Some notes on 'Variations without a theme (drones ongs)'

This collection of pieces constitutes my first foray into writing 'scores'. I have written singer-songwriter pieces (for acoustic bass guitar and voice) music for different band projects, but the pieces I have written in the last few years feel of a different 'genre' than my previous writing. My explorations into writing scores came easily out of my involvement in the Perth improvised music community as well as spending time with more composers and having the opportunity to play some more experimental and/or contemporary scores, in particular text based scores, with other performers in Perth.

This piece attempts to explore some of the aspects of my own improvisation practice that differ from some other people's focuses. The piece takes inspiration from my practice of meditation, and developing one's concentration—focusing on the subtle differences, and minutiae that appear when one tightens the focus of one's attention.

The pieces invite explorations of various notions of the self: the self as an individual, the self as part of a group, the relationship of the self to the Other and a non-monadic sense of 'self'. I also intend these pieces to explore the ethics of playing together, not just in how our notions of self feel in different situations, but in creating a space within which people can question and explore these; the players hold space for each other to ask these questions of themselves and the group.

The pieces also reference other drone musics, many of which use high volume to create their effect (and/or affect). These pieces explore similar motifs but at the other end of the intensity spectrum in some sense integrating the deep listening practice of Pauline Oliveros, the influence of John Cage and some of the Wandelweiser composers. I also acknowledge the huge influence of Perth composers and improvisers who explore quiet musics: Jameson Feakes, Djuna Lee, Josten Myburgh, Dan O'Connor and others.

The 'lack of theme' refers to the usual sense of a theme as a recognisable melody. There is a theme, of course. The theme is: '*Play a long, slow, quiet drone. Ensemble voices blend as seamlessly as possible.*' And there are variations of this in each of the four pieces.

In consideration of the 'inverse' variation the question arose "what constitutes a phrase", particularly for percussion players (or any non-voice instrument). I suggested something of approximately equivalent length to a breath-phrase, but the intent really had to do with taking a pause every so often and taking that time to reflect on the sounds one had just made as the score suggests: "Feel free to adjust your sound within a phrase and between phrases." Having a pause, however slight, feels like a good structure to facilitate this kind of change or reflection. It also functions as a contrast between the two sections of the piece, moving towards a seamless, group drone sound (the 'inverse' of the first piece in this series).