

Richard Barrett

codex XVII

2015

6 or more improvising musicians and electronics

performing score

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for 6 or more improvising performers (2 groups of 3 or more each) and electronics

duration 10 minutes approximately

for the Schreck Ensemble

first performance: 11 July 2015, SIRGA Festival, Flix (Catalunya)

The ten sections of the score should be cued by the performer responsible for playback of the electronic sounds (who may also take part as an instrumentalist). The electronic part consists of a single stereo soundfile which runs throughout the piece - except in section 6 which is a general pause, and section 9 where the soundfile is freely paused and resumed - and provides its structural and proportional framework principally for group 1. It is notated in the score as a single melodic line whose pitches are mostly linked by glissandi. Its dynamic profile is not built into the soundfile and must be realised by the performer. Indications for each group in each section are given in rectangular boxes at the beginning of the section, and hold until the beginning of the following section. While the transitions between sections in the electronic part are clear and instantaneous, performers may negotiate the transitions in other ways according to considerations of improvisational coherence and spontaneity – the indications in the score should be internalised as far as possible so that a performance may treat them freely and fluently without losing the character and symmetries of the composition's structure. It shouldn't be necessary to read the verbal instructions while performing!

Group 1 should consist of at least 3 performers capable of continuous glissandi within the two-octave range from g to g'' occupied by the electronic part - voices, trombones, bowed strings, steel guitars, theremins and other electronic instruments. Their improvisational activity may of course include pitches outside the given range. The instrumentation of group 2 is open but might contain whichever percussive (pitched and/or unpitched) and plucked instruments are available plus appropriate electronic instruments. One member of group 2 (perhaps a different one for each section) should be assigned to cue its entries where appropriate. In section 9 the cues will need to be given by the operator of the electronic part, whether or not he/she is otherwise an active member of group 1 or 2.

Group 1 activity is (except in section 5) always linked to the electronic part according to the indications in the score. Generally, all members of group 1 operate independently as concerns sound/silence alternation and other aspects of their musical material.

Group 2 activity falls into three principal categories with which (alongside additional indications) the various sections are labelled. In most sections, in distinction to group 1 these activities occur in clearly-delineated "blocks" whose beginnings and endings are cued by the assigned performer, in which all performers in group 2 begin and end synchronously.

(a) **points** – brief sounds irregularly varying in pitch, timbre and (within the limits given for each section) dynamic, so that each sound is different in as many ways as possible from all the others.

(b) **pulses** – sequences of more or less rapidly repeating or quasi-repeating sounds, perhaps involving gradual or abrupt changes of tempo, pitch, timbre and/or dynamic.

(c) **polyphony** – a diverse and complex texture filling the block with rapidly-changing and variegated material from all members of the group.

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(0'00")

1'42"

group 1
follow the slow glissando with individual <> envelopes, in or close to unison with it, with occasional ornamentation
mp sempre

electr.
mp sempre

group 2
polyphony 1
around 24" before the first block, all blocks between 4 and 12 seconds long, separated by silences of between 8 and 24 seconds, always dense and complex and beginning and ending as abruptly as possible
mp - ff sempre

(1'42")

54"

2

group 1
continue from section 1 but now occasionally freezing a glissando on a sustained pitch for a while, fading out
mp *pp*

electr.
mp *pp*

group 2
points 1
blocks shorter and less dense than in section 1
mp - ff *pp - mf*

(2'36")

1'30"

3

group 1
individual irregular brief sounds, varying in articulation but mostly staccato and/or percussive, following the glissando, with occasional wider deviations in pitch
ff sub. *f*

electr.
with internal pulsations...
ff sub. *f*

group 2
pulses 1
blocks (and intervening silences) longer than in section 1 rates of pulsation mostly in same range as pulsation in electronic part
mf - f sempre

(4'06")

30"

4

group 1
glissandi separated by silences, with similar shapes and turning-point pitches to the repeated glissando in the electronic part, but always varying the durations individually and independently
mf - f sempre

electr.
irregular repetitions...
f sempre

group 2
polyphony 2
each block is here a single (perhaps relatively complex) event with a strong attack and brief resonance - therefore only the beginnings of the blocks need to be cued, every 2-6 seconds
mp *f*

(4'36")

18"

individual pulse-sequences with <> envelope like group 2, choosing pitches (or pitchlessness) freely
p - ff sempre

abrupt change to dense granular texture...
(f sempre)

pulses 2
no coordinated blocks but individual pulse-sequences with <> envelope
p - ff sempre

(4'54") (5'00")

6" 1'18"

group 1 6

as section 1 apart from difference in dynamic ranges and with more (and more diverse) ornamentation, sometimes incorporating pulsations (eg trills, vibrato, tremolo of various kinds)

mf *ff*

with internal pulsations...

electr. GP

mf *ff*

group 2

polyphony 3

as section 1 apart from difference in dynamic ranges

ppp - f *pp - ff*

(6'18")

1'06"

group 1 8

free improvisation but always departing from and returning to the glissando, and keeping to the dynamic profile

p sub. *(fff)*

electr.

p sub. *(fff)*

group 2

points 2

not in cued blocks but sparsely and individually distributed through the entire section (one sound per instrument every 2-8 seconds)

ppp - fff sempre

(7'24")

1'54"

group 1 9

much ornamentation of electronic part while staying close to it in pitch; when the electronic part pauses, be silent or sustain the previous sound or improvise freely - think also of transition to section 10!

fff *(mp)*

frequently and irregularly paused and resumed so as to be silent around 50% of the time (soundfile for section 9 is 57" in duration)

electr.

fff *(mp)*

group 2

polyphony 4

blocks begin when electronic part is paused, end when it resumes, producing an irregular and sometimes rapid alteration between the layers

pp - fff sempre

(9'18")

(10'00")

42"

group 1 10

glissandi separated by silences, with similar shapes to the repeated glissando in the electronic part, sometimes in or close to unison with it, and always SYNCHRONISED with it

mp *ppp*

15 regular repetitions...

electr.

mp *ppp*

group 2

pulses 3

blocks not cued visually but synchronised to the repeated events in the electronic part (and group 1)

mp *ppp*