees of success.

With some notable exceptions (discussed below), mainstream musicology has not only neglected popular music (at least until recently), but has also failed to find a way of understanding Western "art music" as a social practice, and instead has continued to approach it as a self-enclosed and self-explanatory formal system with no necessary relationship to actual performers, audiences, or social contexts. In traditional musicology, Western classical music is regarded as:

[..]somehow unique and not to be subjected to the same modes of inquiry as other musics, especially in respect to its social meanings; brave spirits who have attempted to do so have brought the wrath of the musicological establishment down on their heads. (Small 3-4)

Edward W. Said argues that this emphasis on autonomy is suspect, and that it impoverishes our understanding of music:

Because music's autonomy from the social world has been taken for granted for at least a century, and because the technical requirements imposed by musical analysis are so separate and severe, there is a putative, or ascribed, fullness to self-sufficient musicological work that is now much less justified than ever before. [...] ...the roles played by music in Western society are extraordinarily varied, and far exceed the antiseptic, cloistered, academic, professional aloofness it seems to have been accorded. (xvi)

However, in the last two decades there has been a significant, if not wholesale, move away from this traditional emphasis on the autonomy of the musical work – a move represented most visibly by Susan McClary, Robert Walser, and John Shepherd. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary's *Music and Society*, for example, is a collection of essays that represent the recent minority move towards sociological and ideological (particularly feminist) analysis. In the introduction, the editors state that the concept under question is that of autonomy: “[...] the notion that music shapes itself in accordance with self-contained, abstract principles that are unrelated to the outside social world” (xii). Apart from Frith's much-anthologised “Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music”, however, most of the included essays concern classical music, so that while the politics of the canon might be questioned, its objective existence is implicitly reinforced. While I do take note of recent arguments coming out of musicology that cultural studies has failed to notice the intensity of internal self-reflective debates that have occupied musicology for the last decade (Fink 135-79), the fact remains that mainstream Western musicology's orientation is overwhelmingly textual, while social processes and structures are only rarely seen as causative or contextual, rather than as co-constituents of music in themselves.

These “social processes and structures” are, of course, the traditional domain of sociology, and in another way, of cultural studies. There have been recent efforts to close the gaps between musicology, sociology and cultural studies, most notably John Shepherd and Peter Wicke's book *Music and Cultural Theory*, which “[feeds] musicology in cultural theory”, and in so doing addresses the imbalance between musicology's autonomous textualism, sociology's

structuralism, and cultural studies' unmusical concentration on "the linguistic discourses that are constructed around musical practices" (1).

Within sociology, the "social interactionist" school has a long tradition of research on music that understandably places social relationships and structures firmly in the foreground. In his analyses of various fields of cultural production, Howard Becker consciously steps away from the "dominant tradition" in the sociology of art (including music), defining specific fields of cultural production as art worlds, each of which is to be understood in terms of "the network of people whose cooperative activity, organised via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that art world is noted for" (*Art Worlds* x). By contrast, the dominant tradition defines art as:

[...] something more special, in which creativity comes to the surface and the essential character of the society expresses itself, especially in great works of genius. The dominant tradition takes the artist and artwork, rather than the network of cooperation, as central to the analysis of art as a social phenomenon. (*Art Worlds* xi)

In his analyses, Becker looks for the ways in which aesthetic principles are shared by producers, support workers, and audiences, and how they organise, enable, and constrain the possible range of a particular artistic activity. He argues that the construction and negotiation of aesthetic values is not confined to academics or professional aestheticians, but involves everyone who contributes to the process of cultural production, including audiences:

Someone must respond to the work once it is done, have an emotional or intellectual reaction to it, 'see something in it', appreciate it. [...] we are interested in the event which consists of a work being made and appreciated; for that to happen, the activity of response and appreciation must occur". (*Art Worlds* 4)

Becker's major contribution to the available methodologies for studying music as a social practice lies in the opportunity to develop a sophisticated understanding of the ongoing processes of negotiation and cooperation between arts workers (including those in "supporting roles"), which both enable and constrain artistic production. Indeed, in his self-described "anti-elitist" approach to art worlds, refusing the "dominant" privileging of individual, aesthetically

worthy artworks and individual artists, Becker prefigures the general orientation of much cultural studies work on the media and cultural industries. However, despite his gestures towards their inclusion, Becker attributes only limited power to cultural consumers: the audience is part of what Becker terms “support personnel” whose function is to validate (or invalidate) the claim to ‘art’ status of particular works through their reactions (4).

What is required in order to understand a specific instance of contemporary art music as a field of social practice then, is far more than the analysis of autonomous musical works and the evaluation of such works by experts. The unique potential of cultural studies lies in its flexibility and its methodological and theoretical eclecticism, giving us the ability to perform serious contextualisation, encompassing the social practices, structures, and relationships that influence not only the production, but also – in fact, especially – the consumption of musical works and performances. In the study of music, it is subculture theory that is the logical choice for such an approach, for reasons that will be further explained below.

## **2.2 Subculture Theory**

Subcultures were one of the major fields of inquiry at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 1970s, and this overview will take as its starting point *Resistance Through Rituals*, the BCCCS’s 1976 collection of working papers on the subject. In the introduction, the authors acknowledge their debt to the interactionist sociological approach to deviant behaviour, and especially to Howard Becker’s 1963 book *Outsiders*. Here, Becker’s theoretical work on art worlds and on deviance intersect in the classic study of freelance dance band musicians, whose “culture and way of life [were] sufficiently bizarre and unconventional for them to be labeled [sic] as outsiders by more conventional members of the community” (*Outsiders* 79). Becker builds an intricate ethnographic analysis around the values encoded in the concept of “hipness” (as opposed to “square” society) and the way such values are made to operate tactically within the subculture. This study, published in 1963, is part of the corpus referred to by Gelder and Thornton as the “Chicago school” (12),



whose themes (male urban opposition to ‘mainstream’ commercial and moral values) clearly prefigure the main preoccupations of the British cultural studies work on subcultures in the 1970s.

The most important contribution of the BCCCS to the field of subculture theory was to locate these deviant groups and behaviours within the class structure. Within this overarching structure are contained particular ‘parent cultures’ and their corresponding subcultures. Therefore, working-class subcultures are posited in relation to both the parent working-class culture and the ‘dominant’ (inauthentic) culture:

Sub-cultures, then, must first be related to the ‘parent cultures’ of which they are a sub-set. But, sub-cultures must also be analyzed in terms of their relation to the dominant culture – the overall disposition of cultural power in the society as a whole. Thus, we may distinguish respectable, ‘rough’, delinquent and the criminal sub-cultures within working class culture: but we may also say that, though they differ amongst themselves, they all derive in the first instance from a ‘working class parent culture’: hence, they are all subordinate sub-cultures, in relation to the dominant middle-class or bourgeois culture (J. Clarke et al 13).

One of the central tenets of this early approach was that subcultural style worked to provide a “magical” (that is to say, symbolic rather than material) solution to social problems. This idea came into British cultural studies from sociological deviance theory, but the BCCCS reworked it, taking into account a sophisticated theory of class relations:

The latent function of subculture is this – to express and resolve, albeit “magically”, the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture. The succession of subcultures which this parent culture generated can thus all be considered as so many variations on a central theme – the contradiction at an ideological level, between traditional working class puritanism, and the new ideology of consumption: at an economic level between a part of the socially mobile elite, or a part of the new lumpen. Mod, parkers, skinheads, crombies, all represent in their different ways, an attempt to retrieve some of the socially cohesive elements destroyed in the parent culture, and to combine these with elements selected from other class fractions, symbolising one or other of the options confronting it. (P. Cohen 23)

Therefore, subcultures are of interest to researchers who seek to understand how the politics of class structures are impacted at times of social change because, through their symbolic practices, subcultures both represent and incompletely

resolve the contradictions that such circumstances inevitably produce. The authors outlined several defining subcultural characteristics. Firstly, a subculture must be externally distinguishable from its parent culture:

Sub-cultures must exhibit a distinctive enough shape and structure to make them identifiably different from their 'parent' culture. They must be focussed around certain activities, values, certain uses of material artefacts, territorial spaces etc. which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture. But, since they are sub-sets, there must also be significant things which bind and articulate them with the 'parent' culture. (J. Clarke et al 13-14)

Secondly, subcultures were internally homologous. In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* – the best known and most influential of the BCCCS subcultural analyses – Dick Hebdige establishes “homology” as a central category. To speak of the homological relations of a subculture is to describe “the symbolic fit between the values and lifestyles of a group, its subjective experience and the musical forms it uses to express or reinforce its focal concerns” (Hebdige, *Subculture* 113). Therefore, despite the chaotic appearance of punk’s symbols:

The subculture was nothing if not consistent. There was a homological relation between the trashy cut-up clothes and spiky hair, the pogo and amphetamines, the spitting, the vomiting, the format of the fanzines, the insurrectionary poses and the ‘soulless’, frantically driven music. (114)

Hebdige’s application of the concept to punk is explicitly indebted to Paul Willis’ ethnographic studies of the “motor-bike boys” and the hippies, collected in his book *Profane Culture*. Of the symbolic choices of the motorbike boys, Willis writes:

The solidity, responsiveness, inevitableness, the strength of the motor-bike matched the concrete, secure nature of the bikeboys’ world. It underwrote in a dramatic and important way their belief in the commonsense world of tangible things, and the secureness of personal identity. The roughness and intimidation of the motor-bike, the surprise of its fierce acceleration, the aggressive thumping of the un baffled exhaust, matches and symbolizes the masculine assertiveness, the rough camaraderie, the muscularity of language, of their style of social interaction. (53)

The motor-bike boys had “very specific tastes” that were clearly differentiated from the mainstream popular music of the time; their music was deliberately chosen from “the first really authentic and integrated period of rock ‘n’ roll” –

the 'golden age' represented by Buddy Holly and Elvis Presley (62). Willis argues that these choices were:

[...] objectively based on the identification of fundamental elements of the musical style. The music did have a distinctiveness, a unity of construction, a special and consistent use of techniques, a freshness and conviction of personal delivery, a sense of the 'golden', 'once and for all' age, which could parallel, hold and develop the security, authenticity and masculinity of the bike culture. (63)

The dress, rituals, choice of material and symbolic objects, then, create a "general consonance of structure" which answers the lacks identified in the social situations of the boys, and at the same time distinguished the subculture from the aspirational, style-conscious mods and against various racial 'others'.

In the same anthology is Willis' analysis of the hippie counterculture, which is interesting in that it stands in direct contrast to the aggressively masculine, socially conservative, immediate world of the motor-bike boys: "more than anything else it was language and conversation which demonstrated the elaborate, ornate, indirect and stylish nature of the hippy [sic] culture...everyday life had become a kind of art" (103). The hippies distinguished themselves from "straight" society on the basis of values which nevertheless reflected their predominantly middle class origins: naturalism, personal authenticity, individualism, mysticism, and creativity. Progressive rock (or "art rock") as the music of choice "both attempted timelessness and an abstract, complex shape was marvellously formed both to mirror and momentarily complete this Promethean attempt to encompass a post-capitalist timeless mysticism" (169).

It is significant that Willis' study of the hippie "counterculture" is generally not included in the corpus of subculture theory from this period in British cultural studies. In practice, the subcultures of most interest to British cultural studies shared an additional set of defining characteristics that were not always overtly acknowledged: "authentic" subcultures were spectacular and public, male-dominated, and demonstrably working class. The widely circulated term "counterculture" (rather than "subculture") used to refer to the hippies is telling, signifying not only the more widespread development and influence of the hippies, but also their position in the class hierarchy. However, in the

introduction to *Resistance through Rituals*, the authors made three key qualifications which, taken together, demonstrate that even the ‘original’ version of the theory could be applied to middle-class cultures (although of course this was not a priority at the time). Firstly, subcultures are not necessarily working-class: the authors identify the bohemian avant-garde as a subculture of the urban middle-class intelligentsia (13). Secondly, subcultures are not necessarily distinct, bounded groups: “some sub-cultures are merely loosely-defined strands or ‘milieux’ within the parent culture” which “possess no distinctive ‘world’ of their own” (14). Finally, some subcultures are “regular and consistent” features of their parent cultures, rather than appearing dramatically at particular moments in history. Dick Hebdige also acknowledged that subcultures can be “more or less ‘conservative’ or ‘progressive’, integrated into the community, or extrapolated from it” (127), but it was the resistance of marginal subcultures that was really the central concern of subcultural analysis. Hebdige is most interested in class- or ethnicity-based subcultures like punk, mod, skinhead, and reggae, but dismisses their relatively synchronous counterpart, Glam rock (represented specifically by David Bowie), as “devoid of any obvious political or counter-cultural significance”. Even though Bowie questioned the stability of prevailing gender and age categories, his symbolic instruments were, Hebdige implies, superficial and illusory rather than radical and ‘real’: “Bowie’s meta-message was escape – from class, from sex, from personality, from obvious commitment – into a fantasy past...or a science-fiction future” (59-60).

In the early 1980s, some of the assumptions and methods of this early subcultural research came under attack, not least from those within cultural studies itself (see, for example, McRobbie and Garber’s “Girls and Subcultures”). Gary Clarke in particular composed a systematic critique of Hebdige and the BCCCS’ assumption of the viewpoint of the “expert semiotician”, which entails neglecting the direct experiences of subcultural members and allowing them to speak “only through their clothes” (87). This not only results in a poor understanding of what the subculture means to those who participate in it and denies their positions as “knowing subjects” (87), but also creates an “essentialist and non-contradictory picture” (83) of subcultural groups as homogeneous, bounded, and frozen in time:

[...] the subcultures are treated as static and rigid anthropological entities when in fact such reified and pure subcultures exist only at the Centre's level of abstraction which seeks to explain subcultures in terms in their genesis (82)

Secondly, Clarke points out that earlier accounts of subcultures gave no insight into their material origins:

...we are given little explanation as to how and why the class experiences of youth crystallize into a distinct subculture. The possible constituency of a new style is outlined, but where do the styles come from? Who designed the first fluorescent pink or leopardskin drape suit, for example, and how do we analytically leap from the desire for a solution to the adoption of a particular style?

Angela McRobbie's study of the second-hand clothes market in London was an important step in closing this conceptual gap, detailing some of the ways that economic relationships are productive of style, how 'street' and 'high street' fashion are interconnected and interdependent, and therefore how even the most 'anti-consumerist' countercultures are always part of the circulation of capital. Challenging the idea of the "collective creative impulse", McRobbie reframes punk as an "enterprise subculture" ("Second-Hand Dresses" 25-37). Implicit in McRobbie's emphasis on the making, selling, and buying of punk style is a feminist critique – like dancing and hanging out in bedrooms, shopping is a feminised pursuit that, in the classic subculture model, ranks far below the "magnificent gestures" of transforming and subverting the intended meanings of stylistic objects for which punk was celebrated ("Second-Hand Dresses" 37-39).

Further weakening both the notion of authenticity and the conceptual separation of subcultures from the capitalist economy, John Cagle's extended exploration of the emergence, mass popularisation, and eventual diffusion of Glam rock uses the genre as an example of how it is not only the most "resistant" subcultures, but also those blatantly "geared towards commercialization", that can empower their fans or adherents. Challenging the exclusion of "commercial" genres from the Birmingham School's canon of authentic 1960s and 1970s subcultures, he proposes a distinction between "in-there" (underground) subcultures and "out-there" subcultures like Glam rock:

Unlike Hebdige's subcultural innovators, out-there subcultures take styles from mass-mediated sources (out-there) and appropriate them in a subcultural manner. Thus the out-there subculture is not pure in that it takes particular images given to it by commercial sources that have already incorporated innovative subcultural styles. Out-there subcultures, however, may engage in the recontextualization of an already commercialized (incorporated) style, but in so doing, they also engage in an act that symbolically resists the supremacy of dominant /mainstream culture. (45)

Cagle uses the case of Glam rock to cast doubt on Romantic narratives of classic subculture theory. While the "authentic" subcultures emerged spontaneously as a street solution to local political problems before eventually being appropriated by or absorbed into the commercial mainstream, glam rock was never so innocent (and neither, suggests Cagle, was punk): "glitter inverted the traditional subculture's role by starting with commercial assumptions that were laced with subversive premises that had been plucked from localized cultures" (Cagle 173-74).

The development of popular music in the post-punk era made the adherence to the original political and structural emphases of subculture theory even more difficult, or at least made the difficulties ever more obvious. Steve Redhead writes that in 1980s pop culture "the term Style Culture symbolized a decade which witnessed extremely volatile affinities and identities and contradictory shifts in production and consumption in the leisure and culture industries" (29). In this context, it became difficult to find subcultures that appeared to be "authentic" even in the complex way that punk had been: it was no longer possible to distinguish between *bricolage* and what appeared to be a politically meaningless over-abundance of consumer style; further, (young) people's tastes and subcultural affiliations are multiple, unstable and not easily linked to unified social identities. David Muggleton proposes the term "post-subculturalist" to refer to the knowing figure of the contemporary style-conscious individual:

Post-subculturalists no longer have any sense of subcultural 'authenticity', where inception is rooted in particular sociotemporal contexts and tied to underlying structural relations. [...]all post-subculturalists are aware [that] there are no rules, that there is no authenticity, no reason for ideological commitment, merely a stylistic game to be played. [...] Constituted through consumption, subcultural style is no longer articulated around the modernist structuring relations of class, gender, ethnicity or even the age span of 'youth'. ("The Post-Subculturalist" 180-81)

Ted Polhemus succinctly sums up these shifts in relation to earlier subculture theory—even if they are changes 'only' in the perception or representation (as opposed to the 'lived reality') of the relationship between musical taste, sartorial style and social identities: "back in 1964 you *were* a Mod or a rocker. Today, you're *into* Techno, Ragga or Acid Jazz" (133, original emphasis). Further, authenticity is no longer a meaningful goal, a fact the "spectacular post-subculturalist" both knows and relishes: "Who is real? Who is a replicant? Who cares. Enjoy" (Polhemus 133). This is not a cause for universal celebration, however. For Redhead, the more pessimistic readings of post-punk style politics are as much a reflection of an incomplete view of the previous decades as they were of the lacks in contemporary reality: the disappointment "[stemmed] from an over-optimistic and one-dimensional theorization of youth culture in the past three or four decades" (*The End-of-the-Century Party* 39). Redhead argues that the commitment to "authenticity" in the earlier work of the BCCCS led to a serious misreading of punk as "more a 'folk' expression of the street than commercial exploitation"—and by extension the misreading of the origins of later youth styles (29-31). It was not the music cultures of the 1980s, but the subculture theorists' romanticisation of the previous decade that prompted the lament that youth culture was 'dead' (31).

While some of the political emphases of early subculture theory are not appropriate to contemporary social contexts, there are a number of contemporary approaches to music cultures that have some basis in subculture theory, but account for changed circumstances and political concerns. What these theorists have in common with earlier versions of subculture theory is a concern with cultural and political contexts as a primary area of analysis, and a typically cultural studies emphasis on lived experience and social practice. However, rather than representing subcultures as bounded communities whose symbolic

practices are strictly homologous with their structural position, contemporary subculture theory accounts for the fluidity of genres, tastes and identities across space and time. While I acknowledge the possibility that not all of these theorists would agree to being associated with “subculture theory” at all, for the purposes of this dissertation I will include their work under the umbrella term “contemporary subculture theory”.

In his work on “music scenes”, Will Straw formulates a theory of the relationships between local music scenes and the global music industry that avoids the trap whereby any “authentic” or legitimately meaningful music subculture or community is imagined as embodying a uniquely local specificity and a resistance to outside influences or changing circumstances. Rather, the term “scene” describes the way in which:

the cosmopolitan character of certain kinds of musical activity—their attentiveness to change occurring elsewhere—may endow them with a unity of purpose and sense of participating in ‘affective alliances’ just as powerful as those normally observed within practices which appear to be more organically grounded in local circumstances. (“Systems of Articulation” 374)

Straw also displaces “resistance” as a central concern and reframes the relationship between cultural politics and popular music – a relationship which remains important – in the following manner:

My emphasis...on the logics of change typical of different musical terrains is not intended to suggest that the value of such terrains is a function of their collective historical purpose. What these logics invite, however, is a reading of the politics of popular music that locates the crucial site of these politics neither in the transgressive or oppositional quality of musical practices and their consumption, nor uniformly within the modes of operation of the international music industries. The important processes, I would argue, are those through which particular social differences (most notably those of gender and race) are articulated within the building of audiences around particular coalitions of musical form. These processes are not inevitably positive or disruptive of existing social divisions, nor are they shaped to any significant extent by solitary, willful acts of realignment. (“Systems of Articulation” 384)

For example, Straw accounts for the popularity of dance music across localities and social identity groups (including UK clubs, “black communities in Toronto” and “significant portions of the young female market”) in terms of the *shared values* of these markets:



[...]these constituencies are all ones which value the redirective and the novel over the stable and canonical, or international circuits of influence over the mining of a locally stable heritage. (“Communities and Scenes” 505)

Straw’s work has proved particularly useful to analysts, not only of dance cultures, but also of those music cultures that are less localised, less spectacular and more musician-centred, but that also rely on specific local contexts for their existence (see, for example, Dueck’s article on Christian Rock, “Crossing the Street”, and Tony Mitchell’s “Flat City Sounds: A Cartography of the Christchurch Music Scene”). In terms of the present study, the theory of music “scenes” will allow us to look at both the local context of Brisbane’s contemporary chamber music scene and the global traditions, patterns of cultural change, and genre movements with which it is aligned. It is for this reason that I have used the term “Brisbane’s contemporary chamber music scene” throughout the dissertation.

In Sarah Thornton’s work on club cultures, music- and style-oriented youth cultures operate according to their own economies of “subcultural capital”: relying, as high cultural capital does, on group-specific knowledge and competencies (99), but with hipness displacing the bourgeois aesthetic as the organizing logic at work (11). These systems of knowledge and power work to construct internal hierarchies, distinguishing the insiders from the aspirational outsiders (as in the distinction, policed at the doors and on the dance-floors, between hip clubbers and mere “tourists”). At the same time, they also draw a boundary around the subculture, constructing the appearance of relative autonomy on the basis of its difference from, and superiority to, an imagined “mainstream” (100-101). This dual logic of distinction is valuable for two reasons: firstly, it allows us to look at the internal politics of subcultures and relate them to wider processes of cultural evaluation. Secondly, it allows us to attribute cultural agency to subcultures, and to see how subcultures use and exploit the imagined mainstream, rather than (only) how the “dominant” culture vilifies, exploits, or incorporates subcultures.

Other theorists and researchers who work in the area of rave and club cultures have noted the temporally contingent nature of contemporary music cultures as

against the “whole way of life” model of the late 1970s (A. Bennett, *Cultures of Popular Music* 127). That is, the “expressions of collective identity” of rave or club cultures are contingent on the temporary existence of a shared space (the theme night at the club, the rave, the doof) as much as, if not more than, they are on the shared “real world” experiences of the participants (Rietveld 127-8). Like Straw’s work, this shift enables us to include in the subcultural frame not only club cultures, but also more conservative music cultures that are focused primarily around music performance and are not spectacularly articulated with everyday life (such as indie rock, or indeed classical music).

After taking these critiques of, and alternatives or extensions to, classic subculture theory into account, it is now possible to see that there is a model of contemporary subculture theory that retains cultural studies’ core commitment to understanding the politics of everyday life, but is flexible enough to accommodate a much broader range of music cultures than those represented by the early work of the Birmingham school<sup>1</sup>. “Subculture” is therefore not a descriptive label that can be applied externally to only particular kinds of emergent, radical youth cultures. Rather, it provides a necessarily flexible model of music as social practice that always grounds its objects in time and space.

At the level of definition, a music subculture might be described as an identifiable group of musicians, audiences, and participants with shared identities and values. However, it is more meaningful to say that to employ the term “subculture” in research contexts is to call into being a way of *looking* at music as social practice. Conceptually, subculture theory requires that the object of study be understood as occupying a cultural space in which a number of cultural fields intersect and dynamically interact. To “apply” subculture theory then, as I must do here, means to pay attention to the ways in which a music culture operates according to certain logics: the symbolic, the social, the spatial, the temporal, and the ideological or political.

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<sup>1</sup> The continued usefulness of contemporary subculture theory is further demonstrated by the quite recent studies that draw on versions of it: Tony Mitchell’s “Australian Hip Hop as a Subculture” (published in 2003), Brian Wilson’s work on Canadian rave cultures (2002), and Susan Luckman’s *Party People*, a study of Australian “doof” culture (2002).

Firstly, subcultures are enunciated through particular symbolic practices and forms of communication: specific styles of dress, music, speech, textual production, and deportment. Indeed, it is the symbolic features of subcultures that allow us to recognise them as subcultures in the first place. Membership entails particular modes of engagement with these texts and practices (for example, Malbon structures his analysis of the clubbing experience around the “dancing, ecstasy and vitality” of his subtitle), and those modes of engagement require certain cultural competencies. Secondly, each subculture can be demonstrated to speak from and to a particular locus of social identity: a class position (as in “classic” subculture theory), an age “group”, an ethnic group, a particular gender position, or, more often, a complex and multiple formation of these.

Thirdly, subcultures emerge at particular kinds of geographic locations and material spaces, and engage in particular uses of those spaces. This last point is important: subculture theorists have moved beyond the dualistic notion of spatiality whereby the concrete or material combine with imagination or representation to create social space, and now are careful to account for the practice and lived reality of spaces (Lefebvre 38-40). Connell and Gibson point out that:

Music does not exist in a vacuum. Geographical space is not an ‘empty stage’ on which aesthetic, economic and cultural battles are contested. Rather, music and space are actively and dialectically related. Music shapes spaces, and spaces shape music” (Connell and Gibson 192).

That is, subculture theory (especially where it is concerned with club and rave cultures, as in the work of Andy Bennett, Malbon, Wilson and Thornton) takes into account how the lived practices of a space transform it, and how sonic and social practices are called into being by the spaces and places in which they occur.

Of course, the concepts of space and place mean little without an accompanying understanding of temporality. Subcultures emerge and make sense out of particular moments in history, and reflect or react to the processes of cultural or social change occurring at such moments. Further, Will Straw has cogently

described the ways in which the logics of political and aesthetic value have a temporal dimension:

Different cultural spaces are marked by the sorts of temporalities to be found within them – by the prominence of activities of canonization, or by the values accruing to novelty and currency, longevity and ‘timelessness’. In this respect, the ‘logic’ of a particular musical culture is a function of the way in which value is constructed within them relative to the passing of time. (Straw “Communities and Scenes” 495-96)

Most important for a cultural studies analysis, of course, is the idea that subcultures are ideological: they are structured by and enunciate shared aesthetic, ethical, and political values. As researchers, it is by making sense of these values that we can make sense of the symbolic, social, spatial, and temporal elements of subcultures, without either falling into the trap of class reductionism, or merely describing the style of a particular subculture. While the concept of “resistance” has become suspect in that it recalls a structuralist account of cultural politics, it has been transposed into contemporary subculture theory as a discursive feature of the relations between the particular constructions of value within subcultures and those in the surrounding culture (the separation between the two is, of course, a discursive move in itself). The articulation of the values of the subculture answer, for its participants, some kind of lack in the surrounding culture, to which is ascribed a set of “mainstream” values (Thornton 101). The “meaning” of a music subculture, then, is a map of the relations between these relations: in other words, to use less fluid terminology, the temporary unity of the subculture, and the relations of the subculture to the world ‘outside’ its imagined boundaries. It is important to account not only for the instances in which these relations appear harmonious or unified, but also for the ways in which they appear to reflect external tensions and contradictions.

It seems equally possible, then, that contemporary subculture theory could be usefully employed in the study of classical, country, or Christian rock music, but this has rarely (or, in the case of classical music, never, as far as I am aware) taken place, for reasons which have nothing to do with the theory itself, but everything to do with what Nick Couldry has called the “favouritism” within

cultural studies (59) – most strongly evident in the persistence of “youth” as the fundamental category of subculture theory, and the persistence of the belief that the cultures of the young are the cultures of subordinate groups (58-59). There is a point of methodological significance to be made here as well: it is important that we do not believe that the limited uses to which subculture theory has traditionally been put somehow marks out for it an equally limited sphere of possible utility. Keeping the above critiques in mind then, it is necessary to determine how subculture theory could be used to investigate the cultural positioning, social functions and lived experience of contemporary art music.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, one of the primary aims of this dissertation is to shed some light on the contemporary status of high culture by carrying out an empirical investigation into its lived practice in a contemporary context. Following from this, the above formulation of contemporary subculture theory as it is applied to popular music scenes and subcultures must now be used in an empirical analysis of an “art music” scene. It is therefore the primary task of the remainder of this dissertation to uncover the “meaning” of contemporary chamber music as social practice, in Brisbane in the first decade of the twenty-first century, using the investigative orientation of subculture theory as a means of locating the enquiry. My study is firmly grounded in place and time, not only for pragmatic reasons, but also in order to problematise the transcendent universalisation of high cultural practices - a universalisation which is a refusal of the local and which, as previously discussed, serves merely to re-inscribe the distinction between the concrete social utility of the popular, and the transcendent, timeless art of high culture.

### 2.3 The Case Study

Brisbane's contemporary chamber music scene comprises small uncondensed groups of tertiary-trained musicians playing music written by (mostly) living composers on a combination of acoustic and electric instruments in semi-formal concert situations. In relation to the institutional definition of "high culture" proposed earlier, contemporary chamber music<sup>2</sup> can be considered a fit because of its discursive positioning as "the arts" in policy and the media, and also because of its reliance on the concert format and formal musical training.

What makes contemporary chamber music most interesting for this dissertation, however, is the sense in which it is also on face value a good candidate for the subculture model in ways that a large symphony orchestra would not be. It consists of small groups of musicians that are generally independent, both of large institutions and of the mainstream music industry, and therefore represent something relatively contained and separate from both "elite" (i.e. dominant) and mass-mediated popular culture. A third and more pragmatic reason to select contemporary chamber music as the subject of this dissertation is that it is also a scene with which I have been personally involved in the past (as performer and audience member) and to which I therefore had better access than I would have had to opera, for example. In order to conduct a detailed subcultural analysis in the time and space available, I limited the scope of the project to contemporary Brisbane, and chose one particular group, Topology, as the subject of a case study. Topology has been active in Brisbane for over a decade now, has a loyal following and collaborative connections to most of the other contemporary chamber ensembles in Brisbane. While it is a contained example, it is therefore

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<sup>2</sup> Even the musicians and composers who work in this scene have great difficulty in finding a satisfactory generic name for it. For example, "contemporary classical" seems to imply a direct and usually unwanted continuity with the canon of Western art music, missing the genre's many historical articulations with personalities and artistic ideas associated with the popular avant-garde. The term "new music", in vogue among modernists during the 1980s, is intended only to distinguish the works of contemporary composers from earlier "classical" periods, and carries such a meaning only if the existence of all music other than Western art music is disavowed. The term "avant-garde" describes, not a musical style, but a particular orientation within cultural politics: it can be used to describe a range of genres, including jazz, experimental electronic music, or even progressive rock. Therefore "contemporary chamber music" seems to be the most honestly descriptive and politically neutral term for the purposes of the dissertation.

by no means an isolated or idiosyncratic one. However, while I intend to use this case study to suggest some of the ways in which high culture functions in contemporary contexts more broadly, it is equally important to point out that the conclusions I will later draw from it are not to be interpreted as universally generalisable.

## **2.4 Methodology**

The study of subcultures does not represent a single unified methodology in itself, but as discussed above, its themes heuristically lead us to certain kinds of investigative practices, particularly those drawn from anthropology and sociology (ethnography and “thick description”) as well as those practices for which cultural studies has become best known (semiotic analysis, “radical” contextualisation). I have therefore found it useful in carrying out research on the case study to import ideas and models at times, particularly in discussing the spatiality of the concert venues, the tastes of the audiences, and most especially in analyzing the performance as social action. Further, the reliance on a single case study required triangulation of methods in order to obtain data saturation and meaningful results. The primary research for this dissertation therefore involved archival research into the history and current situation of contemporary chamber music in Brisbane, participant observation at concerts, audience surveys, and interviews with musicians and managers involved in Brisbane’s contemporary chamber music scene (For full details of the methods adopted, see Appendix 1).

The group interview with Topology was semi-structured, with open-ended questions covering the organisational and artistic decision-making processes of the group, their interactions with other local and international institutions, composers, performers, and arts practitioners, and their impressions of the group’s identity in relation to musical style, cultural identity and hierarchies of value. My own background as a classical musician and former participant in Brisbane’s contemporary chamber music scene had its advantages and disadvantages here. Although my discursive aims were some distance from those of the musicians, as someone personally and professionally known to Topology I

was accorded insider status (to the point that I often had to prompt for further explanation of statements that were made as if their underlying principles were shared and understood).

The audience questionnaires were used to gather basic demographic information about the audience, their level of involvement with the scene, and the patterns of their cultural tastes more generally (see Appendix 2 for a sample questionnaire). The advantage of using questionnaires was that it enabled coverage because of the higher response rate, although the information obtained was of course somewhat one-dimensional in qualitative terms. Therefore, it was important that additional depth and nuance were obtained through the focus group discussions. The discussions were guided by open-ended questions covering topics similar to those in the questionnaires, but with more emphasis on the concert experience and issues of cultural value. An advantage of the focus group discussions was that they allowed participants to emphasise topics they felt to be of more importance in their experience of contemporary chamber music, and indeed there were occasions when perspectives I had not considered emerged from the discussions. Most importantly, this approach meant that the research could be conducted with, rather than on, the subculture.

One of the key questions to be answered through this part of the project, as in any study of cultural consumption, was what the audiences gain from their participation, and the extent to which they engage affectively or critically with the cultural forms that they consume. It seemed to me that the participants in the focus groups went immediately into “expert” mode, and that they were concerned with communicating their knowledge and discriminating ability, rather than sharing information about the pleasures they experienced in participating in Topology concerts. However, this was not necessarily a disadvantage, but rather can be taken as an indication that it is in such processes of critical and discriminating engagement that consumers of high culture incorporate it into the ongoing construction and maintenance of their identities. Additionally, because the participants were self-selecting, it is important to acknowledge that the more actively engaged members of Topology’s audience may be over-represented, and this is especially true of those who went on to



participate in the focus groups. However, as the goal of the project was to formulate a description of contemporary chamber music as a subculture, which already implies a relatively high level of investment, these are precisely the audience members who were of most interest. These audience survey findings will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, but it is first necessary to situate the case study more generally in relation to its material, symbolic and ideological contexts.

## 3. MAPPING BRISBANE'S CONTEMPORARY CHAMBER MUSIC SCENE

### 3.1 The Musical City

One of Australia's fastest growing cities, Brisbane is the third largest capital city in Australia and has a population of just under two million. In terms of the "big ticket" high cultural forms, until recently there were two full time orchestras in Brisbane, but in 2000 the Queensland Symphony Orchestra and Queensland Philharmonic orchestras merged to become The Queensland Orchestra. There is one opera company (Opera Queensland). These companies are a source of employment for recent graduates from the two universities that offer bachelors degrees in instrumental or vocal music performance: the Queensland Conservatorium (Griffith University), and the University of Queensland. The Queensland Performing Arts Complex, which includes three theatres, a concert hall and the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, was built in the early 1980s and is the venue for symphony orchestra concerts, prestigious international chamber music ensembles, as well as musical theatre, jazz, cabaret, and opera. While Brisbane has had a very active and dynamic popular music scene since the 1970s, especially in terms of alternative rock, punk, and protest folk music, since the 1990s several independent rock or "alternative" bands have achieved national or international prominence, including Custard, George, Powderfinger, and Regurgitator. Colloquially and in the music media, Brisbane has been identified as having a scene which, while perhaps not as sonically distinctive as northern soul (Milestone) or the "Liverpool sound" (Sarah Cohen *Rock Culture in Liverpool*), is now imagined to cohere enough to be granted a label: the "Brisband" phenomenon, and is increasingly of interest to academic and policy researchers (see, for example, Flew et al).

The last four decades have seen dramatic changes in the "material and symbolic fabric of cities" (Zukin, "Urban Lifestyles" 825), resulting in the model known as the "postmodern city" (Wynne and O'Connor 841-43). The most striking feature of the postmodern city is the transformation of decaying industrial areas from spaces of production into spaces of leisure and cultural consumption – a

transformation that often achieved through explicit local government policy and planning. This shift to a symbolic (or “creative”) economy is marked by the aestheticisation, rather than rationalisation, of spaces, and an emphasis on play over utility (Zukin, “Urban Lifestyles” 825-26, 835; Florida 182-85). In Brisbane, a similar transformation has taken place, occurring in the former industrial areas of South Brisbane and West End on one side of the Brisbane River, and New Farm and Fortitude Valley on the other. Of most relevance to this dissertation is the recent transformation of the disused powerhouse building and grounds at New Farm into a live performing arts venue. The Powerhouse was originally built in 1928 to provide power for the city’s tramways, and was redesigned and refurbished in 2000 as part of the Brisbane City Council’s urban renewal process. The architectural work proceeded according to a “dual strategy of respectful preservation of the cultural patina punctuated by robust intervention where necessary” (Skinner 60), resulting in a stylish, open exterior and interior, albeit with key signifiers of the building’s previously “disused” state and earlier industrial past left intact (bare ceilings and unpainted walls, internal steel walkways, and prominent graffiti). This irreverently eclectic and yet monumental architecture reflects and is reflected in the Powerhouse’s event programming, which focuses mainly on contemporary, experimental, and equally eclectic art-forms to the exclusion of “traditional high culture”, and is dedicated to “excitement, creative risk and surprise” (“Brisbane Powerhouse”).

Rather than delivering significant growth in already established areas of the “traditional” arts, then, urban change brings with it a new configuration of Brisbane “culture” that is not only more active, but also more experimental, playful, and eclectic. This shift in the character of Brisbane’s cultural activities is accompanied by a corresponding shift in activity from monolithic institutions to smaller, less centralised networks of creative producers and consumers. By contrast, in the 1980s and 1990s, groups who wanted to perform in venues other than those provided by the high-cultural institutions situated in a cluster at South Bank (the Conservatorium, the Queensland Performing Arts Centre) were required to seek out “alternative” spaces of performance. These spaces were in literally and semiotically marginal areas of the inner city’s fringes: candle-lit churches in new age, post-industrial and multicultural West End; gentrification-

resistant RSL (Returned Servicemen's League) or Trade Union halls in leafy suburbs like Paddington; or the cavernous, broken-windowed Old Museum occupying a lonely patch of non-industrial property and ringed by busy main roads in Bowen Hills. The Brisbane Powerhouse in New Farm and the Judith Wright Centre in central Fortitude Valley, however, are arts venues purpose-built (or rebuilt) for an emerging genre of cultural practices that are less arcane than the traditional avant-garde, and deliberately more adventurous and cognizant of popular culture than traditional arts institutions. Speaking about the importance of the Powerhouse to contemporary chamber music in Brisbane, Topology violinist Christa Powell said:

All the groups now that are housed here were doing what we were doing kind of underground – looking for a new venue that was suitable [and] accessible, [financially] and also environmentally. And it's here. They have all come here. And it does feel like a community.

The creation of these new venues has made a loose, decentralised “fringe” music scene that was always comfortably crossing the high-popular divide now appear more coherent. To return to earlier times, Lawrence Levine argues that spatial reconfigurations were central to the institutionalisation of the high-popular divide in modern America:

Physical or spatial bifurcation, with different socioeconomic groups becoming associated with different theaters in large urban centers, was followed inevitably by [...] stylistic bifurcation [...] and ultimately culminated in a bifurcation of content, which saw a growing chasm between “serious” and “popular” culture. (68).

We might see the development of spaces such as the Brisbane Powerhouse and the Judith Wright Centre, if not as a reversal of that process, then at least as a closer reconfiguration what had been similarly bifurcated spaces for “culture” on the one hand and “entertainment” on the other. The remainder of this chapter aims to map the ensemble Topology's position, both in relation to the changing social and cultural contexts of Brisbane, and in relation to the competing ideas of cultural value that cut across geographic divisions.

### **3.2 Positioning Topology**

Topology is made up of five instrumentalists: Christa Powell (violin), Bernard Hoey (viola), Kylie Davidson (piano), Robert Davidson (bass), and John Babbage (saxophone). The ensemble uses a slightly unusual combination of instruments (unusual, that is, because of the permanent inclusion of a saxophone), but it is well within the limits of traditional classical instrumentation. Topology has a residency at the Brisbane Powerhouse, performs each year at most of the major Australian arts festivals, and has frequently received funding to make recordings or commission new works. The musicians are all tertiary trained in classical music (with the exception of John Babbage, the saxophonist, who studied and regularly performs jazz). Additionally, the bassist and most frequent composer for the group, Robert Davidson, has a doctoral degree in music composition, and has recently taken up a full-time lecturing position in music and composition at the Queensland University of Technology. The musicians are all in their thirties, and support themselves by working as freelance performers and teachers (but in one case as a full-time violist in the local symphony orchestra, The Queensland Orchestra), so Topology is the main outlet for satisfying their “artistic” needs but isn’t a fulltime job.

A brief history of the group will serve to orient them in Brisbane’s music scene. Topology was formed by members of the early to mid 1990s composers collective Music for the Heart and Mind. Heart and Mind was an independent and loosely run organisation that produced monthly concerts, usually in candle-lit churches in West End, which before the latest stage of its gentrification in the late 1990s was home to the majority of Brisbane’s neo-bohemian artists and musicians, student activists, and migrant families. As the very different group names suggest, Topology is a more tightly organised, less Romantic and more contemporary-focused enterprise, and has become increasingly so since the earliest years when its slogan was “Non-institutionalized music”, as compared to 2003’s “Postclassical music”. In the group interview, the members of Topology

were keen to present this shift in terms of professionalism, and not in terms of abandoning their early politics:

**Interviewer:** What's the difference between Topology and Heart and Mind?

**Robert Davidson:** Much, much more practical I think. It's the portable thing.

**Interviewer:** What about aesthetically though?

**Robert Davidson:** Well it's tighter...

**Christa Powell:** Better presented. It's more organised

**Robert Davidson:** The focus on professionalism, like more product...

**Christa Powell:** Heart and Mind was just an idealistic thing.

**Robert Davidson:** An early twenties thing.

**Kylie Davidson:** It came out of a frustration that...for us to want to be more streamlined.

**Robert Davidson:** It was much more the communal....

**Kylie Davidson:** It came out of our frustration, because we wanted to have something that was a bit more streamlined and workable and manageable

**John Babbage:** More control over it as well...

**Kylie Davidson:** Yeah, control over the quality

**Robert Davidson:** The quality, exactly, because there was a rehearsal at the last minute, the night before

**Christa Powell:** So then we'd present a piece...

**Robert Davidson:** And [one of the heart and mind composers] would turn up with this piece like on the morning or something, just written..."Oh, can we slot this one in?"

[general laughter]

**Robert Davidson:** Yeah, and also the rehearsal process was ridiculous because there'd be all these egos battling...

**Christa Powell:** There were like forty people...remember the meetings? The meetings were hilarious

**Robert Davidson:** Yeah, no-one knew what was going on because there was a hundred performers in one...

**Christa Powell:** And there was always someone fighting with somebody else, there was always [one of the composers] having an argument with someone else [laughs]

**Christa Powell:** I think the *idea* of Heart and Mind still lives on in it, it's just that we're more organised and a bit older, and less...

**Bernard Hoey:** What is the idea of Heart and Mind?

**Kylie Davidson:** Accessible new music.

**Christa Powell:** Yeah, yeah

**Robert Davidson:** Well, yeah, and what it says – Music for the Heart and Mind

**Christa Powell:** That’s right.

**Robert Davidson:** Beautiful music with grit!

**Christa Powell:** But we tried a few [slogans], like, anti...what was it? Anti-institutional...

**Robert Davidson:** No, non-institutionalised music

The idea of Brisbane as a particularly vibrant and “friendly” contemporary classical scene was expressed quite strongly in the group interview:

**Christa Powell:** there is a mutual support much more than what you hear about in Sydney.

**John Babbage:** It’s definitely what attracts me to Brisbane, really, I mean one of the primary things is that there is a friendliness

**Robert Davidson:** There’s a feeling of collaboration and camaraderie which I haven’t found in other cities in Australia or in other cities in the world like New York or London...there’s a feeling of support – it’s probably just to do with scale...but then it’s not really in Adelaide either, and it’s not in places of similar size. Brisbane does have this openness which you don’t find in other cities so much – freedom to not worry too much about boundaries, and to support each other even though you have quite diametrically opposed aesthetic approaches.

**Interviewer:** So if I hadn’t asked the question in terms of contemporary chamber music, if I’d asked if you felt part of the Brisbane music scene generally, would that make sense to you? Are you a Brisband?

**Robert Davidson:** Not in terms of pop music really

[several people talking at once]

**Bernard Hoey:** Well, there’s a chance we might be [inaudible] with Katie Noonan<sup>3</sup> next year, maybe...

**Robert Davidson:** We’re probably going to do something with, we have done something with George.

**Interviewer:** When you look at the actual music as well...

**John Babbage:** Loops.

**Robert Davidson:** Loops, of course! Plus we’re working with Full Fathom Five who are a pop group...doing an album with them

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<sup>3</sup> Katie Noonan is the lead vocalist in the jazz/alternative rock band George.

This emphasis on the organic nature of Brisbane’s creative networks is borne out by the extent of Topology’s practical collaborations with local musicians, bands, and composers. Topology’s October 2002 concert was a collaboration with local percussion duo Karak, members of Topology appear with The Queensland Orchestra’s fringe percussion ensemble Isorhythmos, and their final concert for 2003 featured several local popular and opera singers. In the collaboration “Airwaves” they worked closely with Loops<sup>4</sup>, members of which play regularly in the onstage band for the popular annual cabaret concert “Women in Voice” and who have collectively worked with vocalist Katie Noonan of George<sup>5</sup>. The group performs works by local composers, several of whom share close creative and personal connections with members of Topology, extending back to the Music for the Heart and Mind era, or beyond that to the shared experience of tertiary music education. While there is strong representation by Australian composers in their repertoire, this is by no means exclusive or obsessive, and works by American or British composers considered to be compatible with the group’s aesthetic approach are often included, especially those of the most well-known minimalist composers – Steve Reich, Philip Glass, Michael Nyman, Arvo Part (for a full list of Topology’s repertoire see Appendix 3). The group has international connections as well, making an extended visit to Canada in May 2003, and Robert Davidson has made several study tours to the UK and the US to collaborate with composers and to commission works for Topology. At a practical level, therefore, Topology remains committed to the local “community” as an important point of reference and as a social and professional network, but their aesthetic values and alliances are equally tied up with European traditions that are articulated throughout many Western cultures. Similarly, Will Straw argues that in local instances of alternative rock “[the] aesthetic values which dominate local alternative terrains are for the most part those of a musical cosmopolitanism wherein the points of musical reference are likely to remain

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<sup>4</sup> Loops is a local semi-improvisational group of tertiary-trained jazz musicians. The core lineup of drums, guitar, bass and electronics is frequently augmented with popular, classical, or “world” artists (e.g. violinists, tabla players, sitar players, or vocalists).

<sup>5</sup> Hybrid jazz/alternative rock group George, featuring Katie Noonan (daughter of opera singer Maggie Noonan) as lead singer, is the latest of the “Brisbands” (following Powderfinger and Regurgitator) to achieve both national chart success and the support of music critics.



stable from one community to another”, despite the fact that alternative rock *relies* on small-scale local community enterprises for its existence as a meaningful genre category (“Systems of Articulation” 378).

The following exchange occurred in the Topology group interview in response to a question about how the group describes their musical style to “outsiders” and potential audiences:

**Interviewer:** But what would you say to someone who’s not well versed in classical music – would you say post-classical music?

**Robert Davidson:** Oh, yeah.

**Kylie Davidson:** I’d say contemporary classical music

**Robert Davidson:** It’s got to have some reference to classical

**Kylie Davidson:** I often say “It’s not that horrible crash-bang stuff, you know”...squeaky gate, you know.

**Robert Davidson:** But a lot of people have never heard that anymore

**Kylie Davidson:** Yeah, they don’t know what that is either

**Robert Davidson:** [...] Yeah like I think it has to be in reference to classical music because to be honest it really is, you know. Very strongly, it comes with an assumption in the belief in the Grand Tradition, you know, which we are somehow partakers of...the idea of written-down, composed music as the norm. And it’s not – you know, we don’t have to question that, it’s been questioned. All of the 60s happened, we’re over that now. Now we can just get on with what we like.

“Postclassical Music”, as well as functioning, more obviously, to address a potential audience not easily interpellated by “traditional” classical music promotional discourses, also works to address those with some knowledge of the jargon of postmodern pop culture.

As the comments above suggest, Topology’s music remains “art music” because it is the work of an individual composer who structures it according to complex and consciously applied compositional rules, it is written down, and it requires an extremely high level of rhythmic and technical skill on the behalf of the performers, and appropriate cultural competencies on behalf of the audiences (i.e. the audiences need to expect and appreciate the display of rhythmic and technical skill for its own sake). What we think of as “instrumental skill” is bound up with historically constructed combinations of techniques that have

become naturalised, and that work to reinforce the boundaries between high culture and popular culture: these technologies of performance function as “mechanisms of legitimation” (Born). Likewise, the written score retains the composer’s authority and the ability of the performers to interpret it “correctly” is further proof of their specialist expertise. In its precise codification of the “musical ideal”, it minimises the free flow of performers’ individual personalities. The existence of a contemporary chamber music performance depends on an originary moment of creation that occurs before its “interpretation” and reception, a sequence of events that recreates the artistic hierarchy that flows from composer to performer before finally reaching the audience at the bottom.

Connected to this is Topology’s use of “new” technologies such as amplification, digital effects, samples, and electronic instruments. The performances are often amplified, but no effects are applied to the signal other than EQ, which is only used to reproduce as “natural” a sound as possible, or in the case of musical works that are constructed to be performed with a certain amount of digital delay providing an additional instrumental voice. When samples are used, it is not as another primary source of musical sound – the sampler is not treated as an instrument in its own right – but as documentary material around which the orchestral instruments weave a musical commentary<sup>6</sup>. This use of “documentary samples” allows the group to place itself in an explicit relationship with contemporary cultural politics, and to borrow from appropriate popular genres as part of the process of “commenting” on the content of the vocal samples.

These technologies are not used in a way which suggests that they have been borrowed or appropriated wholesale from popular music; rather, the ways in which Topology uses them both demonstrates the knowledge of how they figure in popular contexts, and suggests an “artistic” mastery of their possibilities. In

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<sup>6</sup> Such works include *The Dismissal* (a documentary opera set to recordings of radio broadcasts and notable speeches from the notorious dismissal by the Governor General of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam) and *Airwaves: 100 Years of Radio* (where the pitch and rhythms of historic radio broadcasts are matched by the ensemble).

using digital technologies contemporary chamber music ensembles do not privilege or celebrate them, but position them in an inferior or dependent relationship to the analog technologies of their orchestral instruments and the superior technology of the composition process<sup>7</sup>. Humanistically, technology is understood as a “supplement [to] the human will” (Born 212) – it serves the “needs” of the work (i.e. the composer’s will). Further, Topology’s use of technologies such as sampling, or even the integration of recorded sound within performance works, is carefully arranged so as to be understood as a comment on those technologies, rather than appearing to be motivated by mere convenience or novelty. The use of digital technologies is therefore carefully contained within the organizing discourse of composition, on the one hand, and “live” instrumental performance, on the other.

However, much of Topology’s music is also influenced by the rock, pop, and dance musics with which both they and the younger generation of “postmodern” composers has grown up. Many aspects of their repertoire recall Alper’s key features of the postmodern aesthetic in music: genre and “period” mixing, wit, humour, the return to tonality, and the emphasis on repetition and rhythm (1-4)<sup>8</sup>. While Topology’s repertoire is broad and not easy to sum up stylistically, it is fair to say that in much of their music, repetitive, cyclic rhythms and rock-influenced harmonic progressions are overlaid with slow-moving lyrical solo passages, creating a textural contrast not dissimilar to that produced by trance or house. This aesthetic is most associated with the postmodern composers of the

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<sup>7</sup> However, it would be short-sighted and, given my own background as a classical musician, quite dishonest not to point out that the musicians have made massive investments of time, energy, and subjectivity in the synergistic relationship between each individual performer and his or her instrument, so that the central importance of these instruments to the ensemble is a given. Topology’s pianist Kylie Davidson succinctly pointed this out, saying, “We just want to play our acoustic instruments, you know. Which is not a popular thing”. For an ethnographic exploration of the institutional contexts in which this synergy between musician and (one) instrument is naturalised, see Henry Kingsbury’s *Music, Talent, and Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System*.

<sup>8</sup> Topology’s latest CD release encapsulates several of these characteristics: the title *Perpetual Motion Machine* emphasises the pre-digital rhythms of mechanical objects and reflects the energetic rhythms of the works included the album. Additionally, the sleeve notes feature a humorous image of a cat as perpetual motion machine: the cat is ‘falling’ with a piece of buttered toast tied to its back.

late 1970s and the 1980s who popularised tonal minimalism<sup>9</sup> - Steve Reich, Philip Glass, and Terry Riley, for example.

Musicians and composers in this tradition, with which Topology is clearly aligned, are concerned not only with the popular, but also with institutionalised modernism. The break between the postmodern minimalists and modernism is most often articulated through a rejection of the modernists' "perceived arrogance" (Alper 3) – an arrogance that allowed works to be composed, performed, and evaluated without any regard to the pleasure, or even the presence, of an audience. In her critique of the institutionalisation of modernist art music in the 1980s, Susan McClary describes the twentieth century avant-garde as "a music that has sought to secure prestige precisely by claiming to renounce all possible social functions and values", particularly those that required any kind of a relationship with the public ("Terminal Prestige" 60-61)<sup>10</sup>.

The renewed desire to attract an audience is one of the reasons that the music of Reich and Glass is marked by the use of rhythmic repetition and conventional tonality, creating multi-layered works that, despite their intricacy, did not make for difficult listening, at least in comparison to the modernist avant-garde of the time<sup>11</sup>:

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<sup>9</sup> The musical minimalism of the late 1970s and early 1980s was so named because of its emphasis on repetition over melodic and harmonic "development"; an emphasis influenced by Eastern philosophy, especially the idea that "change may be...experienced in the extended contemplation of apparently unchanging, or only slowly changing, acoustic situations" (Potter 77). The music of Glass, Reich, and Riley was also marked by a willingness to engage with popular music and vernacular traditions, so that their music employed familiar modal harmonic structures similar to those found in rock and folk musics (Potter 11-16).

<sup>10</sup> McClary provides ample evidence of the modernist composers' contempt for the audience, including quotations from Milton Babbitt in which he yearns for a publicly funded career that he could conduct in private; and also this gem from Arnold Schoenberg:

If previously my music had been difficult to understand on account of the peculiarities of my ideas and the way in which I expressed them, how could it happen that now, all of a sudden, everybody could follow my ideas and like them? Either the music or the audience was worthless. (58-59)

<sup>11</sup> Writing of this earlier phase of postmodern art music, Andrew Goodwin warns us not to equate the production and consumption of pop-influenced art music (or art-influenced pop music) with the collapse of the high-popular divide:

The simplicity was often deceptive but was, nevertheless, a logical reaction to the overriding complexity that could make modern music such an agonizing experience for musicians and the public alike. Composers made communication an important priority and did care if the audience listened (Garry E. Clarke 162).

The following discussion from the group interview clarifies the musicians' own view of the relationship between their contemporary work and what they see as the obsolete attitudes of institutionalised musical modernism:

**Robert Davidson:** And there's a lot of things people did in the past which were better than they are now, and many people in the past were actually better off than they are now...like you know, it's not always a good thing to be "new".

**Bernard Hoey:** "New" is passé

**Interviewer:** Can you expand on that Bernard?

**Bernard Hoey:** Oh, well the whole idea of being innovative for its own sake is such a boringly old unsatisfying kind of idea, I think. It doesn't satisfy. The idea that something's new – that's not enough for anyone, I don't think

**Robert Davidson:** What is?

**Bernard Hoey:** Something with more substance, depth

**Robert Davidson:** I agree

**Interviewer:** Is that because there really is nothing new?

**Bernard Hoey:** Maybe there is, but it's irrelevant.

**Kylie Davidson:** I think *genuine* newness is very rare, but it's also novel to have new combinations of old things, and just a simple fresh approach

**Bernard Hoey:** I don't think it matters – I don't think we have to be sort evaluating how much newness there is, or how much lack of newness is there.

**Robert Davidson:** It's also the period that I can't stand which is the sixties/seventies revolutionary period, which was just kind of chuck everything out as much as possible, which was just really crazy I think [...] We've explored that, we've found it wanting, see you later. Get back to what people want to do.

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[The music of artists] like Glass, Eno and Laurie Anderson in fact [occupies] a space within contemporary pop that reproduces the position of progressive rock and art-rock in the 1960s and 1970s. It is music for college students and middle-class graduates who have the cultural capital to decode the significance of its heightened use of repetition, its minimalism [...] ("Popular Music and Postmodern Theory" 419)

As well as arguing for the validity of their anti-modernist aesthetics in terms of repertoire, the members of Topology emphasised their imbrication with contemporary popular music in practice:

**Kylie Davidson:** I'll have to make my lounge contribution at some point [general laughter]

**Robert Davidson:** Kylie's actually making a living out of playing cocktail piano.

**John Babbage:** Well I think we're away from the classical so-to-say sit-down serious concert – they're not the people we *want* to attract I guess. So it will be more broad.

**Robert Davidson:** But then you know, a number of us, three of us have worked full-time in classical music and Kylie has too...I mean like the orchestra.

**Bernard Hoey:** Even John's played in the orchestra.

**Robert Davidson:** John's played in the orchestra...Bolero...did you play Bolero?

**John Babbage:** No.

**Christa Powell:** I remember that Tommy Tycho Big Band concert [laughs]

**Robert Davidson:** And Christa's played with Led Zeppelin [general laughter]

**Christa Powell:** *And* Shirley Bassey, *and* Jerry Lewis.

While the self-conscious humour running through this discussion might indicate a certain uneasiness with the less fashionable of these popular artists, it seemed to me that it was also very important to the musicians that they claimed as part of their group identity some of the informality of Australian culture and the fun of popular culture (as opposed to high-minded seriousness of the art world). A part of this is a sense of collective individuality created by the small number of performers, by the absence of an obvious leader, and by the relaxed but focused character of their onstage demeanour. In their concerts, the group performs a kind of shambolic yet confident casualness in their deportment and their dress – there is a careful harmony of colours (usually including a lot of black), but a careful avoidance of uniformity. Finally, it is perhaps metonymic of Topology's cultural positioning between the worlds of art music and popular culture that violist Bernard Hoey's trademark performance outfit is a lurid sixties-style T-shirt teamed with black concert trousers and dress shoes.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

This chapter began by situating the case study within a specific spatial and temporal context – that is, in relation to the culture and creative networks of Brisbane at a time of rapid change in its cultural economy. As in Straw’s theory of music scenes (“Systems of Articulation” 378), I have shown that, while this local context is important to Topology’s identity, the group’s relationship to longer and more widespread traditions is equally productive of its position in the cultural field. The task of the next chapter is to map the relationship between Topology and their audiences. This means understanding not only the social identities of the audiences, but also how these identities map onto patterns of taste and cultural value. Finally, and most importantly, the chapter will describe and analyze the symbolic practices of the audiences as they participate in the concert performance.

## 4. 'CONSUMING' CONTEMPORARY CHAMBER MUSIC

The term “consumption” has come to mean much more than the purchasing and subsequent use (or using up) of goods and is now the subject of an enormous body of work that encompasses not only the buying and using, but also the participation in and making over of almost any form of intangible, as well as material, culture. Rather than understanding consumption as the opposite of production, and therefore merely the reactive or passive absorption of mass culture, consumption is now understood to entail some degree of social agency, discrimination, and in some cases significant creativity (Fiske, “The Cultural Economy of Fandom”; Storey, *Cultural Consumption and Everyday Life*; Lury, *Consumer Culture*). Without stretching theories of active consumption too far, both sociological analyses of music consumption and subcultural theory have established as common sense the idea that consuming, or preferring, a particular genre of music is an act of indirect communication that works to place the consumer in an imagined community whose values are mirrored in the symbolic structures of the music (Lewis 134-51; Frith, *Performing Rites* 89)<sup>1</sup>.

### 4.1 Who is Topology’s Audience?

Topology’s audience does not cluster significantly around a particular age group, although there are fewer audience members at the extremes of age – the audience is therefore predominantly between 25 and 45 years of age (see Table 1 below), and gender is almost evenly distributed, with just over half the respondents indicating that they were male. The majority of the audience members were regular attendees of both the Powerhouse and of a wide range of live cultural events, including cabaret, indie rock gigs, contemporary dance, theatre, and classical music; however, neither opera nor ballet were prevalent choices. Word of mouth was the most common source of information about the concert, followed by the Powerhouse program guide accessed via the Powerhouse website. The two most strongly



represented occupational categories were music and education (including teachers, lecturers, and students), followed by other creative occupations (e.g. web design, graphic design, visual arts, writing) (see Table 2).

**Table 1**

Age at Last Birthday

| Age group | Frequency | %     |
|-----------|-----------|-------|
| 0) 15-19  | 4         | 9.1   |
| 1) 20-29  | 12        | 27.3  |
| 2) 30-39  | 10        | 22.7  |
| 3) 40-49  | 11        | 25.0  |
| 4) 50+    | 7         | 15.9  |
| TOTAL     | 44        | 100.0 |

**Table 2**

Usual Occupation

| Occupation Category                             | Frequency | %     |
|---|-----------|-------|
| 1) Education Professions (teachers, librarians) | 5         | 11.1  |
| 2) Students (including music students)          | 9         | 20.0  |
| 3) Professions or Management                    | 8         | 17.8  |
| 5) Musicians or Composers                       | 8         | 17.8  |
| 4) Creative (other than music)                  | 7         | 15.6  |
| 6) Trades or Clerical                           | 8         | 17.8  |
| TOTAL   | 45        | 100.0 |

At Topology concerts, professional or quasi-professional musicians (composers, members of the local symphony orchestra, and music students) made up a large proportion of the audience members who returned the form, and when we include all those who indicated that they played an instrument or wrote music

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion on the relationships between social identity groups (class, 'race', and gender), cultural capital, and music preferences, see: Peterson and Simkus; Van Eijck; Bryson.

(whether on a professional or amateur basis), the percentage of musicians in the audience rises to 66% (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

Active Musician<sup>2</sup>

| Response | Freq. | %     |
|----------|-------|-------|
| 1) Yes   | 31    | 66.0  |
| 2) No    | 16    | 34.0  |
| TOTAL    | 47    | 100.0 |

The audience for the Topology concert cannot be identified as belonging to any particular “class fraction”, i.e. as a particular age (or gender) segment of a clearly defined class segment of the city’s population<sup>3</sup>. However, as in Wynne and O’Connor’s study (846), education is a key marker – 92% of those surveyed reported that they had some tertiary-level educational qualifications (see Table 4), something that is to be expected on the basis of previous research into the demographics of arts audiences (Constantoura 161-65).

**Table 4**

Highest Level of Education Completed

| Education Level               | Frequency | %     |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-------|
| 1) Secondary                  | 2         | 8.0   |
| 2) Some tertiary              | 9         | 36.0  |
| 3) Undergraduate degree       | 9         | 36.0  |
| 4) Postgraduate Qualification | 5         | 20.0  |
| TOTAL                         | 25        | 100.0 |

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<sup>2</sup> Participants were asked to answer “yes” or “no” to the following question: “Do you ever perform, compose, or produce music yourself?”

<sup>3</sup> It is important to point out that Brisbane remains one of the least multicultural cities in Australia, and it is therefore unsurprising that the audiences are almost exclusively from white European backgrounds.

What distinguishes Topology's core audiences from 'traditional' arts audiences (i.e. lovers of "fine music") is a particular mode of engagement with culture that is organised, not only around learned taste, but perhaps even more so around curiosity, risk, and openness. As Tables 5 and 6 and show, the audiences represented themselves as having very eclectic tastes in music and other forms of culture. Importantly, this eclecticism crosses the high-popular divide. Those associated with this taste culture are likely to be tertiary-educated, with sophisticated but diverse tastes in music, film, and literature. They are likely to frequently attend a range of cultural events (from symphony orchestra concerts to indie rock gigs, plays, and dance events), many of them hosted by the Powerhouse. They distinguish their own tastes in relation to what they perceive as the conformism or anti-intellectualism of mass culture. In their responses, they base these distinctions on aesthetic, intellectual, and occasionally spiritual grounds. This group, perhaps less consciously, also distinguishes itself from conservative middlebrow culture, firstly, through a generally positive relationship to new technologies (e.g. nominating techno or drum'n'bass music, or "computer magazines" as preferred genres); and secondly, through consuming sub-genres of innovative or "cultish" popular culture. The audience members tended to present themselves as intelligent, discerning but also somewhat irreverent consumers: for example, using their knowledge of taste hierarchies to playfully mention their love of "cult" or trashy TV shows ("The Wombles rule!") thereby demonstrating a camp aesthetic which actually depends on having highly educated tastes<sup>4</sup>. Several of the younger respondents answered humorously, using jokes that require a certain level of cultural knowledge, e.g. one participant described her favourite genre or style of films as "Margaret and David's choices"<sup>5</sup>; another described himself as a "culinary pragmatist"; a third

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Ross describes camp as a way of recuperating the power of the tastemakers in an age of mass culture (145) and as an expression of the "self-mockery" of "arriviste groups" such as gay men who lack social power but not cultural competencies (146).

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Pomeranz and David Stratton are the co-hosts of *The Movie Show*, a popular film review television program that airs on Australia's Special Broadcasting Service. SBS was set up to provide a multicultural broadcasting service. It combines arthouse and LOTE (languages other than English) programming, attracting a predominantly urban cosmopolitan audience (Hawkins 45-47). The element of humour in this particular comment is a reflection of the program, which is famous for the hosts' vigorous, but good-natured, on-air arguments about the value of particular films.

called herself a “PH junkie”, where the abbreviation of Powerhouse to “PH” is to be read as indication of a casual, irreverent familiarity with the venue.

**Table 5**

Musical Tastes<sup>6</sup>

| Genre Category                              | Freq. | %    |
|---|-------|------|
| 1) Classical (traditional and contemporary) | 47    | 34.1 |
| 2) Rock and pop                             | 29    | 21.0 |
| 3) World, folk, new age                     | 24    | 17.4 |
| 4) Jazz, soul and funk                      | 21    | 15.2 |
| 5) Dance and electronica                    | 11    | 8.0  |
| 6) Musical theatre                          | 2     | 1.4  |
| 7) Country                                  | 2     | 1.4  |
| 8) Hip Hop and R & B                        | 2     | 1.4  |

**Table 6**

Overall Taste Patterns

| Taste Category             | Frequency | %     |
|----------------------------|-----------|-------|
| 1) Eclectic <sup>7</sup>   | 37        | 80.4  |
| 2) Elite <sup>8</sup>      | 7         | 15.2  |
| 3) Middlebrow <sup>9</sup> | 2         | 4.3   |
| TOTAL                      | 46        | 100.0 |

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<sup>6</sup> Collapsed from recoded responses to the question “Which styles of music do you listen to for pleasure at home?”

<sup>7</sup> A pattern of tastes drawn from both sides of the high-popular divide, frequently organised around the themes of difference and innovation.

<sup>8</sup> Tastes from what could reasonably be considered to be traditional high cultural, elite or avant-garde categories, to the exclusion of popular forms.

Topology's audiences can therefore be divided into three groups: those who are also performers or composers of contemporary art music; the "arts supporters" and chamber music lovers who value Topology as innovators within a secure tradition; and the culturally competent adventurers with broad and eclectic tastes from both sides of the high-popular divide. While the first two groups represent traditional audiences for high culture, this last group arguably represents a newly dominant class of cultural consumption. Richard A. Peterson has argued extensively that even amongst those who have traditionally patronised high culture, high-brow snobbishness has been replaced in the United States by a new cultural omnivorousness, particularly in urban areas ("Understanding Audience Segmentation" 252-53). Likewise, Wynne and O'Connor's findings in their study of the cultural tastes and lifestyles of inner-urban dwellers in Manchester centre around the themes of openness, omnivorousness, and eclecticism, themes which are certainly mirrored in the findings of the present study. They posit in conjunction with the "aestheticisation of everyday life" "a model of cultural participation that [emphasises] "enjoyment, spectacle, ease of entry and a crossing of genres". (858-59)

As we have seen, Brisbane has been similarly transformed, particularly through urban renewal initiatives in Fortitude Valley and New Farm – and the new arts and cultural precincts established as a result are the heartland of Topology's territory. The Brisbane inner-city letterbox publication Map Magazine explicitly targets this emerging urban taste culture. Its primary target market is people aged 17-35, but its secondary target market is people aged 35 years and over, and 62% of its readership has completed post-secondary education (Map Magazine Reader Survey 2002). Map Magazine describes its readership as:

Interested in career opportunities, employment opportunities, lifestyle culture, success stories, motivated Australian people, role models, brain candy, topical issues, successful people, café culture, book reviews, art and design, stuff, entertainment, technology and net info. ("Map Magazine Snapshot Info Card")

As this description of the wide range of their readership's tastes (but not their distastes) demonstrates, openness can be the opposite of what is presumed to be

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<sup>9</sup> Tastes fall into patterns that appear to be organised around quality, self-development and relaxation, including neither "low" nor avant-garde forms.

the hard sell, or the formulaic nature of the mass-popular's offerings (the McDonald's menu, the top 40). It can also be the opposite of high-cultural elitism, didacticism, and exclusiveness. This is exemplified by Map's use of the words "brain candy" in place of "intellectual stimulation". Topology's audiences, through their embodied knowledge of the creative city, their participation in the concerts, and through talking about and evaluating the music, validate their identities as creative people: maintaining their identities as contemporary cultural citizens, and adding to their stock of eclectic creative experiences (much as Richard Florida's "creative class" does) (182-85). Creativity, experience and urban citizenship, and not straightforward class aspirations, are therefore the organising forces in their participation.

However, although the respondents demonstrated their rampantly eclectic musical and other cultural *tastes*, there were clear patterns of *distaste* that were directed against commercial pop and "low" genres of popular music (see Table 7). The Topology audience member Keith, who enjoys listening to heavy metal, independent rock, early recorder music, and traditional chamber music, summed his cultural tastes up in the following way:

**Keith:** I probably just go for things that are a bit obscure, like Topology, that's the kind of stuff I like, different, not mainstream, like they're not a mainstream pop group or something like that

This affinity with modernism's condemnation of mass culture is also indicated by other audience members' justifications for musical dislikes: "[these styles] require no work", "dumbing down", "unskilled". Typical of the "postmodern urban consumer" (Wynne and O'Connor) or the "omnivore" (Peterson), Topology's audiences share with the tolerant omnivore a "familiarity with a range of cultural styles that is both broad and predictably exclusive"; exclusive, that is, of low, crude, or "mainstream" styles (Bryson 884-88)<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Bryson elaborates on the argument that the musical genres excluded from such "omnivorous" (and seemingly all-embracing) tastes are at the same time signifiers of social exclusion. Since cultural forms are associated with particular identity groups or class formations, the exclusion (from preference) of particular genres links to the exclusion of particular social groups. In Bryson's terms, musical genres associated with less-educated fans--gospel, country, rap, heavy metal--are most likely to be rejected by "the musically tolerant". For example, a person who likes "everything but rap" is making a negative statement about a particular construction of urban blackness and the tropes of violence, poverty, and lack of formal education associated with it.

**Table 7**

## Musical Dislikes

| Genre Category <sup>11</sup> | Freq. | %    |
|------------------------------|-------|------|
| 1) Country                   | 16    | 29.1 |
| 2) Commercial Pop            | 12    | 21.8 |
| 3) Heavy Metal and Hard Rock | 8     | 14.5 |
| 4) Avant-garde               | 4     | 7.3  |
| 5) Rap                       | 4     | 7.3  |
| 6) Dance and Electronica     | 3     | 5.5  |
| 7) Jazz                      | 2     | 3.6  |
| 8) Easy Listening            | 2     | 3.6  |
| 9) World and New Age         | 3     | 5.5  |
| 10) Classical                | 1     | 1.8  |
| TOTAL                        | 55    | 100  |

In the more general areas of cultural preference, a majority of respondents made at least one strong statement against mass-popular culture (e.g. McDonald's, commercial TV) and/or "low" genres (e.g. heavy metal, country and western, soap opera) (see Table 8). Frequently these judgements were framed not in terms of personal preference, but on the more moralistic basis that they were too commercial, "inauthentic", or "exploited". In response to the question "which styles of music do you personally dislike?" for example, one respondent wrote, "commercially exploited styles", because they are "not authentic".

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<sup>11</sup> Collapsed from all genres named in response to the question, "Which styles of music do you personally dislike?"

**Table 8**

Evidence of negative attitudes towards “mass” or “low” culture

|                         | Freq. | %    |
|-------------------------|-------|------|
| 1) Strong <sup>12</sup> | 24    | 54.5 |
| 2) Some <sup>13</sup>   | 14    | 31.8 |
| 3) None <sup>14</sup>   | 6     | 13.6 |

These patterns are clearly representative of the “new evaluative dynamic” described by Jim Collins, within which:

[...]a higher education is judged essential but incomplete, in need of the finishing that only high-end popular culture authorities can now provide as they make taste into a process of converting one’s stored cultural literacy into registers of personal preference articulated by the proper consumer choices [...]. (“High-Pop” 19)

These “proper consumer choices” allow the consumer to claim “a higher moral ground by condemning the excesses of a materialism without taste, demonizing it as consumerism without a soul” (Collins, “High-Pop” 19). By contrast, a respondent who said that she didn’t like “some contemporary classical styles”, explained this in terms that suggest the styles concerned represent a lack of fit with this shifting taste pattern: rather than eclectic, playful, and intelligent, it was described as being “self-indulgent, unstructured, humourless”.

While it is important and interesting to discover how contemporary chamber music audiences might fit into a social identity group (however loosely defined), and how their musical tastes fit into broader taste maps in relation to that identity group, it is even more important in terms of subcultural theory to think about

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<sup>12</sup> Frequent or vehement statements negatively evaluating either or both mass-popular culture (Top Forty music, commercial television) and low genres (fast food, soap opera).

<sup>13</sup> Isolated or mildly expressed statements of this sort.

<sup>14</sup> No evidence of negative attitudes towards mass popular or “low” genres.



their consumption of contemporary chamber music not only as a “taste”, with its implications of merely choosing from a range of prepackaged cultural objects and then absorbing these into one’s identity. In subculture theory, the emphasis must also be on active *participation* in the rituals of the subculture - even in those subcultures where the rituals are less than spectacular.

#### **4.2 Ritual, Cultural Competence and Subcultural Participation**

The contemporary chamber music concert can be understood as a social ritual, and in this Christopher Small has led the way with his fascinating Geertzian account of the modern symphony orchestra concert, to which parts of this dissertation are heavily indebted at a conceptual level. Small analyses the symphony orchestra concert as a social ritual in which musicians, composers, audiences, and ushers alike take part in performing the social actions he calls “musicking”. He offers the following description of the concert:

What is going on in this concert hall is essentially the same as that which goes on during any musical performance. Members of a certain social group at a particular point in its history are using sounds that have been brought into certain kinds of relationships with one another as the focus for a ceremony in which the values—which is to say, the concepts of what constitute right relationships—of that group are explored, affirmed, and celebrated. [...] During a musical performance, any musical performance anywhere and at any time, desired relationships are brought into virtual existence so that those taking part are enabled to experience them as if they really did exist. (183)

Small’s approach is global and general, seeking commonalities in the ritual of the symphony concert, wherever and whenever (within the last forty years or so) it occurs. While the task of the present study is a slightly different one, taking more account of local and temporal specificity, and focusing on the social meanings of the subculture first, and its symbolic practices second, it will still be useful to provide a similar, although necessarily shorter, description of the contemporary chamber music scene’s core activity: the concert performance. What follows is a deliberately impressionistic account of my observations and experiences as an “insider” at several Topology concerts. This account is provided primarily as a means of conveying some sense of how the various subcultural “elements” come together at the site of the concert performance. As such, it is not meant to be taken as straightforward “evidence” in its own right,

but as a way of contextualising the interview material that refers to the concert experience, and the discussion of cultural competence and subcultural participation that draws on this material.

On a Friday or Saturday night, after driving through busy Fortitude Valley (former home of brothels and disused warehouses but now Brisbane's hippest and most eclectic night-time destination), the members of the audience pass new boutique apartment complexes and the dark expanses of New Farm Park before arriving at the Brisbane Powerhouse. They might be dressed in whatever they had on that day, in styles ranging from neo-bohemian casual attire to contemporary street wear, or they may have dressed for the evening in the unofficial uniform of contemporary art music - black trousers and turtleneck jumper. Those who are less familiar with contemporary art music and are more accustomed to attending classical concerts at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre might have come in "smart casual", as if dressed for a special night out, but formal jackets and ties or evening wear would be almost laughably out of place and would mark the wearer as aspirational, suburban, or middlebrow.

The audience approaches the Powerhouse either via the well-lit walkway, flanked on either side by now-darkened New Farm Park, or up the staircase from the open-air car park to the large flat piazza area. Surrounded by darkness and backing onto the river, the Powerhouse gives the appearance of monolithic size. On passing through the tall glass entry doors, the immediate impression is one of vertical space. Once inside, the audience is free to wander at will around the open areas of the Powerhouse. They pass the doors to its various concert spaces and might head in the direction of the Spark Bar with its colourful couches, its central bar area and its windows facing out to the river - which is dark and quiet apart from the occasional dinner cruise boat going past. The Topology audience does not stand out dramatically from the patrons of other, more widely marketed, Powerhouse events, except perhaps in that they are quieter, travel in smaller groups (or even alone), and appear to belong in their surroundings, moving with the appearance of casual confidence around the open labyrinth that is the Powerhouse's interior. While they wait, drink in hand, until it is time to enter the performance space, they might leaf through the piles of leaflets, street

newspapers, and advertisements for upcoming events in the foyer, or they may peruse the artworks exhibited along the lengths of the interior walls.

As the beginning of the concert draws near, they walk quietly through the door of the Visy theatre, sweeping up photocopied program notes from the table outside and showing the usher their tickets on the way through before he or she can ask them to do so. They take their seats, settle in, gaze around the room at the other audience members, read the program notes, chat quietly, or wave to acquaintances from across the room, sometimes even taking the opportunity to wander over to the other side for a quick chat before performance time. The atmosphere is relaxed and sociable, but expectant. As the musicians emerge from the black curtain that serves to separate the performance area from the backstage area of the room, there is a noticeable shift of social focus from the communal audience to the stage. The performers smile and perhaps wave to friends or invited guests as they take to the stage, and a warm round of applause greets them. Their attention turns inward, checking the music on their stands is in the right order, glancing at each other, and checking tuning before bassist and composer Robert Davidson turns to address the audience. He might share an anecdote about the piece the group is about to play, or tell a joke, but his comments are brief and the audience is not invited to respond. This micro-ritual is repeated throughout the concert, marking the space between one composed work and the next. As the performers lift their arms and ready their instruments, the lights dim and at the same time a hush falls over the crowd, creating the illusion of suspended time, and of separated sonic space from which the music will emerge. The bodies of the audience members are stilled and the visual environment is as unobtrusive as possible so that each individual member can experience the full impact of their engagement with the music.

Audience behaviour at a “classical” concert can seem passive, meek, and empty of social meaning (as compared with the rave or the mosh pit at an indie rock gig) but it can be more productively interpreted as a meaningfully structured form of social action that requires prior knowledge on behalf of the audience members. The audience reproduces a familiar repertoire, based directly on established “interactive competencies” (Gottdiener 73) with which they

negotiate the material and cultural space of the concert. As I have suggested above, the cultural competencies required in this case include the ability to ‘correctly’ read the layout of the concert space, correctly interpreting the flow of the concert (clapping at the appropriate point in the performance), knowing when to laugh, when to enter, when to leave, when to move to the music, when to be silent, when to speak, to whom, and at what volume. These behaviours – gestures, styles of deportment, and other communicative or goal-directed actions like finding a seat, applauding and chatting – dynamically reinforce and are reinforced by the performances of the musicians on stage, establishing the audience and musicians as competent in the performance of the concert ritual, and creating a naturalised sense of belonging.

Small adopts Lipsitz’s famous notion of the “community of strangers” that forms the audience for performing arts in the Western tradition:

Those attending [the] symphony concert come as strangers to one another and seem content to remain so. Even those who have come with friends sit, once the performance begins, still and silent in their seats, each individual alone with his or her own experience, avoiding so much as eye contact with others. Whatever may be the nature of the performance, they experience it, and expect to experience it, in isolation, as solitary individuals (41).

Because of this shared expectation and the shared social position of the audience however, there is an “underlying kinship” between the members of the audience (Small 41). Therefore, a feature of the art music concert is the shared expectation that the audience *wishes* to interpret and enjoy the music in collective isolation, and that along with this comes a deeply internalised mode of engagement – an “intensely subjective sense of being sociable”, as Simon Frith puts it (*Performing Rites* 273). This “internalised” mode of engagement might be interpreted by outsiders as distance or even boredom - as *non*-engagement. The level of interaction that is “just enough” for subcultural insiders may well be experienced as nowhere near enough by those more familiar with shoulder-to-shoulder pub rock gigs, or the intensely physical spirituality of dance. Some members of the audience did in fact draw my attention to this in their responses to the questionnaires, wishing for “more interaction” between performers and audience. However, it is important to remember that many of the audience members are also instrumental musicians, and as such, it seems logical that they

attend concerts in order to watch and hear other musicians play their instruments as much as to hear particular musical works – it may not be too extreme to say that for a musician, the composition is a vehicle for the instrument, and not the other way around. Based on my own history as an instrumental musician, I would argue, with Simon Frith, that musicians watch and listen with “a felt, physical empathy” which non-musicians may not experience as intensely (*Performing Rites* 142). Therefore, for musicians, sitting and listening is actually an aid, rather than a barrier, to the enjoyment of a concert performance in that all of their attention can be focused on the performers’ physical production of the sound.

It is worth pointing out that while the social world of the concert performance itself shares some qualities with Christopher Small’s monumental symphonic concert, in other ways it is less hierarchical and more organic. Firstly, many of the audience members *are* directly acquainted with one other, and even with the performers – this is particularly true of the classical musicians and composers who make up a large proportion of the audience. Secondly, the Visy Theatre, the Powerhouse space in which most Topology concerts take place, is relatively small, enabling a physical and psychic intimacy between the performers and the audience, and between the audience members themselves. While in the case of a large opera or symphonic performance there is a sense that the audience “takes in” the power of monumental works interpreted for them by the performers up on stage, because of the small space and the elevation of the seating above the concert platform, in the case of a Topology concert the sense is more that the audience is granted the privilege of “looking in” at an intimate ritual of music-making between five close friends. In the surveys and focus groups, the audiences spoke of the value of this intimacy, and of the feeling that they were in some ways part of the performance.

In as much as contemporary chamber music concerts are not widely promoted through the mass media, even knowing when and where concerts are to be held demonstrates a degree of “belonging”. Like Florida’s description of the FIY (Find it Yourself) ethics and aesthetics of the “creative class” (182-85), the focus

group participants expressed pride in their ability and desire to find different, out of the way places and events:

**Matthew**<sup>15</sup>: [...] there's that issue of knowing the place, finding out about it...my first Topology concert, I'd been meaning to [go to one]; I happened to be walking through the Powerhouse that week they were playing.

**Laurence**: I sort of stumbled on them...like [Matthew] I don't necessarily follow...there is a Topology brochure out each year for their concerts coming up, but I'll just stumble on them...I went down to the Conservatorium one night, they had some Indian music on, so I went to that concert – you stumble on something and say “Oh, here's a chance to go to something totally different and out of the way”

**Keith**...It's sort of like exploring something new, when you start getting something new...a whole new field to explore. You can go and listen to a whole lot of different things and you find out, “Oh, I like this, I like that”. As I said before you come across one like this and you think, “Oh, I like this.”

There may even be a sense of anxiety about not being “plugged in” to this kind of urban knowledge network. Louise, who has a subscriber seat at the opera but enjoys trying “different things” when she can find out about them, expresses her sense of the inaccessibility of subcultural knowledge:

**Louise**: I guess there's lots of issues, I mean there's knowing about it, and I don't feel that I mix in the forums where you find out about things like Topology or The Necks<sup>16</sup> concert, I only found out because I went to the markets on Sunday morning and it was on the board outside that it was on.

“Stumbling upon” or “coming across” something different means displaying a certain urban competency, an ability to move with confidence and a keen eye through the creative precincts of the city, and most importantly to find what others may not without the aid of overt mediation. The self-cultured individual is able to construct, piece by piece, her own repertoire of experiences, sensations, and urban knowledges, therefore demonstrating creativity and a mastery over, not a dependence on, the mediated postmodern city.

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<sup>15</sup> Pseudonyms have been used where it is necessary to refer to the participants by name.

<sup>16</sup> The Necks is a three-piece freeform improvisational group whose sparse sound the popular music press has categorised variously as “avant-garde jazz”, “ambient” and “experimental”.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented a progressively more nuanced depiction of Topology's audience and their relationship to the cultural contexts described in the previous chapter. Based on the results of the questionnaires, we can see that Topology's audiences are not to be located in a clearly defined age or gender category, but that they do represent an emerging taste segment of the Australian middle class. Although there are some audience members with traditionally high cultural tastes, the majority of them can be described as postmodern urban consumers, whose preferences are marked by eclecticism, openness, and irreverence for the high-popular divide, albeit with a shared disdain for what is perceived as "mainstream" popular culture. In the second part of this chapter I moved on to a discussion of how these audiences engage with and participate in the contemporary chamber music concert. I found that they employed certain cultural competencies, learned not only in high cultural, but also contemporary urban contexts, in order to "belong" to the particular social world constructed through the concert ritual. I suggested that those members of the audience who identified strongly as musicians would experience the social ritual of the concert as being most "right" and enjoyable.

## 5. CONTEMPORARY CHAMBER MUSIC AS A SUBCULTURE

### 5.1 Applying the Contemporary Subculture Model

In Chapter 2, I established a basic definition of subcultures as an identifiable group of musicians, audiences, and participants with shared identities and values. At an equally basic level, Brisbane's contemporary chamber music scene, as read through Topology as an exemplary case study, can certainly be described in this way. Beyond the context of their own performances, Topology is involved in a collaborative network of musicians with a shared interest in contemporary instrumental music that remains within well-defined aesthetic boundaries. This performers' network shares both a "class" and geographic location with its audiences: the majority of musicians and audience members are white, highly educated middle-class adults. Most importantly, the subculture coheres around the shared experience of the concert performance; an experience that articulates the subculture's shared values (for now, we might list these values as intellectual exploration, independence, eclecticism, and playfulness).

As outlined in the earlier chapter on subculture theory, to carry a subcultural analysis of the scene beyond this basic definition means to look at how various cultural logics operate in and through it. To this end, in the previous two chapters I have tried to describe the subculture in relation to its social composition, its use of spaces, its relationship to time and place and history, and its ideological and political positioning. However, analyzing, rather than merely describing, contemporary chamber music in Brisbane as a subculture means bringing these relationships together and attempting to draw conclusions from them. Only then do we achieve an understanding of how contemporary high culture works as social practice, what kinds of people are associated with it, what kinds of experiences they have, and how it helps them to make sense of or construct their place in the wider culture.



To employ a spatial metaphor, Brisbane's contemporary chamber music scene might be described as having a cohesive social centre made up of classically trained musicians and composers who attend one another's concerts. As we move from this centre outwards, we encounter looser networks of artists, students and teachers, some of whom know members of the group and other audience members, and many of whom also write, produce, or play music. Those who do not identify as musicians at all and are not socially connected to one another - the middle-class professionals who see themselves as "arts supporters" and the young urban omnivores - might be said to occupy the outer edges of the scene. It is for those at the centre that the notion of subcultural identity has most valence: for them, performing, composing and listening to contemporary chamber music is inseparable from everyday life and the self. It is also those at the centre who have the full range of cultural competencies required to enact the symbolic rituals of the subculture, and, as Christopher Small might put it, to see "rightness" in the relationships perpetuated by those rituals. Interestingly, with the exception of the music students, the "trained" and professional musicians in Topology's audience were least inclined to complete the surveys, and even denied they were audience members at all: as I attempted to hand him a survey form at one of Topology's concerts, the composer of one of the works performed in the concert said, "Oh, you don't want me! I'm not really in the audience, I'm part of the festival". This passing comment, along with the relatively low participation in the study by the professional musicians in the audience, has tremendous significance, indicating the extent to which musicians are considered "insiders", as "part of" the scene, while the audiences are (albeit perhaps unintentionally) dismissed as mere onlookers. This clearly resonates with the implicit or explicit hierarchies of subcultural capital, linked to style and scene-specific knowledge, and logics of distinction that operate in dance cultures as described by Thornton (99-100).

One of the distinguishing features of contemporary chamber music as a *high* cultural subculture is that while the music may be deeply embedded in the everyday lives of these 'insiders', active and inclusive participation in the subculture occurs not on the street but only in the space and at the moment of the concert performance: this is one of those subcultures referred to in *Resistance*

*Through Rituals* as “loosely-defined strands or ‘milieux’ within the parent culture” which “possess no distinctive ‘world’ of their own” (J. Clarke et al 14). There is little interaction between performers and audiences beyond the ephemerality of the concert space, and even those audience members sufficiently engaged with the scene to volunteer for an off-site focus group display few characteristics of the intense and productive mode of engagement by which fans are identified<sup>1</sup>.

Although the contemporary chamber music scene is less tightly knit, less spectacular and less public than the problematic classic subculture model, it is nevertheless possible to argue that there is a homologous kind of relationship between its symbolic rituals and the social identities of its participants. The social world of Brisbane’s contemporary chamber music scene is adult, middle-class, educated, and urban. In attempting to draw together the threads of the subcultural analysis of the scene, however, by far the most important of these social characteristics shared by Topology and its audiences is education. By education, I mean more than the simple fact that a majority of the participants have attained relatively high levels of formal education (which, unsurprisingly, is the case). More accurately, what is evident in almost all the texts (including promotional materials, concert reviews, and interviews) I analysed was an emphasis on education as a continuing process of experimentation, exploration, and interpretation with an inherent value to the self and to society. In classically middle-class fashion, emphasis is placed on individual, rather than collective, experience, and on intellectual appreciation and evaluation of those experiences. Indeed, while it was difficult in the focus groups to bring the discussion around to pleasure of any kind, the focus group participants were very comfortable critiquing the contemporary chamber music scene and demonstrating their knowledge of it, even suggesting ways in which it could be improved. Like fans, they were more than willing to offer their opinions of particular concert programs, and to compare Topology against other groups and artists. Indeed, much of the pleasure in being an audience for contemporary chamber music

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<sup>1</sup> There was one focus-group participant could be considered an exception to this on the grounds that he collects the printed concert programs.

comes from the chance to demonstrate and actively exercise one's powers of discrimination.

In classic subculture theory, each subculture is both distinct from and derivative of or dependent on its parent culture (J. Clarke et. al 13). Accordingly, we might frame the Brisbane's contemporary chamber music scene as operating in relation to the middle class traditions of art music – unarguably the “parent” of contemporary chamber music, despite its selective appropriation of popular elements. It is indeed difficult to imagine a middle-class subculture that would *not* emphasise individual, rather than collective participation, intellectual appreciation rather than physical celebration, and critical detachment rather than intense affective engagement. However, many of the values and symbolic practices of Brisbane's contemporary chamber music scene mark out distinctions between the subculture and this “parent” culture. In keeping with Thornton's dual logics of distinction thesis then (99-101), Brisbane's contemporary chamber music scene is marked by its difference from two cultural formations: firstly, the elitist and stale traditions of middle-class high culture (the “parent” culture) as represented by institutionalised classical music; and secondly, an imagined “mainstream” metonymically represented by the global popular music industry.

This two-way process of distinction produces tensions and contradictions. In the group interview I conducted with Topology, apparently innocuous topics frequently evolved into complex discussions that are very revealing of the tensions the musicians have to negotiate in order to maintain a cultural identity that enables them to continue seeing themselves as artists on the one hand, but as postmodern and democratic (or at least non-elitist) on the other. These negotiations, however, are never concluded and can have quite a destabilizing effect. The following exchange is a particularly good example of this:

**Robert Davidson:** It's very difficult to define what's good in the arts. And as soon as you start to talk about things which are intellectually demanding or something then you get too much balance towards what Elision does<sup>2</sup>, who I support, but in the 60s and 70s it went too far down that – only things which were really...difficult to think about got support. And to the detriment of the audience. But then, go the other path and you sort of dumb everything down – which I don't think it is dumbing down but that's the perception of pop music sort of taking over...

**Interviewer:** What is dumbing down?

**Robert Davidson:** Well making things which are easily digestible and don't particularly have much reward after you've chewed and swallowed them...

**John Babbage:** Throwaway

**Bernard Hoey:** Yeah

**Robert Davidson:** You know, like Andrew Lloyd Weber musicals getting the funding and stuff...

**Kylie Davidson:** *Not* to be confused with our idea of accessibility

**Robert Davidson:** Like accessibility should not be at the expense of some sort of...

**Christa Powell:** Quality

Beyond cultural value, these tensions are also evident when the members of Topology attempt to explain their knowledge of, and their relationships with, their actual and potential audiences:

**Christa Powell:** I think there's a huge variation in our audiences. You get older people, you get academics, you actually do get musicians.

**Robert Davidson:** I'd actually like more of the music establishment to take us seriously.

**Bernard Hoey:** Basically it would be good if everyone was interested in what we do

**Interviewer:** Everyone?

[general agreement, everyone talking at once]

**Interviewer:** So you'd like to have huge audiences? You don't get off on being a tiny, secret...

**All:** No

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<sup>2</sup> I interpret this comment as referring to the highly abstract avant-garde style of much of Elision's repertoire and presentation.

**Robert Davidson:** No, we don't. And um, it's not like we're going to sell our souls to do it but we would...

**Christa Powell:** I think the audience is definitely out there for it

**Robert Davidson:** It's not like the main motivation or anything, but...it would be nice

**Kylie Davidson:** I'm always amazed when I knock off work at 9.00 am, and I'm in my frock or whatever, and people are naturally curious about what I do because I'm dressed up, and they just can't believe that I do what I do, and so I just think there's a need for making it way more, not ordinary, but just more obvious, accessible, acceptable, I don't know. Not such a surprise. Because I think that people are put off by how strange – you know I think if we could make it so that it was just a really normal thing to do to go to a classical music concert instead of such a weird thing...

**Christa Powell:** That's a problem in Australian culture though...

**Interviewer:** Is it the music or the context though, because for example when you think about the music on soundtracks of weird independent thrillers or something, that music is "weirder"...

**Robert Davidson:** But they're not listening to the music though. They're not listening to it first and foremost [...] but it's also the level of concentration and demand that is required – it is quite hard work, and it is the culture we're living in, because a hundred years ago people were going to listen to Lincoln debating his political opponent for five hours, I mean, and you know now they have a soundbite of two senators on the radio...

**Kylie Davidson:** Anyway I'd like to make that my cultural cause, making that kind of thing just a normal part of everyday life...going to music concerts and getting some kind of cultural fulfillment that way.

**Robert Davidson:** But the level of difficulty will always make it hard to sell to a large audience, and if it does [sell] then you'd have to be sort of suspicious. Like I was slightly suspicious with the whole Gorecki hitting the charts thing<sup>3</sup>, like people aren't really using it to its fullest extent let's say. But I mean, not many people read Dante either [...] But people don't have patience and I think they're missing out...like we're just living in a very shallow culture and a part of what I'm committed to with my music and with Topology is to have some little beach-head against that.

The audiences also grapple with the tensions, proceeding from the persistence of Cartesian dualism, between intellectual "challenge" and affective engagement, which subsume tensions between the modernist aesthetics and popular values:

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<sup>3</sup> "Spiritual minimalist" composer Henryk Gorecki's Symphony No. 3, "Symphony of Sorrowful Songs", sold in such large numbers in the early 1990s that it crossed over into the mainstream charts in the UK and Australia.

**Laurence:** And I think a lot of it doesn't appeal to the emotional side, a lot of it appeals to the rational and analytical side of the mind, so a lot of people go along expecting something that's going to comfort you and it doesn't always comfort you at all, you know, it puts you on an edge where you sort of deal with something different.

**Interviewer:** Do you all agree with that, that it's more a rational response than an emotional response?'

**Andrew:** I think so, some of it's quite hypnotic, and I think that would be a mental response, wouldn't it? [...] Yeah, I think there's a bit of both. Because they did that Steve Reich two marimbas thing, and that's the whole...minimalist thing...

**Louise:** Yeah, I'm not sure, I think I feel it's quite soothing, a lot of the repetition, so I don't know, emotional response or...

**Interviewer:** Do you ever feel really moved, or...

**Matthew:** Shit, yeah! It's interesting...while I certainly agree with Laurence's point that it is actually an intellectual thing...because I imagine that most people who are going to contemporary chamber, contemporary classical music are on the one hand willing to be challenged, you know, give something a go...it doesn't have to immediately fit into expectations or a genre or so forth...there's an openness there, and that I think is an intellectual focus...but on the other hand I think like...the strong use of rhythm and so forth...and rhythm's emotional.

The tensions between two of Topology's core values (the popularisation of contemporary classical music on the one hand, and the deep appreciation of that music on the other) could not after all be reconciled when the group attempted to move definitively into the world of night-time leisure with a residency at Fortitude Valley's best known boutique bar, Ric's Café – a small bar in the Fortitude Valley Mall that often features 'live' jazz and electronica acts. The musicians felt that the venue gave the audience the 'wrong' cues – in other words, they treated the music as a soundtrack to their evening, periodically tuning in and out, breaking into conversation, getting up for a drink.

**Interviewer:** But why didn't Ric's work?

**Bernard Hoey:** Well it's a question of whether you're kind of mentally focusing on music, whatever type of music it is, or whether you're going somewhere to have a good time and drink – something to be studied or have lots of attention focused on primarily, rather than just having it as a background.

The members of Topology explained that they had retreated from the Valley's live music venues not because they preferred to remain in the restricted space of

the concert hall, but because the cultural spaces that might accommodate their performance style without requiring non-negotiable elements of it to be fundamentally altered simply did not exist:

**Christa Powell:** So yeah, I don't think it was the idea that didn't work it was the venue, you know, like people would go to a jazz bar and there are certain types of bars where, you never, you know, people just don't talk.

**Interviewer:** Are there venues like that in Brisbane though?

**Christa Powell:** No that's right, there's no culture for it, I mean no-one's really set a precedent for it, you know, a kind of a club venue where you go to it...

**Christa Powell:** But I think what we wanted from it was – the ideal was that people could be somewhere where they felt relaxed, and not sitting in a row of chairs and they could have drinks while they were listening to music – the combination of the two. But there's just not been...the venues that we want to play music in doesn't allow drinking in the...

**Bernard Hoey:** You're not allowed to drink there.

**Christa Powell:** No, no.

They emphasised their ongoing efforts to include more audience participation and to reduce the degree of separation between the concert and leisure or entertainment experiences (again, recalling the more casual atmosphere of the Heart and Mind concerts):

**Robert Davidson:** And some of the concerts sort of stretched the boundaries a little bit, like in terms of audience participation or, when we used to do them in the church, have candles and things it slightly altered it.

They also acknowledged that it may have been possible for them to adapt their repertoire and performance style to suit the atmosphere of Ric's:

**John Babbage:** I think we've got the repertoire, a lot of the stuff we choose to play though works better in a sit-down and listen situation. Some of it we could play fully amplified and it wouldn't care if everyone was...[laughs] talking at the bar.

In the end, however, they ultimately concluded that this would have been going too far: the removal of the fundamental premise that listening was the only appropriate audience response would have been fatal to their entire collective identity *as* contemporary art musicians:

**Interviewer:** So have you ever actually gone back to first principles and thought about whether or not you should have “concerts” at all?

**Robert Davidson:** Oh yeah.

**Interviewer:** And what was the discussion?

**Robert Davidson:** What *was* our discussion? I mean I sort of thought that the music works best that way, and the music, it just works that way well, and I like that tradition[...]. If you want to do the thing where the focus is the sound of the music really and not even how it looks particularly – you know if the focus is how the music sounds you want people to listen to the music in that old fashioned way. But we have looked at if that is what we want to do and I think we decided, “yeah”

**Bernard Hoey:** Well the music suffers if you don’t do that. Like, you may as well not devote as much time and creativity to it if people aren’t really going to be listening

From this example, it appears that “contemporary chamber music” would literally no longer exist for Topology as a meaningful category without the written score, the virtuoso classically-trained musicians, the dedicated venues, and the particular social relationships encoded and reinforced by the “concert” mode of performance. In other words, the maintenance of this historically established configuration of technologies, sonic relationships, material spaces, and performance rituals support and define contemporary chamber music, not just as a genre, but as a subculture. Even though the musicians see their position primarily in *opposition* to traditional or elite modernist classical institutions, paradoxically the processes by which contemporary chamber music is constituted in the first place are both derivative of high culture and dependent on its institutional support.

## **5.2 Openness and Virtuosity as “Magical Solutions”**

As suggested in Chapter 2, the “meaning” of a music subculture can best be thought of as a map of the “relations between the relations” of the subcultural elements discussed above, and the relations of this symbolically unified subculture to the world ‘outside’ it. As in classic subculture theory, the symbolic practices of Brisbane’s contemporary chamber music scene can be characterised as both symbolic of the contradictions that mark out contemporary chamber music’s position in the cultural field, as discussed above, and a necessarily



incomplete resolution of these contradictions. Just as Australian hip hop both embodies and imperfectly resolves the contradictions between the global and the local, while retaining a core emphasis on masculinity and a fierce sense of place (Mitchell “Australian Hip Hop as a Subculture”), and just as Hebdige explored the themes of order and chaos in relation to punk (*Subculture* 113), I propose “virtuosity” and “openness” as the themes that represent the means by which contemporary chamber music in Brisbane both embodies and imperfectly resolves the tensions between aesthetic and democratic values, and between elitism and accessibility, while retaining the emphasis on intellectual work and the separation from the mass popular that are definitive of high culture in contemporary Western contexts.

The representation of Topology as a band of virtuosos is, of course, one of the most basic signifiers of their status as “classical” music—indeed as a “performing art”—in the first place. It stabilises the absolute primacy of live performance, gives them a right to venue space, to the concert form of presentation which, through its discursive traditions, positions the audience to sit and listen, and attracts audiences who are willing to take up this position. Virtuosity in this context also refers to the audiences’ display of their skills in decoding and incorporating the music, and also in interacting with the city, constructing their own cultural identities, and maintaining the values that contribute to these identities without appearing to be old-fashioned or elitist.

Openness is established as a core meaning of the subculture by the casualness of Topology’s stage behaviour and promotional language, the open-plan layout of the Powerhouse, and by the avoidance of the confrontational or deliberately unsettling. It is also exemplified by the minimalism of the music, the sparseness of the program notes, the low-key behaviour of the audiences, the individual interpretations of the music made possible by the silent isolation in which it is consumed. On the other hand, the open, casual, and distant style of the subculture’s symbolic rituals - the understated and minimalist music, equally minimalist communicative styles, the absence of enthusiastic invitations to interact with the performers either in the performance space or beyond – while likely to be interpreted as casual understatement by insiders, might be translated

as closed obscurity by others. At the same time as it works to reassure the insiders (especially the musicians themselves) that their cultural competencies do not signify stuffy conservatism or traditional elitism, the “openness” of the scene also works to invite those with specific sets of cultural competencies, or forms of “virtuosity”, to decode and enjoy what is on offer.

For the musicians, participation in the subculture is a means of retaining what is perceived as the worthy elements of the classical tradition while rejecting those elements of it that are perceived as politically conservative or elitist. At a less abstract level, performing in a contemporary chamber music ensemble is also a way for the musicians to use and extend their hard-won skills on their own terms, in their own time, and (almost completely) at their own expense, rather than allowing their cultural autonomy to be negated by the regimented anonymity of the symphony orchestra. For those audience members who are not also performers or composers, contemporary chamber music is one of many cultural forms that make up their eclectic repertoires of cultural taste. Together, these tastes form a body of cultural “work” that demonstrates an awareness of difference, an openness, and an adventurousness that nevertheless requires certain kinds of educated knowledge and is quite distinct from the uniform, drab, or common products of “mass culture”. Just as the performers use the subcultural space to employ their musical skills in as accessible a way as they believe is possible, so too the audiences are able to visibly exercise their educated tastes, and gain pleasure from them, without appearing to be old-fashioned, middle-class elitists (or what is thought to be even worse - aspirational, middlebrow suburbanites). Looking at the scene as a whole, it is on this shared compromise as much as on a shared love of particular kinds of music that the temporary alliance, given material form at the moment of the concert performance, is based.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This dissertation began by posing the problem of understanding high culture as social practice and lived experience. I argued that, while understandable in its historical context, the legacy of early British cultural studies' particular mode of defending the popular is not a destabilisation of the high-popular divide, but the maintenance of it, even as new formations of cultural value and social power continue develop outside the academy. While other theorists and researchers are rightly concerned with the evacuation of value from popular culture, I suggested that the evacuation of high culture from everyday life has produced conceptual gaps that are equally in need of attention. Proceeding from this theoretical background, the substantive objective of the dissertation was to use theoretical frameworks and methodologies that have been used almost exclusively to investigate the lived experience and cultural politics of popular music cultures to examine a "high cultural" music culture.

In Chapter 2, a brief overview of disciplinary approaches to the cultural study of music revealed the unique possibilities of subculture theory as a means of analyzing music cultures as fields of social practice. Building on "classic" subculture theory but taking critiques of it into account, a flexible model of contemporary subculture theory was developed. I argued that the best use of subculture theory is as a set of heuristic devices, rather than as a means of finding and labelling "authentic" subcultures. To this end, five investigative themes were identified as being crucial to all forms of contemporary subculture theory: the symbolic; the social; the spatial; the temporal; and the ideological and political. In terms of the traditional emphases of cultural studies, it is of course the ideological and political dynamics of music subcultures that are ultimately the most important, at least for the purposes of this exercise.

In creating this theoretical model, I incorporated ideas from outside the classic subculture theory canon: most importantly, Will Straw's theory of music scenes, and Sarah Thornton's ideas about the logics of internal and external distinction that operate within subcultures. As an alternative to the intense localism of

classic subculture theory, Straw's work was particularly useful. The concept of the music "scene" allowed me to look at contemporary chamber music in Brisbane dialectically, as the locally inflected articulation of a "global" genre with a long aesthetic and political tradition (the tradition of Western art music). Thornton's theory of distinction allowed me to frame the operation of logics of social distinction in Brisbane's contemporary chamber music scene, not as a straightforward expression of high cultural capital *or* a site of resistance to a dominant culture, but, again, as a two-way process that constructs an internal hierarchy (in this case, with the musicians at the "top" and the casual consumers at the "bottom") and separates the subculture from a devalued mainstream.

Chapters 3 and 4 moved on to the case study, providing a description of the social world around the ensemble Topology and its audiences. This description was contextualised from multiple perspectives, and informed by the five investigative themes established earlier. In Chapter 3, I provided a brief description of the musical and cultural life of Brisbane, and noted that recent economic and cultural changes in the city have reconfigured the formerly stable categories of "arts" and "entertainment" and have shaped new spaces for what were previously "fringe" cultural practices. Topology was firstly situated within this specific geographical and temporal context, and then within the broader context of the cultural politics of modernism and postmodernism in classical music. I found that their aesthetic choices, cultural ethics and musical practices are tied up with the politics of cultural change at the local level (in Brisbane) and at a "global" level (debates within the Western art music tradition). In Chapter 4, I presented the findings of audience surveys: firstly, to establish the social identity formations of Topology's audience; secondly, to relate these social identity formations to patterns of cultural preference; and finally, to describe something of the experience and participation of audiences for contemporary chamber music.

In Chapter 5 I attempted to draw all these perspectives on the case study together, and to map the "relations between the relations" that shape how music cultures operate in specific contexts. I argued that, while participation in contemporary chamber music is not as intense or pervasive as is the case with

the most researched street-based youth subcultures, it is nevertheless possible to describe Brisbane's contemporary chamber music scene, as seen through the case study, as a subculture – a musician-centred, rather than style-centred, middle-class subculture, but a subculture nonetheless. I showed that, like the “classic” BCCCS subcultures, contemporary chamber music as a subculture is “related to the ‘parent cultures’ of which [it is] a sub-set” (J. Clarke et al 13) – that is, educated, middle-class Australians on the one hand, and the traditions of musical high culture on the other. Secondly, contemporary chamber music in Brisbane can be said “to express and resolve, albeit “magically”, the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved” in these parent cultures (P. Cohen 23). Just as the “central theme” of 1970s working-class subcultures was “the contradiction at an ideological level, between traditional working class puritanism, and the new ideology of consumption” (P. Cohen 23), contemporary chamber music in Brisbane, as seen through the case study, might “express or resolve” a three-way contradiction between traditional European high culture (and its values of excellence, exclusion, and transcendence), traditional Australian anti-elitism, and the eclecticism and playfulness that signify cultural capital in contemporary urban contexts.

### **6.1 Reflections on the High-Popular Divide**

The particular formation of practices, identities, and values that Brisbane's contemporary chamber music scene represents is, of course, not the only possible re-positioning of “high” culture in contemporary urban contexts. While many “classical” artists, ensembles and orchestras have failed to adapt to the changing cultural landscape at all, other “splinter” traditions have proceeded to reshape their cultural spaces in different but equally coherent ways. The institutionalised European avant-garde, for example, has hardly become less abstract, while at the same time the works of its leading composers are emulated or directly sampled by self-taught experimental electronic musicians and DJs<sup>4</sup>. Meanwhile, “traditional” classical music (e.g. the opera, the symphony

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<sup>4</sup> Anecdotally, the 2000 CD release *Ohm – Early Gurus of Electronic Music*, which includes work by Stockhausen, Xenakis, Varese, and Babbitt, has become essential listening for IDM (Intelligent Dance Music) or experimental music producers and listeners.

orchestra) is no longer marketed exclusively, or even primarily, on the basis of the “greatness” of its composers or the perfection of its virtuosos, particularly in Australia; rather, the emphasis is on a particularly Romantic and middlebrow form of audience experience that encompasses affect, sensuality, and self-discovery<sup>5</sup>.

To speak of “high culture” as a general category is to deny its diversity, internal contradictions, and the very different politics which can speak through it in particular places and at particular times. Neither is it enough to define high culture in purely institutional terms (i.e. its funding, training, or its venues), or in terms of the technologies that support its cultural forms (i.e. the written score, acoustic instruments). In terms of this study, a comparison between Elision Ensemble and Topology will illustrate the point: both of these ensembles involve tertiary-trained musicians from the classical tradition, performing contemporary classical music from written scores in concert environments. Both of them receive some support from arts funding, and both of them are based in Brisbane. However, it is when we look closely at the ways in which each of these groups positions itself socially and culturally, in relation to the global and the local, in relation to regimes of value, and most especially in relation to popular culture, that the differences become stark. Elision is administratively based in Brisbane, but do not represent themselves as part of a local scene, and do little to maintain organic networks at the local level. Their current slogan is “Australia’s *National Contemporary Music Ensemble*” (“Elision Ensemble”, original emphasis). The *national*, we suppose, is opposed to the “merely” *local*. Whereas Topology is clearly interested in struggling with the tensions inherent in creating musical experiences that will be both stimulating and enjoyable for performers and musicians alike, Elision, like the modernist avant-garde, focus on artistic and intellectual “challenges” above all else (“Elision Ensemble”).

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Opera Australia is marketing an upcoming season of Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* with a “hand-painted” illustration that could well appear in a book of fairy tales, and describes the opera as “a sublime journey from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, from solitude to true love” (Opera Australia).

Perhaps we need the term “alternative art music”, or something similar, to collectively describe the music scenes that are structured by some or all of the following characteristics: the coding of production and consumption as primarily “intellectual”; the aestheticisation of difference, hybridity, and play; an ambivalent, but active, relationship with elite or institutionalised culture; and a critical distance from what is perceived to be the dominant culture – that is, mainstream popular culture. This would include musicians who practice experimental electronic music or sound art (emerging from both underground dance culture and from the universities) as well as acoustic art music ensembles like Topology, or abstract improvisation groups like The Necks. As Bernard Gendron details in his cultural history *From Montmartre to the Mudd Club*, the avant-garde has long shared certain modes of expression, spaces, and values with “underground” popular culture (Gendron 83-120). These shared values might be variously articulated as a DIY (“do it yourself”) ethic; a critical separation from, rather than an elevation above, the imagined “mainstream”; a disdain for legitimate art worlds; and an investment in the politics of cultural difference.

However, it is undeniable that another characteristic the “alternative art music” or “experimental popular music” scenes have in common is a desire to distance themselves from a particular kind of popular culture: commercially produced, widely consumed (by “other” people), and not considered to be politically or aesthetically valuable. Their tastes and the music that they produce and consume might be archly hip and cheerfully eclectic, but their distastes are quite predictable (and usually not particularly well-informed), almost always including the most widely consumed forms of “commercial” culture (such as “lifestyle shows”, Top 40 music, Hollywood films, and fast food). It is no mere coincidence that “McDonalds” was consistently given as the answer to a question about which genres or styles of food the participants favoured least: after all, McDonalds is at once the epitome of everything the refined palate rejects, and a most effective metonym for globalised capitalism. This shared disdain for the most widely consumed cultural forms, and the easy conflation of left wing and elitist values that it obscures, is also deeply problematic for anyone who takes the democratic aims of the cultural studies project seriously.

One final reflection: in contemporary chamber music's liminality, in the tensions between the market and the academy, between modernism and postmodernism, between intellectualisation and accessibility that it embodies, there is a striking resemblance to the position within the cultural field of cultural studies itself: its practitioners work in institutions built around high cultural traditions that are nevertheless no longer separate from the market, in a field that is committed to cultural democracy and educational accessibility. Not only that, but cultural studies practitioners working within academic environments, even in their diversity, are as precise a fit as it is possible to imagine with the social identity positions occupied by the performers, promoters, and audiences of what I have tentatively dubbed "alternative art music": if Richard Florida's "creative class" is an apt description of anyone, then it is an apt description of those working in cultural studies. Perhaps, this could explain why the social practice, if not the texts, of contemporary forms of high culture are apparently so invisible to the cultural studies imagination: it is difficult (but not impossible) to see one's own position as others may perceive it, and this difficulty is compounded in areas (such as music) where cultural studies has not yet managed to entirely relinquish its preoccupations with youth, with resistance, and with the exotic.



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## APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH METHODS

This project was subject to and cleared by a departmental ethical review according to the ethical requirements of the University of Queensland.

A tape-recorded group interview was conducted with the five members of the contemporary chamber ensemble Topology in the home of one of the musicians following a regular rehearsal. I had several additional discussions and email exchanges with the members of Topology throughout the research period. A representative of Elision Ensemble also participated in a tape-recorded personal interview on similar topics, and further discussions with members of Topology and Karak Percussion as well as a number of local composers were conducted by email.

The second area of primary research was concerned with Topology's audiences. There were two primary instruments used for this part of the research project: audience questionnaires and focus groups. The questionnaires were used to gather basic demographic information about the audience, their level of involvement with the scene, and the patterns of their cultural tastes more generally (see Appendix 2 for a sample questionnaire). The concert questionnaires were distributed among audiences at two Topology concerts at the Brisbane Powerhouse, one as part of the Minimax festival in August 2002, and the other at one of Topology's regular series concerts in September 2002. The forms were handed to members of the audience as they exited the theatre at interval. The questionnaires were completed during the course of the evening and placed in a box in the Powerhouse foyer. The questionnaires were also distributed via Topology's electronic mailing list by Topology administrators in September 2002, and the responses were sent directly to the researcher's email address. The demographic data were collated electronically and analyzed using simple frequency tests. The qualitative data relating to cultural tastes were also collated electronically and recoded according to taste formation segmentations developed through an analysis of the patterns of response combined with existing sociological research into cultural tastes (Bennett et al; Di Maggio, "Are

Art Museum Visitors Different From Other People?"; Peterson, "Highbrow Taste"; Peterson, "Understanding Audience Segmentation").

Both the concert and electronic questionnaire forms included an invitation to take part in focus groups. Two tape-recorded discussions were held in a seminar room at the University of Queensland Library, with two participants in one group and four in the other. The discussions were guided by open-ended questions covering topics similar to those in the questionnaires, but with more emphasis on the concert experience and issues of cultural value. The tape recordings were fully transcribed and subjected to a thematic discourse analysis.

## APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE AUDIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. In what year did you first attend a Topology concert?
2. How many Topology concerts have you been to in the last 12 months?
3. Thinking about the last Topology concert you attended, what did you enjoy about the experience?
4. What did you dislike about the experience (if anything)?
5. How did you find out about this concert? (circle all that apply): Brisbane Powerhouse website / Powerhouse program guide / Topology website / radio / newspaper / street press / friend / Other
6. How are you involved with contemporary chamber music in Brisbane? (circle all that apply): audience member only / performer / composer / critic / musicologist / arts management / Other
7. Do you know any of the members of Topology personally? Y / N
8. What name would you give to the style of music Topology plays?
9. Which styles of music do you listen to for pleasure at home?
10. What do you like about these styles?
11. Which styles of music do you personally dislike?
12. What do you dislike about them?
13. What live concerts or gigs have you seen in the past six weeks?
14. What other arts or entertainment events have you attended in the past six weeks?
15. Do you ever play, compose or produce music yourself? Y / N
16. If yes, what kind of music?

17. Please list a favourite and a least favourite genre or style of the following:

|             | <i>Favourite</i> | <i>Least favourite</i> |
|-------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Books       |                  |                        |
| Magazines   |                  |                        |
| Films       |                  |                        |
| TV Programs |                  |                        |
| Food        |                  |                        |

**18. About You**

Age last birthday:

Postcode:

Gender: M / F

Highest Education Level Completed: Secondary / Some Tertiary / Bachelors Degree / Postgraduate Degree

Usual occupation/s:



## APPENDIX 3: REPERTOIRE LIST

- John Adams**, Christian Zeal and Activity; John Philip Sousa; Pat's Aria from Nixon in China; Road Movies
- Tom Adeney**, Allegro and Adagio; And Though the Rain Falls; Fantasia; Jewel; Kagu Ya Hime; Sinfonia; To Fairymead
- Thomas Albert**, A Maze (With Grace)
- Louis Andriessen**, Disco; Double Track; Hoketus
- John Babbage**, Cagebird; Dance of the Pleiades; Five Notes; Millennium Bug; Pedal Power; The Hourglass; Three Wishes
- Gerald Barry**, Piano Quartet no. 2
- Kirsty Beilharz**, Earth essence : air, earth, water, stars
- Sasha Bognadovitsch**, Wings Across This Way
- Tim Brady**, Dark Matter; Lightning Field; Three or Four Days after the Death of Kurt Cobain
- Gerard Brophy**, Glove; NRG; S&N;we bOp
- Gavin Bryars**, Allegrasco; Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet; The Last Days; The North Shore
- Warren Burt**, Heat Wave
- John Cage**, Living Room Music
- David Chesworth**, The Soft Skin
- Brendan Colbert**, Steigung
- John Coltrane**, Giant Steps; Naima
- Robert Davidson**, A Short Hour Unseen; Arch; Black to Grey; Carter Phases Out; Chaconne; Cheap Imitation; Coil; Cycle; Entrance; Exterior; Four Places; Joy; Junction Rd; Landscape; Lento; Mabo Tango: The Lizard of Oz; McLibel; Message Ground; Paramatta Rd; Peel; Scratch; Self portrait at age six; Spin; Squaring the Circle; Stradbroke Forest; Strands; String Trio; Tapestry; Three Grounds; Trio; Turnings; Tyalgum.
- Willem Dragstra**, Piano Quartet
- Ross Edwards**, Ecstatic Dance no. 2
- Paul Epstein**, Solstice Canons
- Kent Farbach**, New Work; Tangerine
- Tim Florence**, Choral; Death and the Child
- Jan Garbarek**, Fourth Piece; Psalm
- Orlando Jacinta Garcia**, Frozen Fragments
- Jon Gibson**, It Doesn't Matter; Unfinished Business; Waltz

**John Gilfedder**, Fantasia Concertante

**Philip Glass**, A Brief History of Time; Bed; Facades; Knee Play IV from Einstein on the Beach; Music in Fifths; Music in Similar Motion; Offering; Opening; Two Pages

**Michael Gordon**, Paint it Black; Strange Quiet; The Low Quartet; Thou Shalt! Thou Shalt Not!

**Percy Grainger**, Random Round

**Stuart Greenbaum**, 800 million heartbeats

**Sean Heim**, Kulbuku

**Matthew Hindson**, Chrissietina's magic fantasy; In search of ecstasy; Yandarra

**Bernard Hoey**, Blockage; Mere Mother; Mlrethenepesheengench; Musings with Henry Brant; Urine may petrify us

**Gustav Holst**, Mars Bars - Topology's arrangement from The Planets

**Andrew Hugill**, A Slight List

**Tom Johnson**, Rational Melodies

**Giya Kancheli**, Night Prayers

**Elena Kats Chernin**, Variations in a Serious Black Dress

**Aaron Jay Kernis**, Air

**John Lewis**, Almost Hardly Either

**Gyorgy Ligeti**, Viola sonata

**Liza Lim**, Amulet

**James Macmillan**, After the Tryst; Kiss on Wood

**Steve Martland**, Danceworks; Remix

**Olivier Messiaen**, Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes from Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps

**Edgar Meyer**, Waltz

**Stephen Montague**, Eine Kleine Klangfarben Gigue; Paramel VI

**Mastaneh Nazarian**, Responses

**Michael Nyman**, And Do They Do; Bell Set; In Re Don Giovanni; Memorial; On the Fiddle; Prawn Watching; Time Lapse; Viola and Piano; Waltz no. 1 in D; Wheelbarrow Walk

**Michael Parsons**, Canon; Clapping Piece; Fourths and Fifths; Two Macedonian songs

**Arvo Pärt**, Fratres; Spiegel im Spiegel

**Jeremy Peyton Jones**, Purcell Manouvres

**Astor Piazzolla**, Buenos Aires hora cero; Concerto para quinteto; Contrabajando; Milonga en Re; Plus Ultra; S.V.P.; Vardarito Mark Pollard, As if in a dream

**Lynette Lancini-Pratten**, Centaur; Jasper and Obsidian; Madame Bovary; Overture and Oblong Dance

**Steve Reich**, Clapping Music; Four Organs; Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ; Music for Pieces of Wood; Pendulum Music; Phase Patterns; Piano Phase; Violin Phase

**Terry Riley**, Autumn Leaves; In C; Keyboard Studies; Ritmos and Melos; Salome's Excellent Extension; Tread on the Trail

**John Rodgers**, Death and Mrs Lilee; The Marriage of Figaro Suite; Viv's Bum Dance

**Frederic Rzewski**, Coming Together; Les Moutons des Panurges

**Giacinto Scelsi**, Maknongan

**Alfred Schnittke**, Piano Quartet

**Peter Sculthorpe**, Irkanda I; Landscape II

**Howard Skempton**, Campanella; Durham Strike; One for Martha; Postlude; Quavers II; Recessional; Spadesbourne Suite; Trace

**Paul Stanhope**, Phosphorics; Throb

**Igor Stravinsky**, Duo Concertante; Elegie for solo viola

**Eric Sweeney**, Duo for saxophone and piano

**Toru Takemitsu**, A Bird Came Down the walk

**Tan Dun**, Jo-Ha-Kyu

**Ralph Towner**, Alpenbridge

**Mark Anthony Turnage**, Sarabande

**Lois Vierk**, Go Guitars; Yeah, Yeah, Yeah

**Kevin Volans**, Wanting to Tell Stories; White Man Sleeps

**Anton von Webern**, Quartet

**John White**, Autumn Countdown Machine; Drinking and Hooting Machine; P.T. Machine; The Chairman's Enemies Favourite Things

**Christian Wolff**, Jasper; Look She Said

**Toby Wren**, Album

**Iannis Xenakis**, Morsima-Amorsima

**La Monte Young**, Poem for Chairs, Tables, Benches etc.