

The process of becoming: Roger Redgate's *Genoi Hoios Essi*

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Abstract: During the 1980s, the Darmstadt Summer Course for composition gave rise to a body of works engaged with the topic of complexity, often referred to under the label "New Complexity." This complexity is comprised of many aspects, the most observable of which comes from the notation. These scores, often replete with intricately woven rhythmic strands, abrupt dynamic changes, and spectacular shifts in pitch register present a plethora of technical and interpretational challenges for the performer and an equally daunting perceptive task for the listener. Roger Redgate has suffered under this epithet more than others included in this group. The musicologist Richard Taruskin boldly claims that in their compositions "the notational detail was significant, even if the music was not; for its intricacy set a benchmark that is never likely to be equaled, let alone surpassed" (Taruskin 2009, 457-476). Yet in Roger Redgate's *Genoi Hoios Essi*, moments of complexly weaving rhythmic strands give way to perceptual transparency -an approach that is not the product of some eclectic notational strategy. Rather, the struggle between these two extremes lies at the heart of the narrative of *Genoi*, building an awareness of "things becoming themselves," the translation of the title. Friedrich Nietzsche originally intended to use the title for the work now known as *Ecce Homo*. The rhetorical function of this title within the work is significant, for as well as asserting a struggle in the way various things attempt to "become" in Redgate's music, Nietzsche's ultimate rejection of the title suggests that such an attempt will never bear fruit. Awareness of this aesthetic will inform an analysis of the perceptually salient moments in the work, and contrary to Taruskin, allow us to move beyond a superficial examination of the notes-per-inch towards the overall process of "things becoming themselves."

Compared to many of his colleagues labeled with the term New Complexity, Roger Redgate presents a more modest collection of pieces.¹ Each piece, however, is imbued with an intensity of musical thought that reflects the composer's level of engagement with the material(s) at hand and the influence of the post-structuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida. As the composer Richard Barrett points out, "As with Derrida, experiencing one of [Redgate's] compositions one is constantly convinced of an inner cogency, vitality and total lack of an all-too-common triviality" (Barrett 1995, 133). Redgate moves beyond this all-too-common triviality in favor of "a world of fruitful paradox, driven by a fiercely dogmatic anti-dogmatism which insists on absolute precision in the articulation of the imprecise" (Ibid.). Such a statement may resonate with Richard Taruskin's criticism that composers regarded under the umbrella term New Complexity were solely interested in notation at the expense of the performer and listener: "the notational detail was significant, even if the music was not; for its intricacy set a benchmark that is never likely to be equaled, let alone surpassed" (Taruskin 2009, 476). But at least in Redgate's case (if not underlying all New Complexity composers) notational concerns are not divorced from, or conceived separately from, the performer. As Redgate explains: "For one thing, there are received ideas of what notation means, about how you interpret it and about what is possible and what isn't possible, which creates an interesting kind of boundary or limit to what notation seems to be capable of for the performer" (Redgate 2006, 99). This boundary or limit consequently affects the listener, who according to Barrett reaches "a point of crisis ... as to what the main or central concern might be [regarding Redgate's music] and why one cannot quite gain a foothold on it, ... attempting to grasp some kind of discourse merely causes it to slip through the fingers, [only then] has [one] begun to comprehend this peculiar (and peculiarly musical) vision" (Barrett 1995, 133). Listeners, far from being excluded, are channeled into actively making their own way through the music.

Within Redgate's musical output solo piano features significantly. Beginning with his first published work *Genoi Hoios Essi* in 1981 a series of piano works followed, including *Eidos* (1985), *Pas au-delà* (1989), *Beuys* (1992), *Trace* (1995), *Arc* (1997), *Écart* (2003), and *Monk* (2007). In 2008, the pianist Nicolas Hodges recorded Roger Redgate's complete piano music.² This paper will focus on a reading of the first of Redgate's solo piano pieces, *Genoi Hoios Essi* (henceforth referred to as *Genoi*), moving beyond a narrowly focused evaluation that attends

to notational concerns in the hope of laying groundwork for a future examination of Redgate's piano music and offering a different theoretical approach to music falling under the epithet of New Complexity. The choice of this work is pertinent in exploring the ephemeral nature of Redgate's "peculiar vision" in which the grasping for "some kind of discourse" is central to the work's aesthetic. The translation of the title "things becoming themselves" is significant regarding this aesthetic. In *Genoi* this process of becoming reveals a struggle between the complexities of weaving rhythmic and motivic strands, and moments of perceptual transparency, which Barrett situates within a dialectical framework:

[*Genoi*] seems to chart a struggle, necessarily unresolved, between various opposing tendencies - the extension of melodic lines versus their fragmentation, the tension between vertical and horizontal proliferation (or between a polyphony of superimposed subdivisional time-layers and their pulling together into unified gestures), individuation of gesture versus normative or homeostatic tendencies, monodic lines versus lines of chords, *legato* versus *sforzando*, and so on (Barrett 1995, 134-135).

It is the struggle between these unresolved elements that engenders the process of becoming in the work. Hodge's performance emphasizes *Genoi*'s sudden registral shifts and variety of densities resulting from the complex weaving of independently generated strands. Spontaneous bursts of these strands tangle across the musical landscape only to be abruptly interrupted by an ensuing silence. *Genoi* traces a becoming that never becomes, reflecting the development of an identity that ultimately returns to its embryonic state at the close of the piece. Friedrich Nietzsche originally intended to use this title for the work now known as *Ecce Homo*. The rhetorical function of this title is significant, for as well as asserting a struggle in the ways various things attempt to "become" in *Genoi*, the consequent failure of this struggle through the piece's return to the opening material at the close of the work can be interpreted as an embodiment of Nietzsche's own rejection of the title.

Given the complex nature of the material presented, where does one begin to analyze the work outside of the discursive frameworks employed by Taruskin? Barrett, in his discussion on Redgate's music, is skeptical of employing an analytical approach. He asserts:

It is of course possible to 'read' such a composition in myriad different ways, even ... diametrically opposed ones. In Redgate's work, pointers towards a 'preferred' mode of assimilation of the music are almost absent. There is no theory of analysis or means of explication which will hold water for more than a few seconds at a time (Barrett 1995, 144).

Nevertheless it is these *almost* absent pointers, or gestures, that allow us to offer a reading of *Genoi* which holds water for more than a few seconds. Redgate's sketches of *Genoi* provide a glimpse into the underlying compositional processes at work and contextualize my reading of the piece. However, the sketches only feed part of the analysis which seeks to balance the underlying formal constructs with a phenomenologically channeled reception, a reception that situates a 'listening' of the work through the recently recorded performance by Hodges.



Figure 1. Roger Redgate's *Genoi Hoios Essi*, measures 1 – 3. Score courtesy of Editions Henry Lemoine, Paris.

Drawn from opening measures of *Genoi*, the repetition of both gestural shapes and structural elements throughout the work allows us to explicate the process of becoming. The nature of this becoming, as engendered in the opening three measures, is defined primarily through the formal confluence of six elements: 1) Textural configuration; 2) Registral elaboration; 3) Harmony; 4) Rhythmic similarity; 5) Tempo; and 6) Meter. The opening two measures, bordered by silence, form a closed unit in which four texturally (and rhythmically) independent lines come together in an arch-like gestural shape that expands and contracts. The opening chord spanning eleven semitones (Bb3 to A4) expands by measure 2 to fifty-four semitones (C#2 to G6) before collapsing into a dyad of eight semitones (G2 to Eb3).

Harmonically the opening two measures of *Genoi* act as the generative material for the entire piece.³ Redgate extrapolates six trichords from these measures which are then multiplied against each other through a process of intervallic multiplication.⁴ The resulting pitch collections are then deployed through a mixture of vertical and horizontal presentations. Of particular note is how this multiplication process leads to a prevalence of the set-class (0,1,2,6,7). Though this primarily occurs within a constellation of competing melodic fragments, it also appears independently –acting as a pseudo syntactical element. In the first two measures, the upper rhythmic line (Ab,Eb,D,G,Ab,D,Eb) forms the pitch collection [2,3,7,8,9] a member of set-class (0,1,2,6,7), while the lower rhythmic line (C#,D,G,G#,Eb) also inhabits this set-class –as pitch collection [1,2,3,7,8]. The third measure repeats the earlier presentation of [2,3,7,8,9] but this time without surrounding material –lending harmonic weight to this particular collection.



Figure 2. Roger Redgate's *Genoi Hoios Essi*, measures 10 – 12. Score courtesy of Editions Henry Lemoine, Paris.

Measures 10-12 demonstrate the first return to the gestural and structural shape of the opening measures and share the same tempo and metric pattern (two measures of 4/8 followed by one measure of 3/8). Furthermore, both passages exhibit the same gestural partitioning with a two measure arch-like profile followed by a one measure response. A similar arch-like gestural shape connects measures 1-2 to measures 10-11; the latter opens with a chord spanning thirteen semitones (E3 to F4) expanding to forty-nine semitones (C#2 to D6) before collapsing to seven semitones (G1 to D2)— compare to the 11, 54 and 8 semitone presentation in measures 1-2. Both passages share the same nadir of C# as their points of expansion, while their respective zeniths differ. However, it is interesting to note how the latter passage's D zenith is present in the former passage's registral expansion –located at the same octave placement. As well as sharing the same registral shape of expansion and collapse, the two passages also demonstrate the same textural configuration: A two measure passage with four intertwining rhythmic lines each with its own articulatory and melodic trajectories, followed by a single measure with only one line present.

Harmonically, the (0,1,2,6,7) set-class continues to play a role. In measure 11 the line initiated by the trill is joined by a downward trajectory of pitches (Eb, E, B, F, Bb) culminating in the pitch collection [t,e,3,4,5], which is shortly followed by the *sforzando* vertical presentation of another set-class instantiation [7,8,0,1,2]. In the following measure (measure 12), the lower staff houses the pitch collection [9,t,2,3,4], a tritone away from the referential pitch collection in measure 3. In addition, this pitch collection in measure 12 mirrors the partitioning (1,3,1) and registral shape of the respective pitch collection in measure 3.

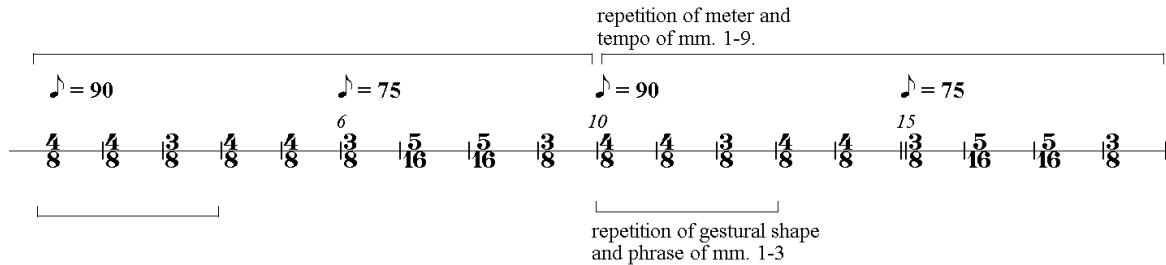


Figure 3. Linear reading of measures 1 - 18.

Figure 3 demonstrates how measures 10-18 present a formal repetition of measures 1-9 with measures 10-12, consolidating elements from measures 1-3. While measures 13-18 draw from aspects of their respective prior passage, it is not until measure 21 that these elements come together to suggest a further development in the process of becoming. Moreover, measure 20 sets up a suitably dramatic context lending an audible salience to measure 21, which one could argue attempts to recapture the salience provided by the silence prior to the opening measure.

Figure 4. Roger Redgate's *Genoi Hoios Essi*, measures 20 - 21 highlighting [2,3,7,8,9] pitch-class set. Score courtesy of Editions Henry Lemoine, Paris.

Similar to its appearance in measures 1-2 and measure 3, the [2,3,7,8,9] pitch collection returns with a syntactical role by framing the ending of one section and offering the opening to another. The *rallentando* in measure 20 is the greatest change in tempo so far and offers a somewhat unusual case of narrative dramatization; it is unusual because rather than increasing the climactic nature of this passage with an increasing dynamic profile, the opposite is present. Coupled with the expansion of register and extremities of pitch, this measure begins to lose a central cohesion, as if the gravity within the piece were dramatically reduced. However, just as quickly as the music escapes towards the registral extremes in measure 20, abrupt changes of tempo, dynamics and register in measure 21 materialize the start of a new section and a return to material identified with the process of becoming.

Register plays a vital part in shaping the formal boundary between measures 20 and 21. In measure 20 the final five notes at the tail end of the *rallentando* form the widest registral expansion of the [2,3,7,8,9] collection. Following the widest registral presentation (with its linear partitioning), this collection spectacularly contracts to its most compact form with a contrasting vertical partitioning (two groups of three notes).

Measure 21 returns with a different tempo to the opening two iterations and although starting with a 4/8 meter the following measures break the established pattern with a 3/8 meter (consequently disrupting the two measure followed by one measure pattern of the two previous passages). This being said, the rhythmic and pitch semblance with the opening is telling; the upper line of measure 21 follows the same pattern of its partner measure – measure 1 (a quintuplet 1/16, quintuplet 1/4 and a 1/4 tied to the following measure) – and outlines the same [2,3,7,8,9] collection. The following measure also shares the same quintuplet configuration as found in measure 2; however, the rupture in the metric pattern subsumes the quintuplet rhythmic fragment under a 7:8 tuplet (drawn from measure 6). Apart from the rhythmic and pitch-set resemblance to measures 1-2 and 10-11, measures 21-22 also share the same gestural arch shape. A density of layered lines, an increase in the rhythmic complexity, and expansion of register are common to the center of both arch-shaped gestures (compare the beginning of measure 2 with measure 22). However, the latter's gesture is intensified through a wider tessitura, louder dynamic profile, and greater rhythmic complexity.

It is worth pausing to consider a point by Célestine Deliège, who has written extensively on issues relating to perception and cognition of music, particularly with regard to works assuming the label New Complexity. Bearing in mind the density of information that these scores exhibit, Deliège asks

What richness does a figure retain when buried in a mass? What are the perceptual limits of this mass, what possible reading can there be of the details which constitute it? Such questions arise on the levels of both production and perception of a piece. What's the point in producing rich figures when they're doomed to be completely swamped? (Deliège 1990, 13).

Genoi provides a ready response, that although we are often swamped by complexities of pitch and rhythmic material, instances such as measures 1-3, 10-12 and 20-22 provide a contextualization for those moments of mass where the saliency of gestural shape – aided by registral trajectory, textural configuration, rhythmic identity and instantiations of set-class (0,1,2,6,7) – act as framing agents. Rather than being swamped we are able to use such salient moments to traverse the musical landscape. Such an analytical approach is sympathetic to the Derridian influence that colors Redgate's thinking. In Gayatri Spivak's translators preface to *Of Grammatology*, she emphasizes Derrida's belief in "awareness that both literature *and* its criticism must open itself to a deconstructive reading, that criticism does not reveal the 'truth' of literature, just as literature reveals no 'truth'" (Spivak in Derrida 1997, Ixxx). Hence a similar relationship can be offered in approaching *Genoi*, where its analysis does not aim to reveal any 'inherent truth'; instead it follows the path offered by Derrida – as outlined again by Spivak – seeking to "dismantle ... the metaphysical and rhetorical structures which are at work in [the text], not in order to reject or discard them, but to reinscribe them in another way" (Ibid.).

I will offer such a reinscribing of the opening measures and in doing so appeal to Barrett's belief in "diametrically opposed" readings. Although providing an opposing reading might at first seem to weaken the original assertion (that posits developments of the opening material based on six factors defining the process of becoming) the converse is true. The process of becoming, what Barrett calls a "struggle," has to actively work against something – the

resulting friction stops the state of becoming from resolving into that of being. In other words, underlying the process of becoming is an equally present process of regression, embodied in *Genoi* through the use of palindromic rhythmic structures.

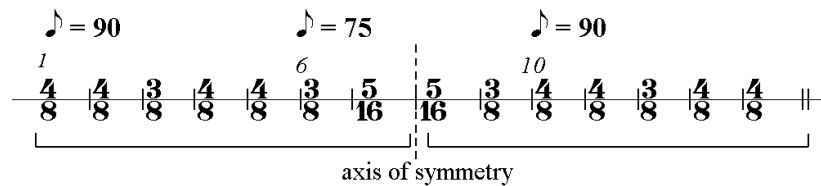


Figure 5. Reinterpreting the opening 14 measures.

Besides the straightforward symmetrical reading of meter and tempo domains, a more complex palindromic process occurs within the rhythmic domain. The central access for this process, which I will refer to as retrograde rhythmic complementation, lies between measures 7 and 8. This process continues to expand outward, connecting measures 6 and 9, 5 and 10, 4 and 11, and 3 and 12. Measures 1-2 and 13-14, lying at the extremes of the central axis's gravitational pull, discontinue the retrograde process in favor of the complementation procedure alone, thereby establishing a connection between measures 1 and 13, and 2 and 14 rather than the expected connection between measures 1 and 14 and 2 and 13.

Figure 6a. Roger Redgate's *Genoi Hoios Essi*, measures 6-9. Score courtesy of Editions Henry Lemoine, Paris.

Figure 6b defines this process of retrograde rhythmic complementation (with the score of measures 6 – 9 shown in Figure 6a). In this Figure each measure is compared against its metrically located symmetrical partner (i.e measure 7 is above measure 8, and measure 6 is above measure 9) and is further broken down into individual rhythmic lines. Therefore, a comparison between measures 7 and 8 (the central point of this entire process) reveals three independent rhythmic lines, while a comparison between measures 6 and 9 reveals only two. The third line of measures 7 and 8 will serve as a model for the rest. Focusing on this part of the Figure, the top stave (of the three staves) replicates the original rhythm present in measure 7, which is rhythmically complemented in the stave below. The resulting

complemented rhythm is then retrograded, resulting in the respective rhythmic line in the partnering measure.

1st Rhythmic Line

Rhythmic Complementation Process

Retrograde Process

2nd Rhythmic Line

Rhythmic Complementation Process

Retrograde Process

3rd Rhythmic Line

Rhythmic Complementation Process

Retrograde Process

Figure 6b. Palendromic Rhythmic complementation process surrounding the axis of mm. 7-8, connecting mm. 6-9.

The dichotomy between linear and symmetrical readings derived from the domains of pitch, rhythm, harmony, meter, tempo, and gestural shape extends beyond the opening 18 measures, inducing a larger formal tension over the course of the work between the metaphorical linear development of “becoming” and the symmetrical sense of return to where one has previously been. Under the lens of this dichotomy *Genoi* presents three broad sections. The first (measures 1-42) has already been explored. The second (measures 43 – 68) destabilizes the process of becoming through textural dissolution, erasing the gestural shape prevalent in the first section (aided by a lack of explicit use of set-class (0,1,2,6,7)) and places an emphasis on a large scale formal symmetry that we will shortly attend to. The third section (measures 69-94) attempts to restore the status of the opening material through a greater dramatic presentation; ultimately, however, the return of the opening’s six primordial chords –the harmonic source of the piece – suggests that the regressive elements of the music have outweighed the process of becoming.



Figure 7. Roger Redgate's *Genoi Hoios Essi*, measures 58 – 59 highlighting [9,t,2,3,4] pitch collection. Score courtesy of Editions Henry Lemoine, Paris.

The process of textural liquidation begins towards the end of the first section and continues distilling, culminating in a sequence of rapid monophonic lines that reach a climactic point at measure 58 (shown in Figure 7). This passage represents the farthest point away from the opening material in terms of gestural shape and affiliation with the set-class (0,1,2,7,8) before dramatically ending with the pitch collection [9,t,2,3,4], -a tritone distance from the opening pitch collection- which provides a premonition of the third section's return to the opening material. The passage from measure 55 through measure 58 presents a series of consecutive rapid linear lines, each measure under a different tuplet ratio, moving from a 22:16, to 19:16, 20:16 in measures 55-57 respectively, which culminates in a 22:16 tuplet in the final measure. These ratios are the product of two complementary rhythmic phrases separated by a central axis similar to that between measures 7-8. Measures 55-58 sum select rhythmic material from measures 43-50 and measures 63-70 while measures 51-54 and 59-62 provide transitions between these passages:



Figure 8. Rhythmic complementation process drawing from measures 43 – 50 and measures 63 – 70 juxtaposed in measures 55 – 58.

The final section of the work struggles to bring back the elements from the opening to re-engage the process of becoming. In measure 77 a dramatic *Esplosivo* section brings back the textural configuration from the opening. Barrett offers a brief but insightful examination of the music from this point onwards. His reading focuses on the unresolved tendencies of various parameters of the work:

The only possible outcome [of *Genoi*] arrives in the last eighteen bars, where all the previously mentioned processes begin to operate simultaneously in a passage of violent complexity, mostly in four independently-transforming strands which occasionally form mutual 'liasons.' At the end the dynamic is raised still further (!) and the music collapses in exhaustion, no doubt along with the player (Barrett 1995, 134-135).

Even though the last eighteen measures lead to a dramatic ending, as Barrett posits, the trajectory of the final measures is unable to maintain the "four independently-transforming strands." The final eighteen-measure stretch, rather than building to a climax, stutters and falters under the need to traverse the gulf separating the becoming and its resolution. Compared to measure 20 (recall Figure 4), the *Esplosivo* at measure 77 does not offer a similar degree of parametric change; the transitioning tempo, fortissimo dynamics, and multiple interweaving strands beginning in measure 68 dampen the gestalt effect of measure 77. The slight injection of energy at measure 77, with the linear rhythmic lines reminiscent of measures 55-58, is only temporary, as the "violent complexity" dissipates at measure 80. Moreover, the return of these linear rhythmic lines from the second section works against the recall of the opening material:

Figure 9. Roger Redgate's *Genoi Hoios Essi*, measures 76 – 80. Score courtesy of Editions Henry Lemoine, Paris.

Of more significance to our reading is the measure that follows (Figure 10). Here, in measure 81, a dramatic reduction in complexity through a sudden suspension of the previous rapid tuplet motion, and a reduction to a single strand, creates a perceivable gestalt change. Furthermore, as the “perceptual limits of the mass” are explored at measures 77-80, the clarity of m. 81 becomes all the more important. Several elements of becoming return at this stage. First of all the textural configuration is closer to the original and unlike the previous passage no longer employs the monodic rhythmic lines from the second section. The gestural shape of the opening also returns with a rising melodic trajectory in measure 81. This trajectory, reaching a high B in measure 82, extends into measure 83 completing the registral expansion before collapsing into measure 84. Both the expansion and contraction of this gestural shape make use of set-class (0,1,2,7,8) members; prepared with pitch-collection Gb,G,D,Eb,A [2,3,7,8,9] in measure 81 and closing in measures 83 into 84 with Gb,F,E,Bb,B [4,5,6,t,e]. Furthermore, the harmony at measure 84 includes the opening pitch-collection - B,G#,A,D#,D [2,3,7,8,9] – offering an acknowledgement to measure 3.

Figure 10. Roger Redgate's *Genoi Hoios Essi*, measures 81 – 84. Score courtesy of Editions Henry Lemoine, Paris.

Redgate's interest in Nietzsche's philosophies bears a close resemblance to that of the composer Alban Berg. The Berg scholar Robert Morgan reasons that

Nietzsche was increasingly concerned with the notion of 'eternal recurrence,' the belief that, since time is infinite whereas the elements are finite, all events are destined to repeat themselves again and again throughout eternity ... Berg's familiarity with the concept can scarcely be doubted ... One feature of Nietzsche's view that 'time itself is a

Composers labeled with the term *New Complexity* are charged by the musicologist Richard Taruskin with an obsession for notational detail, an obsession that leads to the disregard of performers and listeners. Yet at least in the case of *Genoi* it is clear that the work moves far

beyond some mere fetish for notational specificity. *Genoi* reaches out to both the performer and listener on an expressive as well as an intellectual level. The constant fluctuations of the musical surface are caused by underlying compositional procedures closely allied to the works title -fluctuations that invite, indeed require, critical appraisal. It is this sense of ambiguity between musical surface and underlying compositional process that drives Redgate's "peculiar vision," a vision that is in need of future critical engagement regarding his later works.

Acknowledgments.

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Notes.

1. The musicologist Richard Toop has long been associated with introducing the term New Complexity regarding his 1988 article "Four Facets of 'The New Complexity,'" *Contact* 32 (1988). Though more recently he has attempted to distance himself from the term, see Toop, "'New Complexity' and After: a Personal Note," Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, Frank Cox, and Wolfram Schurig, eds., *Polyphony & Complexity*, New Music and Aesthetics in the 21st Century, vol. 1, (Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 2002), 133. The term applies to music that grapples with the issue of complexity on multiple levels, as Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf has suggested New Complexity embodies a "radically and thoroughly polyphonized musical discursivity" see Mahnkopf, "Complex Music: An Attempt at a Definition," Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, Frank Cox, and Wolfram Schurig, eds., *Polyphony & Complexity*, New Music and Aesthetics in the 21st Century, vol. 1, (Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 2002), 55. Mahnkopf describes the emergence of New Complexity around a group of British Composers during the 1980s including Chris Dench, Michael Finnissy, Richard Barrett, Roger Redgate, James Erber and James Dillon.
2. "Roger Redgate and James Clarke, works for solo piano," Germany: Deutschlandradio 2008.
3. Confirmed in Redgate's unpublished sketches.
4. For a larger discussion of the role this plays in *Genoi* see Stuart Paul Duncan, "The Concept of New Complexity: Notation, Interpretation and Analysis," DMA dissertation, Cornell University, 2010: 69-120.