

National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend

Animating the Score: Musical Notation and the Mid-Century Avant-Garde

This project has two aims. 1) It will offer a new philosophical account of the role of the musical score in the mid-century avant-garde. And 2) It will ground this argument in a media-rich e-book publication that showcases and animates a trove of relevant primary materials.

Research and Contribution. In the 1950s and 1960s, the musical score emerged as the essential form for new directions in the nascent fields of conceptual and performance art. Visual artists, composers, and writers from across the mid-century avant-garde began to reimagine the purpose and function of what had previously been thought of as the musical score, expanding the form to link together the areas of the visual and performing arts. As certain elements of avant-garde musical compositions challenged traditional conceptions of what counted as musical material, their notations occasionally followed suit, abandoning the traditional musical staff for charts, diagrams, and written instructions. These innovations inspired artists in other fields to adopt this expanded sense of the score as a way to explore chance-based compositions and durational artworks such as events and happenings, or to create scores whose graphic artistry was an end in itself, independent of any realization or performance.

My philosophical contribution to the project argues that the scores of the mid-century avant-garde are distinguished by the fact that they allow us to question, in ways that are unique and specific to each score, the minimal conditions and rules for an artwork to take place. These works challenge conventions of notation and performance at the same time that they dramatize specific collisions of different sensuous media: word, image, and sound. In negotiating this intermedial territory, I contend that questions surrounding the minimal conditions and rules articulated by these scores extend into the social fabric of the scores' performances as well. The details of actualization, the ambiguities in the score's directions to performers, the dynamics of successes and mishaps in execution, and the bemused texture of press reviews all reveal complex aesthetic issues embedded in, and often implied by, the score itself. I make this argument as part of a co-authored introduction to an e-book that draws equally on disciplinary expertise in the media of word, image, and sound. I will write a third of this introduction from the perspective of a musicologist who specializes in philosophy (sound), while my colleagues Natilee Harren and John Hicks, will write the other portions from the perspectives of art history (image) and literary studies (word), respectively.

Understanding how each score establishes its own unique minimal conditions requires a detailed multi-sensory presentation of the scores themselves. In advancing its arguments, the e-book adopts a media-rich digital format that will revitalize the presentation of hundreds of ephemeral documents, images, films, and recordings, which will be drawn largely from the archives of the Getty Research Institute. Following the scholarly introduction, each of the e-book's fourteen sections will reproduce high-resolution digital images of the scores. Related correspondence, performance documentation, and archival photographs, as well as audio and video of performances will accompany each score. In addition, certain scores will be enhanced with digital animation (allowing non-specialists to follow complex musical notations), and others will feature voice or video commentary by scholars and curators, or offer interactive tools that invite users to create, manipulate, and share their own performances. By way of example: readers of this digital publication will be able to click on a complex musical score by John Cage and hear it performed as the notation changes from black to red in sync with the audio playback. They will also be able to view a range of filmed and photographed performances, click on and open historical concert reviews, and compare sketches and performers' notes with finished products. And, in collaboration with the Getty's digital publications staff, the editors will give the publication a clean and inviting format that will make the project accessible to a wide audience.

A sample of the e-book's contents runs as follows. Scores by Sylvano Bussotti (see appendix image), Morton Feldman, Benjamin Patterson, and La Monte Young show mid-century composers moving beyond traditional musical-staff notation to include inventive, new graphic notations and lengthy written instructions (sometimes addressed to specific performers, such as David Tudor).

Performance scores by George Brecht, Alison Knowles, and Yoko Ono show how the score format was adopted by artists associated with the Fluxus movement of the 1960s. A series of postcards written by Jackson Mac Low to Benjamin Patterson hover between poetry, performance score, mail art, and social commentary. A rare, hand-bound book—*An Anthology of Chance Operations*, edited by La Monte Young, designed by George Maciunas, and published by Jackson Mac Low—contains theoretical essays, scores, and other writings by many artists and writers mentioned above as well as Henry Flynt's important early statement on conceptual art, "Essay: Concept Art." The publication will also include important historical precedents for avant-garde performance scores, such as the Dadaist performance of Hugo Ball's sound poem "Karawane" (1920) and Kurt Schwitters's *Ursonate* (1932).

Alongside each of the fourteen scores, readers will be guided by concise (~1,500 word) object introductions that link philosophical claims about the minimal conditions embedded in each work to the interactive elements of the score itself. Readers will be prompted to notice details and quirks in the score, to play back sound recording in a way that decodes the symbolic system at work (or lack thereof) in the composition, and to ponder the ways in which words, images, and sounds either variously translate or fail to translate into one another. I will write three of these object introductions, and my co-editors, among a list of contributors will write (or co-write) the other eleven.

Existing accounts of this topic are often constrained by the separation of somewhat independent disciplinary conversations (musicology, art history, and literary studies). By necessity, each field often finds itself tending to its own intellectual conversation, often leaving the other media in short shrift. Occasionally, such biases within each other's discipline risks idealizing (positively) or caricaturing (negatively) other art forms with less coverage than is appropriate. By contrast, this project proposes a philosophical and multi-sensory presentation of the avant-garde score that is based equally in three disciplines. Such a unique approach is best equipped to delineate the specificity of each score's form as it works across the media of image, word, and sound reduces the likelihood that one of the art forms is privileged or caricatured at the expense of the others.

The electronic format allows for complete reproductions of all primary source materials as well as the integration of textual, audio, and video resources related to each work. Previously, a publication of this kind would have required a cumbersome format: a print publication containing facsimiles or transcriptions of the textual material packaged with CDs or DVDs containing the audiovisual materials. Or, more likely, the materials would be scattered among different products—sheet music, sound and video recordings, and print publications—each with a different publishers, media formats, and modes of distribution. Here, the textual, audio, and visual materials are presented together in the same reading, listening, and viewing environment. In bringing the textual and audiovisual materials together in one publication, we hope to spur more collaboration among musicologists, art historians, and literary scholars on this important development in twentieth-century art.

The editors of the project are drawn from three different humanities disciplines: Michael Gallope (Assistant Professor, Department of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature, University of Minnesota); Ph.D., New York University, Historical Musicology; Natilee Harren (Assistant Professor, University of Houston School of Art); Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles, Art History; John Hicks (Associate Editor, Getty Research Institute); Ph.D., Cornell University, English. Additionally, we are working with two digital publications designers on staff at the J. Paul Getty Trust who will develop the interactive components to the project: Greg Albers (Digital Publications Manager, J. Paul Getty Trust); and Eric Gardner (Digital Publications Developer, J. Paul Getty

Museum). The publication is sponsored by Gail Feigenbaum, Associate Director of the Getty Research Institute.

Stage of Development. Institutional funding for the project has been approved by the Getty Publications Editorial Committee and has been green-lighted for publication. We are currently negotiating the contract and expect to sign by the end of October. From December 14–17, the editors will convene in Los Angeles with the Getty’s programming team to sketch out the visual design of the interface and the key interactions with the scores. The vast majority of the writing and editorial work will occur during Summer 2016.

Methods and Work Plan. During the month of June, I will draft my portions of our introduction, as well as my three object introductions. During the month of July, I will convene with the two other editors in Los Angeles to begin editing and continuing to write and fuse together the introduction. Concurrently, we will be editing eleven other object introductions submitted by other contributors. A range of other editorial tasks will occupy my time through the end of July. A significant component of this project will be my role in the creative design of the e-book’s digital elements, which will in turn be programmed by our digital publications staff. As the musicologist in the editorial team, this labor will be substantial on my part, as I will be the specialist in charge of decoding the musical notation and synchronizing sound and video with various indications in the scores themselves. I will also continue to read and conduct research across disciplinary lines for the introduction proceeds, negotiate and secure digital publication rights with copyright holders, and work with the programming team to continue developing, refining, and troubleshooting interactive elements of the publication. The \$6,000 stipend will support travel and living expenses both in Minnesota and in Los Angeles, where I will travel to work with the editors and the digital design team.

Competencies, Skills, and Access. My primary expertise is in philosophy and music. I have a completed book manuscript (currently under review) entitled *Deep Refrains: Music, Philosophy, and the Ineffable* that explores the ineffability of music from the perspective of five key figures in twentieth-century European philosophy (Bloch, Adorno, Jankélévitch, Deleuze, and Guattari). Beyond my philosophical interests, my historical expertise as a musicologist is in twentieth-century modernism. Staff programmers at the Getty Research Institute will execute the digital components of this project. In sponsoring the project, the Getty Research Institute has facilitated (and will continue to facilitate) access to all digitalized materials.

Final Product and Dissemination. The e-book is aimed at scholars of twentieth-century art, music, performance, and literature, in particular those who might adopt it as an assigned text in their undergraduate or graduate courses. In presenting a large number of primary sources, the publication provides a set of case studies from which professors can assign research projects and other activities. The publication will also appeal to a digitally savvy public audience who are interested in engaging with its interactive features.

Conclusion. The philosophical arguments I advance in tandem with the e-book’s digital presentation aims to revivify the intermedial experimentation uniquely at work in each of these avant-garde scores. It aspires further to show that a philosophical approach to the scores of the avant-garde can be seen as integral to the subtleties of the social and cultural networks surrounding these works. Moreover, by reducing perennial anxieties about expertise across disciplinary lines (for example, with the technical barriers often present in non-specialists reading scores), the digital format of the e-book will hopefully inspire an expanded sense of interdisciplinary dialogue around this important moment in the history of art, one that spans equally the media of word, image, and sound.