**Note for *At the sill point of the turning world***

“At the still point of the turning world” is a line from the second movement of “Burnt Norton,” the first of T.S Eliot’s Quartets. In the Quartet, Eliot speculates on time and existence through the movement towards/around/away from the still point. This point is a perceived moment in time, an echo of choice, the one end that is itself timeless. Choice naturally harbors opposition; the road taken acknowledges the road not taken. Once on the former, frequent holographic self-similarities (of expression, reflection, events, experiences, etc…) emerge on the way. I came to associate circularity (around the still point), opposition, and self-similarity with “[t]he still point of the turning world.”

As I set the words, one per stand, in an octagonal arrangement

**at [I]**

**world [VIII] the [II]**

**turning [VII]** Vc. **still [III]**

**the [VI] point [IV]**

**of [V]**

I realized that any word could be the beginning or the end:

e.g. world at the still point of the turning or of the turning world at the still point

From this rotational conception I derived structural possibilities (based on circularity, opposition, and self-similarity) in which words could even appear repeatedly during the course of the given realization:

e.g. the turning world at the still point of world at the still

For each given performance, the cellist is free to choose the initial stand, which will provide him with certain possibilities (set forth in the performance instructions) of the order of musical events (order and direction of stands). Moreover, the player pre-selects the musical segments to be performed from the octagonal arrangement on each stand. Hence, the myriad of possible structural pathways set up in the work’s architectural design is nearly endless- as such, the duration of the piece is anywhere between ca. 15 and 50 minutes.

Each stand has a specific musical profile directly inspired by the corresponding word of the text (at, the, and of are more neutral reflections). The numerous timbres, playing techniques, gestures, and ideas reflect not only the 1) contrasts between octagonally related and poetically contrasting words (still-turning; point-world); 2) both direct and close self-similarity between words (the-the; at-of); but also the 3) range of poetic allusions inherent in each word.

Central to these musico-poetic profiles are the musical intimations of Eliot’s textual opposites (still-turning) on a temporal level. The music constantly fluctuates between movement and rest, sonic activity and inactivity, hesitation and impulse. Within the musical fabric’s turning world, the numerous rests emerge as delicately sprinkled still points. Furthermore, on a larger temporal scale, each stand has a metronomic still point (e.g. stand I: quarter note = 90; stand II: quarter note = 72; stand VII: quarter note = 54; etc…) towards which the octagonal segments either move or recede from (both regularly and irregularly), or establish fixed momentary temporal relationships (e.g. quarter note = x = M.M. within an accelerando from 36-54). The motion of segments around local metronomic still points of each stand is a miniaturization of the arrangements of the stands themselves around the cellist. It would seem, then, that the performer, surrounded by 8 stands, who in performance navigates around/towards still point(s), himself becomes the music’s visual still point as long as he does not change positions. But he does, and his rotations set up ever new relationships (musical, dramatic, and visual) amongst himself, the material on the stands, and the stationary audience…

In the work, every pitched and non-pitched sonority helps serve and preserve a dramatic equilibrium that is essentially non-teleological. The individual events, suspended in carefully delineated registral spaces in which silence absorbs each point, line, and gesture, exist in what may best be described metaphorically as states-of-being, not becoming. Hence there is neither one single beginning, nor one ending; no singular past linearly processing the future. Rather, the segments hover in present states-of-being: in other words “nows.” A sound is the “present” made audible; silence is both the memory of a now and the anticipation of the next present.