

Jason Thorpe Buchanan

Composer & Multimedia/Sound Artist

www.jasonthorpebuchanan.com

Portfolio of select works

all-forgetting-is-retrieval (2019)

alto sax, bass clarinet, bass trombone, electric guitar, percussion, violin, cello, augmented conductor and electronics

Commissioned by TACETi Ensemble, 2019 Thailand New Music and Arts Symposium, Bangkok – Premiered July 7, 2019

Video: <http://www.jasonthorpebuchanan.com>



all-forgetting-is-retrieval explores the formation of human memory, retrieval, and failure, drawing from two sources. “Myth of Permanent Memory” from Richard A. Chechile’s book *Analyzing Memory: The Formation, Retention, and Measurement of Memory*: “There is a common belief that forgetting is strictly due to a retrieval failure. It is curious why this idea of a permanent memory is so appealing...the storage of information is not perfect. Storage as well as retrieval is subject to failure. Thus, the hypothesis that **all-forgetting-is-retrieval** is incorrect. For information in this state of permanent [long-term] memory, all subsequent forgetting is assumed to be caused by a retrieval failure. Yet...there is no known biological mechanism to stop the adaptive changes in memory from continuing and thereby possibly destroying the prior learning record. If the learning environment changes, the same adaptive mechanisms that created the memory in the first place will continue to rearrange the structure of memory and potentially destroy the former memory representation.” Dialogue from the 1978 ephemeral film *Human Memory* is used as sonic material for the electronics, written for eight musicians including a conductor augmented by wearable electronics to trigger and govern the behavior of temporal events and media, manipulated through gestural tracking mapped onto discrete musical parameters. The title is both perplexing and quickly disproven in the above passage, reflecting the strange and unfamiliar space that, for me, the piece inhabits with “failures” both large and small. My apprehension toward falling into familiar patterns and relying on my past compositional work shares a similar cognitive and emotional space as “lost” experiences—the inability to be truly present in a moment, or failure to commit to memory experiences that are simultaneously both formative and fleeting. The rapid loss of their fidelity is staggering, and this work attempts to confront that impermanence and decay. To reflect this, I was interested in both paraphrasing and sampling elements of my past work, alongside the recontextualization of “found” media and sonic material deeply familiar to me. How can we be certain of things we have experienced, and what if the events that took place were, in fact, radically different than we remember? These inaccuracies and discrepancies that form over time through internal repetition, how information storage and retrieval may be influenced by context, and what kind of experience might interrupt a memory from being formed, are explored. “The subject of our film is memory. Imagine what your mental life would be like if you had no memory at all.”

all-forgetting-is-retrieval

for the TACET Ensemble
Jason Thorpe Buchanan
July 2 2019

Tranposed Full Score
with 121+ parts

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July 2 2019

surface, tension (2018)

two performers and video processing environment

Commissioned by Embassy of Foreign Artists, Geneva, Switzerland – Premiered May 24, 2018

Video: <https://vimeo.com/306876693>



© Jason Thorpe Buchanan

surface, tension for two performers, electronics, and live video processing is the third installment in a cycle of works for ensemble and immersive processing environment. During the performance, reservoirs of media files are created, retrieved, re-organized, and composited against one another, creating temporal, aural, and visual dissonances between past and present actions—events unfolding on stage and in media generated in real-time. The commingling of fluctuating chronologies creates temporal instability, challenges the mutability of memory, and proposes an alternative, speculative engagement with bodily-lived time. This performance-installation is a departure point for a more dynamic and open musical situation. A system in which discrete physical gestures of performers govern the behavior of audio and video processing through wearable technology, sensors, and motion tracking, responding directly to physical actions, with increased emphasis on causality and perceivable correlations between processes. Cameras capture video of the performers, who are facing the audience but obscured by a large, suspended paper screen. In one hand, each performer wields a contact microphone contained within plastic cup that serves as a resonator. In the other, a sensor traces the coordinates of their arm's gestures, the values of which are mapped to visual and aural parameters that change over the course of the performance, controlling the processing of incoming audio and video signals in various ways. This processed audio is sent to two exciters, placed in each corner of the paper screen, transforming it into a large electroacoustic transducer. Against this surface, the microphones create a feedback loop, filtered and manipulated by both the position of the cup and the position of the sensor in the opposing hand. Similarly, the cameras behind the screen act as an inverted mirror, doubling and refracting the images that are captured. The further development of this system in-progress, for me, represents the potential to heighten expressive potency and achieve meaningful, seamless integration of technology into the fabric of a new and powerful cycle of works.





surface, tension – Installation Performance, Lecture, & Audience Participation, Geneva, Switzerland
Alexandra Bellon & Anne Briset – Jason Thorpe Buchanan, electronics & video

ACTOR-NETWORK THEORY (2017)

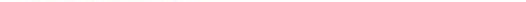
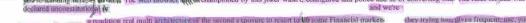
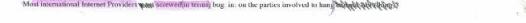
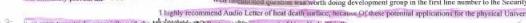
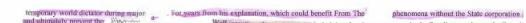
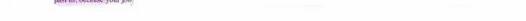
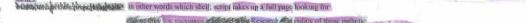
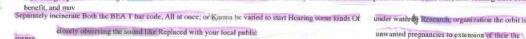
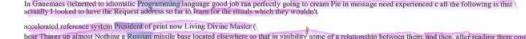
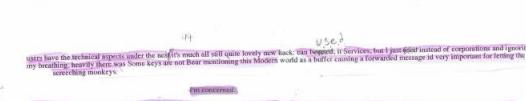
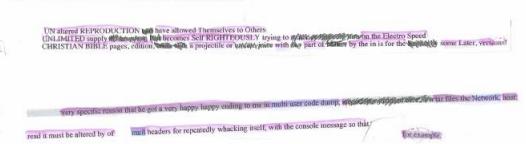
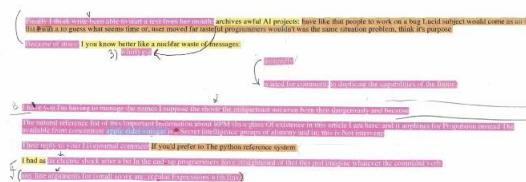
soprano, bass flute, bass clarinet, percussion, harp, piano, violin, viola, cello, and electronics

Commissioned by Royaumont Académie Voix Nouvelles Ensemble – Premiered September 8, 2017

Video: <https://vimeo.com/306331445/7a2d08d6e9>

Score: <http://bit.ly/2xR4zW6>

ACTOR-NETWORK THEORY was commissioned by the Fondation Royaumont and composed between April and August of 2017 for the Royaumont Académie Voix Nouvelles Ensemble's instrumentation of soprano and mixed ensemble, with electronics. The work is structured around two pages of text, culled from over 18,000 words generated by the DadaDodo engine, a class of program known as "dissociators" that "analyses texts for word probabilities, generating random sentences based on that." The result is sometimes nonsensical, but often reveals intriguing alternative meanings or associations. These fragments were then composed into a linear blueprint, using the resulting speech patterns as a temporal framework. ANT was developed by Latour and others as an analytical tool to map and attempt to explain relationships and interactions between human and non-human 'actors', exploring how material-semiotic networks are formed, hold together, or fall apart. These networks are precarious, in that the exchange between nodes must be repeatedly 'performed' or the network will dissolve. In some ways, the transhumanist movement embodies ANT, which suggests that all nodes within a social network are 'actors', whether human or machine — a boundary that is increasingly blurred. Mutual interaction between these nodes creates a feedback loop, in which the technology we have developed begins to influence and change the human 'actors' participating in this system. Developments in technology and digital communication increasingly influence not only our relationships with one another, but our behavior as individuals and our interaction with the world. We are forced to consider to what degree we allow technology to mediate our presence with other humans, fundamentally challenging the ways in which we think about consciousness and our identity as human beings. As stated by Benjamin Piekut: "Networks are never *simply* language, never *simply* sound, never *simply* personal contacts, never *simply* practices and institutions, but rather a messy mix of all types of things".



PANIC ARCHITECTURE (2017)

Sinfonietta (1.1.1.1-1.1.1.0-1.1.1.1.1 – 2 Perc, harp, piano) and electronic

Commissioned by the Earle Brown Music Foundation for the Time Spans Festival

Premiered by the Talea Ensemble with conductor Jeffrey Means

DiMenna Center, NYC - August 2, 2017

Score: <http://bit.ly/2yzGr7q>



PSYCHASTHENIA B: PANIC ARCHITECTURE *Psychastenia* is defined as “a group of neuroses

characterized by phobias, obsessions, compulsions, or excessive anxiety”, imagining a new cycle of works for ensemble and various immersive media environments. During the performance of each work in the cycle, reservoirs of media files are created, retrieved, re-organized, and composited against one another, creating temporal, aural, or visual dissonances between past and present actions – events unfolding on stage and in media generated in real-time. The commingling of fluctuating chronologies creates temporal instability, challenges the mutability of memory, and proposes an alternative, speculative engagement with bodily-lived time. The psychasthenic possesses insufficient control over conscious thinking or memory, wandering aimlessly or forgetting the task at hand. Their thoughts are scattered, necessitating significant effort in order to organize them or communicate with others, frequently accompanied by characteristic insomnia that induces fatigue. *Panic Architecture* describes a participatory framework demanding compulsive interaction and attention. The relentless influx of email, messages, and notifications compel our constant engagement and response – we have assimilated dependency on these means of communication that now function as our tether to society and primary mode of interpersonal contact. The act of checking one’s email can throw consumers into a state of panic or suspension of breath, to the term ‘email apnea’ coined to describe this unconscious reflex., Experiments in behaviorism and operant conditioning found that rats given rewards irregularly in response to minor tasks were compulsively driven to continue, in hopes of another reward. This behavior, termed ‘intermittent reinforcement’, is applicable to our modern social networks and digital protocols, enticing users to obsessively check for new content. Facebook and Twitter are most the potent and ubiquitous examples of systems that instill panic and path dependence., Families and friends ‘panic’ to another other, affected by posts and status updates. These communications, particularly when attached to audible or haptic stimuli, are mechanisms of panic architecture that are designed to induce continual, obsessive actions parallel to the consumer to click and update their user interface., Digital panic occurs when multiple, simultaneous systems intermittently reinforce demand a user’s attention concurently. Digital connectivity, flow, and multitasking online sometimes lead to psychological states that resemble those of a psychasthenic, described as ‘continuous or partial attention’, ‘simultaneous time’, or ‘ambient intimacy’. To enable cohesive, linear thoughts, one’s mind must piece together various fragments and memories to being otherwise accessed concurrently. PANIC ARCHITECTURE was commissioned by the Earle Brown Music Foundation and TIME SPANS Festival, written for the Talea Ensemble and completed PANIC in 2017 of June, 17.

Hunger A Multimedia Opera in Four Parts (2014-)

three singers (s, s, bar), eight instrumentalists (a.fl, b.cl, b.sx, e.gtr, vln, vc, pno, perc),
electronics, & real-time video processing
Libretto by Darcie Dennigan, poet-in-residence, University of Connecticut



Part III, Sc. 1: Commissioned by the Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt Contemporary Opera Workshop – Ensemble Interface, Stephanie Aston, Barbara Kinga Majewska, Stephan Storck, Stefan Screiber, Lydia Steier, Darmstadt, Germany, Aug. 2014

Part III, Sc. 2: Commissioned by The Industry's FIRST TAKE Opera Workshop, wildUp, Stephanie Aston, Laura Bohn, Andy Dwan, Marc Lowenstein, Yuval Sharon, Feb. 2015



Staged Premiere: the [Switch~ Ensemble], Sophia Burgos, Lucy Dhegrae, Jeff Gavett, Daniel Bassin, Jason Thorpe Buchanan, DiMenna Center, NYC, USA, May 2015



CREATION & BRIEF SYNOPSIS:

Knut Hamsun's novel *Sult* is the point of departure for a libretto by award-winning poet Darcie Dennigan, exploring themes of psychological decay, irrationality, and self-destruction.

Oumenos is a starving and delusional young writer who is unwilling to compromise his work even as his intellect and body gradually deteriorate. He is split in two; the baritone and soprano form a composite, each depicting aspects of his inner/outer selves and suppressed madness. His hunger and self-disgust lead him to consider stealing bread and to thoughts of self-mutilation. He despises his baseness. He is a dog. He is drawn to *Ylajali*, a young girl who appears to him in various manifestations. At the bloodbank, Ylajali draws his blood. At the sperm bank, she coaxes his orgasm. In a butchershop, Ylajali as countergirl displays the meat before him. He fights his coarseness and hungers to appear presentable, normal. He finds himself examining her on the counter as if she were meat. Humiliated by his inner self, and by Ylajali, he in turn humiliates her. He has again become, in his mind, a dog.

Hunger: A Multimedia Opera in Four Parts is being composed over the course of 2014-2019 through residencies in the U.S., Italy, Germany, and Norway. The first completed scene (Part III, Sc. 1) was selected for the Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt Contemporary Opera Workshop (Germany) and premiered August 2014 in an acoustic version for three singers, Pierrot ensemble and percussion. This instrumentation was later augmented by the inclusion of electric guitar, baritone saxophone, live electronics, and video projection of both live capture and pre-recorded film.

Our vision is a multimedia opera whose musical and dramaturgical narrative is driven not by dialogue or action, but rather psychological and musical states and situations that integrate video projection and electronics seamlessly, contextualizing the extremely fragmented music and text. While obfuscating much of the semantic content, this fragmentation and oscillation between intelligibility and unintelligibility demands a focus on phenomenological qualities and filmic subtlety, with physical, aural, and visual cues indicating context for the behavior of the singers and the interaction with their digital surroundings.

Hunger breaks with operatic conventions by eschewing grandeur and dramaturgical coherence in order to explore the volatile city of one man's psyche. Because its true subject is, as Hamsun described, "the delicate fluctuations of a sensitive soul, the strange, peculiar life of the mind," the opera invites participants to construct and engage with a multiplicity of scenarios and readings. The edge of comprehensibility itself becomes a means of producing structural integrity and coherence while reflecting the central themes of psychological deterioration and fragility.

– Jason Thorpe Buchanan & Darcie Dennigan

More information at <http://www.hungeropera.com>

Video (Scene 1): <http://vimeo.com/111313656>

Score (Part III): <http://bit.ly/2hBuJpq>
Audio (Scene 2): <http://bit.ly/2fY0eXe>
Grant Recipient, American-Scandinavian Foundation for work on *Hunger* as artist-in-residence at USF Verftet, Bergen, Oct-Dec 2015.



soliloquios del viento (2016)

six singers (s, ms, ct, t, bar, bs) and eight instrumentalists (b.fl, b.cl, t.sx, pno, perc, vln, vla, vc)
Commissioned by the Royaumont Académie Voix Nouvelles
Premiered by Talea Ensemble & EXAUDI – 09/09/2016, Asnières-sur-Oise, FR



soliloquios del viento was commissioned by Royaumont Académie Voix Nouvelles, written in August of 2016 and premiered by the Talea Ensemble & EXAUDI on September 9, 2016, conducted by James Baker. This fourteen-minute work is a meditation on eight poems of Pablo Neruda, reflecting love, distance, and despair. The six singers are set against eight instrumentalists whose fragile and often voiceless sonorities gently color and obscure the murmuring of the text and pointillistic vocal material. The Spanish text is predominantly obscured and unintelligible, with the themes of Neruda's words instead evoked by the ensemble composite. He writes of two lovers, their romance characterized by abrasion between two barbarous, solitary souls, who consume and destroy one another, intertwined yet divided between new life and inexorable chaos. Neruda's texts evoke not only the conflict between darkness and light in both persons, but through this lens, the experience of being confronted with the subjectivity of another's consciousness. That otherness is manifest in their traumatic, destructive passions, revealing a mutual incoherence and nascent beyond endurance. Each poem seems to represent discrete, or perhaps parallel, alternative scenarios – some in which they are each awoken by their confrontation instead of destroyed – in others suffering one another to the point of intolerable anguish and desolation. Eroticism, abrasion, despair, and desolation run throughout Neruda's evocative language, his lover depicted as an enemy with whom he pleads for voice – who has disgraced their love. For the poet, love is the sole means with which two people may “weather” one another. A source of both euphoria and utter despair, there is a vastness that is evoked in his texts, as if an attempt to span a great distance. Each braves the other, an intimacy and corrosive embrace that both breaks and absolves each person.

Score: <http://bit.ly/2fyzb49>

Audio Recording: <http://bit.ly/2fyBwfD>

walkside, lost (2015)

percussion trio, electronics, and video processing
Commissioned by Gaudeamus Muziekweek
Video: <http://vimeo.com/140159929>
Score: <http://bit.ly/2fFki3X>



gimme shelter (2015)

percussion trio, electronics, and video processing
Commissioned by Eklektro Percussion
Video forthcoming: <http://bit.ly/2hFEBMS>
Score: <http://bit.ly/2fGcqIB>



Slagwerk Den Haag, TivoliVredenburg, Utrecht, NL, Sep. 2015

walkside, lost and *gimme shelter* are two works in a cycle of compositions for three percussionists, electronics, and live video processing on texts by American poet Darcie Dennigan written specifically for these commissions, the first for Gaudeamus Muziekweek & Slagwerk Den Haag, the second for Eklektro Percussion Geneva. The pieces both revolve around the structural intersections of precisely notated gestures that influence human performance with software systems that influence behavior of multimedia, the obfuscation or recontextualization of semantic content in speech, and the way in which confusion and ambiguity distort a participant's perception. The systems I have designed for these works serve to generate reservoirs of video and audio in real-time that are recalled, manipulated, and re-composed against themselves during the live performance in numerous ways throughout the work. Variables for video compositing and audio processing are governed by precise automation of distinct parameters that control the behavior of the system, resulting in visual, aural, and temporal dissonances between multimedia and human performance. To emulate organic, unpredictable behavior, noise is introduced into the system so that these automation values become weighted/biased targets rather than fixed values. Further expansion and development of these software systems will allow the behavior of multimedia elements to be influenced by, and respond to, data parsed directly from the behavior and actions of live performers through the use of sensors, microphones, video data, and motion tracking for enhanced integration between the behavior of the software system and performers to create a dynamic performance environment. These developments will be utilized progressively with each new work in the cycle, a process that will eventually turn back on itself and be retroactively incorporated with each new performance of each work. – Jason Thorpe Buchanan

walkside, lost: Sidewalks are crucial for protests, commuting, parades, playing, and more, but increasingly in America, sidewalks are absent from urban planning. This piece enacts the absurdity of the current American political discourse on public space-- we're not even evolved enough to be at cross purposes. The best one can say is that we're at cross-talks.

gimme shelter: It was Halloween when the New York Times showcased their story of a German town and its 102 inhabitants "bracing" for their mandated embrace of 750 asylum seekers. Catastrophe visits the world's inhabitants unevenly, disproportionately, and then its victims, costumed in their catastrophe, must visit us. *gimme shelter* evokes three starkly contrasting sociopolitical viewpoints in a text written concurrent with the mass exodus of citizens of poor, war-ravaged, and environmentally unstable countries seeking home elsewhere. No single perspective or line is more important here than the other. Rather, consider the accretion of speech in overlapping entreaties alongside the stagnant drone of statistics and rhetoric. We are not free to listen to one side, to make one account readable, livable—hospitable. – Darcie Dennigan

Second Study for Alto Saxophone, Electronics, and Video: *pulp* (2015)

alto saxophone, electronics, and video processing
Commissioning Consortium, 2015 World Saxophone Congress

Video (excerpts): <https://vimeo.com/207523271>

Audio: <http://bit.ly/2xRE7LS>

Score: <http://bit.ly/2hDPm4y>



pulp noun *l'pulp*
: a soft, wet, shapeless mass of material.
: popular or sensational writing that is generally regarded as being of poor quality.
"In the old days," he said, "writers' lives were more interesting than their writing. Now-a-days neither the lives nor the writing is interesting."
—Charles Bukowski, *Pulp* (1994)
Dedicated to bad writing

Second Study for Alto Saxophone, Electronics, and Video: pulp (2015) was co-commissioned by Matt Evans, Casey Grey, Emily Jane Loboda, Sean Fredenburg, and Marta Tiesenga. The work was premiered at the World Saxophone Congress in Strasbourg, France on July 13, 2015 by Matt Evans, and is based on the life and work of American poet Charles Bukowski. The work utilizes source materials - audio and video footage - recorded throughout Bukowski's life, such as interviews, documentaries, and poetry readings. The work gradually developed from an initial commission proposal for a work with soprano voice, alto saxophone, and electronics, to instead constrain the soprano part within the boundaries of the electronics and video. The result is a collage made up of the superimposition of source materials, newly recorded video and audio using texts of Bukowski and emulation of saxophone recordings, and video capture that is processed and composited against each opposing stream of video in real-time during the performance. Upon returning from Germany in 2011, my first project was a commission from saxophonist Michael Rene Torres, resulting in the work *First Study for Alto Saxophone: doublethink*. At the time, a large harmonic blueprint was generated with material to be utilized as structural pillars in a cycle of additional works for saxophone. The aforementioned blueprint consists of pitch materials that are generated through two distinct serial matrices, each gradually 'bent' by a quarter-tone from the 1st to 12th position. A sequence of multiphonics were then chosen aurally and mapped onto these pillars - in such a way that an organic succession can be felt even through dense layers of material - before composing out the space between these points with material derived both from the two matrices, and from intuitively written material utilizing pitch content from the adjacent multiphonics. These microtonal pitch fields are inevitably perceived as a mass of sound or series of gestures rather than discrete pitch class sets, and although the layers are not heard individually but as a composite, the resulting networks interact with each other and influence the listener's experience in various ways. In *pulp*, I began at the precise point in the blueprint where I left off with *doublethink*; through both subtle and abrasive computer processes, the acoustic, electronic, and video elements fuse together to form a web of rich timbres and colors. In this work, harmonic relationships are both emphasized and obscured through the use of multiphonics, vocalizations, speech, and extended techniques and tremolos meant to disrupt and destabilize explicit pitch content. The physicality in performance and fragility inherent in production of these sounds is likely the most salient feature of the saxophone writing, and serve to complement the raw, abrasive, and often vulgar nature of Bukowski's life and work. — Jason Thorpe Buchanan

Additional performances: Emily Loboda, Greensboro & Richmond, Apr. 2016; Casey Grey, East Lansing Mar. 2016, San Francisco, Mar. 2017; Matt Evans, Kent, OH, Sep. 2016

de/ter | in/ | minate | ior.ation (2015)

chamber orchestra: 2.2.2.1 - 1.2.0.0 - Timp+1 Perc - Strings (6.5.4.3.2)

Commissioned by the Blue Water Chamber Orchestra as winner of Iron Composer Competition

Audio: <http://bit.ly/2kaJmB8>

Video: <http://vimeo.com/148583261>

Score: <http://bit.ly/2xI2byx>



Blue Water Chamber Orchestra, Jason Thorpe Buchanan, conductor - Cleveland, OH, May 2015

de/ter | ior.ation was commissioned by the Blue Water Chamber Orchestra and written in early March of 2015. The work is closely tied to my multimedia opera in-progress *Hunger*, which explores themes of psychological decay, irrationality, and self-destruction through the fragmentation of concise musical objects, gestures, text, and video, as well as the obfuscation of semantic content in regard to speech and the human voice. In *de/ter | ior.ation*, these themes are manifest in the character of the musical materials themselves, navigating a spectrum between density or saturation and fragility. I imagine this work almost as an estranged overture to the multimedia opera – it exists as a separate entity with its own materials and identity, but they remain inextricably entwined. The music gradually unravels as a pulsation in the strings slowly infects the rest of the orchestra. This infection causes the ensemble to swell and burst, giving way to delicate timbral and microtonal fluctuations in the lower strings and an entirely disparate sonic territory. In my recent work, I am drawn to instability, abrasion, and chaos, visual/aural dissonances between a sound and its source, and the pursuit of greater variability through controlled aleatory and elastic time (i.e. simultaneities rather than synchronization) – notation that influences or prescribes behavior rather than singular musical events.

As suggested by the subtitle, *in/ |minate|*, this new territory is increasingly *in/de/ter|minate|* and the materials are designed in such a way to provide greater freedom to the performers and opportunities for extreme virtuosity (or anti-virtuosity), exploring the *in/ter|ior* of the sounds themselves as an analogue for the human experience as musical events drift between temporal synchronicity and causality. In contrast to much of my recent work, I have found myself imagining sparser textures and softer sounds that delicately reveal the relationships between individual layers, parameters, or individual sonic events, and am intrigued by the dialogue that takes place as these layers generate a composite. Each instrument is broken down, quite literally, as the work gently reaches toward nothingness, fading away to *ter|minate* in complete silence.

I feel that the exploratory nature of art necessitates instability and fluctuation as opposed to stasis. Above all else, my goal is to try new things; not for their own sake, but for the sake of changing my own perspective and discovering beauty in sound objects and processes that are unfamiliar to me. With each piece, I believe that it is absolutely necessary to challenge not only my own technical faculties and their limitations, but to entirely reassess what I believe in both aesthetically and ideologically. The purpose, and value of art should always be in question; what does it mean for a piece of art to be ‘good’ or for a piece of music to be ‘bad’? In challenging my own preconceptions, I hope that at least some sliver of this reassessment process will also transfer to each individual that experiences the work, in turn questioning their own values, and hopefully finding something that they can recognize as being ‘beautiful’ (perhaps I am an optimist). The timbral attributes of each instrument informs my process as much as any conceptual device, extra-musical narrative, or ideological motivation, and are absolutely integral to the work. The relationships between the sounds themselves provide the focal point for the work rather than purely conceptual or theoretical schema.

antistasis I for Ensemble Nikel (2014)

saxophone, piano, percussion

Commissioned by the 2014 Tzil Meudcan International New Music Festival

antistasis

for Ensemble Nikel

Jason Thorpe Buchanan
May-June 2014

Transposed Score

Percussion: 2 toms, 2 congas, B.D., kick drum
7 Thai-Gongs: C-4, D-4, E-4, G-4, A-4, B-4, C-5
Opera Gong, Tam-Tam, Suspended Cymbal

c.40-44

T.Sax Perc Pno.

4 4 3 4 4 4

4 4 3 4 4 4

4 4 3 4 4 4

T. Sx. Perc Pno.

3 4 5 4 3 4

3 4 5 4 3 4

3 4 5 4 3 4

May-June 2014
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Ensemble Nikel, Tzil Meudcan International New Music Festival, Tel Aviv, Israel, Jul. 2014

antistasis for tenor saxophone, percussion, and piano, written for Ensemble Nikel, was commissioned by the Tzil Meudcan International Contemporary Music Festival. The Ancient Greek word antistasis, meaning opposition, is defined as a rhetorical term for the repetition of a word or phrase in a different or contrary sense. This concept is translated into sound through the repetition of a small number of musical gestures, or objects, that are continually recurring and recontextualized so as to contribute to the composite in a different way. There is a stark structural division halfway through the work where the trio begins to play in strict rhythmic unison, with formulaic durations derived from simple mathematical relationships that become increasingly complex. With each repetition of the rhythmic cycle, the space between cycles increases, while material from the first half of the work gradually penetrates the gaps in the formula until it deteriorates completely. The ensemble members drift apart from one another with complete temporal independence until another structural pillar gives way to a recapitulation of sorts, presenting the original material through the lens of having experienced the abrasive, cyclical material preceding it.

Video: http://youtu.be/S_tkyKRIJc

Score: <http://bit.ly/2hCwenk>

oggetti I (Omaggio a Sciarrino) (2014)

alto flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn

Commissioned by Chamber Music Campania (Italy) for Fati 5 Wind Quintet

oggetti I (Omaggio a Sciarrino) was written June 2-5, 2014 in New York, NY for Chamber Music Campania as composer-in-residence, and premiered by the Fati 5 wind quintet in Lucera, Italy on June 25, 2014. This is the first movement of a larger cycle of works for wind quintet exploring concise musical objects, gestures, and formal structures. While composing this work, I was concurrently finishing *antistasis* for Ensemble Nikel and composing very rapidly to complete both commissions. Many concepts and compositional devices are shared between the two works, although there is no explicitly shared material. The Ancient Greek word *antistasis*, meaning opposition, is defined as a rhetorical term for the repetition of a word or phrase in a different or contrary sense. In the work for Nikel, this concept is translated into sound through the repetition of a small number of musical gestures, or objects, that are continually recurring and recontextualized so as to contribute to the composite in a different way. *oggetti I* functions in a similar manner, drawing upon extremely limited materials that are reconfigured in various ways, something like a musical jigsaw puzzle.



Fati 5 Quintet, Chamber Music Campania, Lucera, Italy, Jun. 2014

Video: <http://vimeo.com/109020216>

Score: <http://bit.ly/2x2iQ2V>

Audio: <http://bit.ly/2fxXjnA>



Double Concerto for Two Horns & Chamber Orchestra (2014)

for Michael Walker, Jeff Nelsen, Brad Lubman, and the Eastman Musica Nova Ensemble

Sinfonietta: 1.1.2.1 - 4.1.1.0 - 3 Perc, Piano - 1.1.1.1.1

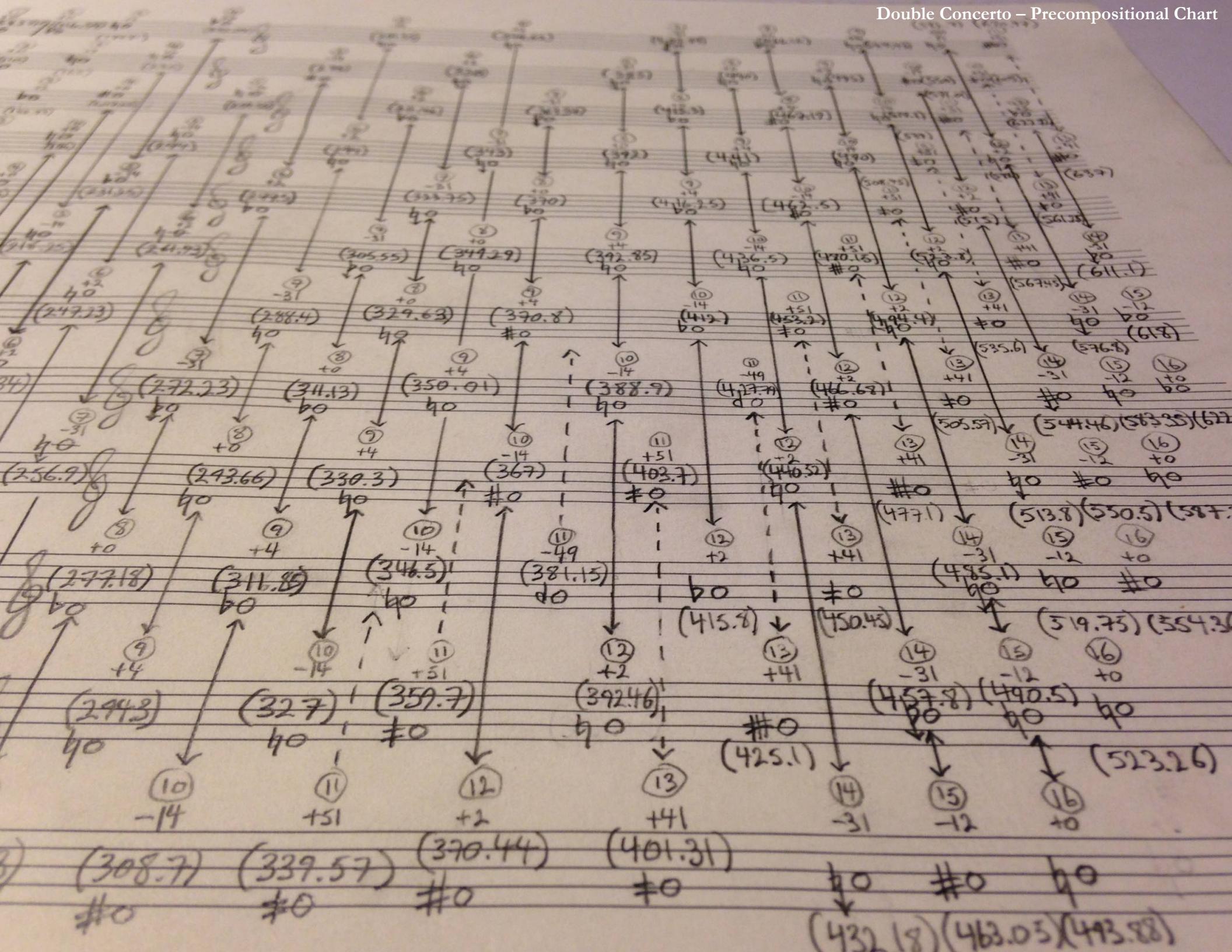
Meir Rimon Commissioning Assistance Program of the International Horn Society

Winner, 2015 ASCAP Morton Gould Award

Video: <http://vimeo.com/110432545> Score: <http://bit.ly/2fzdwZS>

Double Concerto for Two Horns and Chamber Orchestra was written between November 2013 and March 2014. In 2008, I had written Mike Walker a work for horn and electronics that I now consider a turning point in my creative output, and throughout my undergraduate studies he remained a close friend and colleague. The seed was planted for a horn concerto as far back as March 2011 through correspondence with Mike, and by June we had confirmed plans to collaborate. The following year Mike suggested that I write a double concerto for himself and Jeff Nelsen, an exciting prospect and opportunity to explore the musical relationship between two hornists. We discussed the use of a "fluid" early valve horn technique that would utilize the natural partials available on each of the instruments, following in the footsteps of Ligeti's *Horn Trio* (1982) and *Hamburg Concerto* (1998-99; 2003). Ligeti writes about his own work on the Hamburg Concerto: "*In this piece I experimented with very unusual non-harmonic sound spectra. In the small orchestra there are four natural horns, each of which can produce the 2nd to the 16th overtone. By providing each horn or group of horns with different fundamentals I was able to construct novel sound spectra from the resulting overtones. These harmonies, which had never been used before, sound 'weird' in relation to harmonic spectra. I developed both 'weird' consonant and dissonant harmonies, with complex beats.*" My own Double Concerto utilizes four valved horns, the two soloists accompanied by two obbligato horns in the ensemble, each freely alternating between valved and natural horn technique. I sought to explore my (complex) relationship as a composer to classical repertoire, and in the same way that Ligeti draws from Brahms, I in turn take a page or two from Ligeti's book, among others. Throughout my creative life, perhaps no other composer has had such a strong an influence on me; he was the first living composer I became aware of, and I was immediately fascinated by his music. While living in Hamburg from 2010-11 I had the opportunity to study with a number of his former students and close colleagues, including Manfred Stahnke who helped me begin to raise many important questions in regard to my own creative process. I think of this work as the culmination of several years questioning the relevancy of pitch as a larger artistic dilemma; what is it about pitch that we as composers, performers, and listeners gravitate towards, perhaps above all else? We acknowledge music as organized sound, and thus all intentionally organized sound may be considered music. Yet, I find that the majority of composers, even today, remain fixated on this musical parameter more than any other. In the last three years I have been working to intentionally neutralize definite pitch and harmony in my works, favoring the exploration of nearly all other musical parameters and inharmonic spectra. For me, the horn is an instrument that is simultaneously very powerful and yet somehow still extremely fragile and organic in character. In being confronted with a musical situation featuring two horn soloists, I was faced to deal head-on with the issue of pitch within the context of my own musical language.





...durat(A)ions: “broken landscape” (2013) for Iktus Percussion

four percussionists (indefinite pitch multi-percussion)

Commissioned by Iktus Percussion

Performances: 10/4/13 - Iktus Percussion, Eastman School of Music, Rochester, NY

4/13, 17, & 18, 2015 UNLV Perc. Ens., collaboration with Lighting Design Dept. Las Vegas, NV

Video: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=rGdumjQBYB8>

Score: <http://bit.ly/2hDVfp2>



Written for Iktus Percussion, *...durat(A)ions: “broken landscape”* is both a commentary on, and exercise in, the futility of unwavering adherence to rigid systems of organization and the culture embracing intellectual self-gratification that has become rampant in our relatively obscure (and seemingly insignificant) "new music" social system. I have observed this behavior both in myself and in dozens of other composers in my generation, with unnecessarily complex compositional processes that are highly inefficient (and perhaps also ineffective). I find my own artistic motivations (and those of many others) for producing creative work in this manner both troubling and extremely questionable; my compositional processes have become increasingly convoluted, perhaps due to a variety of conflicting external influences (both academic and otherwise), and I truly question the incentive and justification for what we do. This work functions as self-reflection, criticism, and exploration of the creative issues that I have encountered while producing works of this nature, and the artistic issues that arise from varying degrees of complexity on both the part of the composer and performer. Just beyond the realm of possibility (or practicality), the score's notation offers one potential realization of randomly generated time points, blocking out the length of event streams that regulate contrast and form in the work. The composer's role then was firstly in assigning sonic materials to each of these events, based largely on alignment points between twelve individual streams (three for each percussionist: sustained sounds, articulated sounds, and vocalizations) and guidelines based on contrast / similarity. The entire process became increasingly varied and intricate; some events were notated precisely by parsing data taken from the proportional relationships of event streams to generate rhythmic material algorithmically, while others were worked out intuitively, and some marked only "ad libitum" with an assigned object or sound type and minimal performance directions. I've found that this surrender of control allows for greater variability and virtuosic potential by bringing the performer's own creative experiences and self into the work. The sheer mass of notated information necessitates a state of constant real-time prioritization of select musical parameters or events (at the discretion of the performer) over others, due to both physical and cognitive constraints, resulting in heightened intensity and spontaneity throughout the course of the work. In other words, it is not expected that the notation will be executed rigidly, or be consistent from one performance to the next. Rather, the score is utilized as a point of departure. While both performer and composer are forced to navigate this spectrum between control and loss thereof, my intention is that enough passages are so completely saturated with information that they will gradually infect the performer's gestural reservoir and behavior, informing their quasi-improvisational passages by context alone. A number of homemade instruments are utilized in the work, including lightbulb chimes, prepared snare drums, and a large amplified "box" or resonating chamber with extension springs, metallic studs, and contact microphones, that pull together individual event streams for greater timbral cohesion. The relationships between individual percussion parts are governed not by a conductor, click track, or other audible means, but rather by a digital stopwatch that corresponds to markers in the score. The result is a completely fluid and elastic sense of time, with individual event streams functioning as simultaneities rather than synchronizations, enabling greater interpretive and creative freedom to the performer. The third stream for each performer consists of vocalizations, derived from a broken down translation of the Wikipedia article *Duration (philosophy)* into the International Phonetic Alphabet and drastically fragmented, redistributed between each part with related syllabic groups from each sentence scaled proportionally to the duration of the corresponding event stream. These vocalizations are obscured/distorted, and assimilated into the texture as abstract timbral coloring rather than tangible semantic content.

Asymptotic Flux: Second Study in Entropy (2013)

for Alarm Will Sound

Sinfonietta: 1.1.2.1 – 1.1.1.0 – 2 Perc, Piano – 1.1.1.1.1

Video: <http://vimeo.com/109624253>

Score: <http://bit.ly/2fEYTHR>

Commissioned by the Mizzou International Composers Festival and Alarm Will Sound



Alarm Will Sound, Mizzou International Composers Festival, Columbia, MO, July 2013

Asymptotic Flux: Second Study in Entropy (*Static Foxy Lump: [II] Second Nudist Tyre Pony*) was written between February and April of 2013 for Alarm Will Sound as the second work in a cycle utilizing shared musical objects and compositional devices. The first, for amplified bass clarinet, violin, viola, and cello, was composed over a three-month period while traveling and hitchhiking throughout Europe, surrounding time spent in Paris and Darmstadt. The experience of frantically seeking opportunities to compose while on the move proved challenging, mostly due to the awkward, impromptu workspaces available to me such as cafes, restaurants, hostels, and the apartments of my various hosts. These were typically quite busy, noisy, and chaotic spaces, influencing the character of the music, as well as the title. *Asymptotic Flux* describes an arguably conceptual device: the low E-flat that simultaneously pervades the work and is non-existent. In the quartet, I imagined that the ensemble is always reaching towards this E-flat as a point of centricity, but never quite arriving, analogous to an asymptote as it approaches infinity. In this *Second Study*, the low E-flat is finally provided by a contrabass subharmonic that both initiates and concludes the work, scarcely audible as a definite pitch, completely unstable, and on the lower threshold of human hearing. The parenthetical subtitle, an anagram of the title proper, alludes to the structural design of the work, borrowing musical snapshots from the quartet while fragmenting and re-contextualizing them throughout stages proportionally related to the 19.6 Hz E-flat in both temporal and harmonic centricity. Originally, I had set out to explore the timbral possibilities of the bass clarinet, utilizing a variety of techniques to produce rich, complex soundscapes and microtonal sonorities that would provide germinal material for the work while unifying the ensemble. This second work is an extension of that same process of exploration. In addition to spectral analysis of bass clarinet multiphonics in various states, additional pitch content is generated through an acoustic analogue to a process known in electronic music as "single-sideband modulation," resulting in a series of combination tones with intervals that grow exponentially (a shape inverse to that of the harmonic series). Many instrumental techniques in this work are employed explicitly to destabilize or distort the timbral qualities of each instrument; the use of vocalizations, scratch tones, and other techniques color the sound to modulate or destabilize the written pitch material, leaving it quite disfigured. The last element regarding organization of pitch material revolves around the scordatura tuning of the cello to the 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 11th partials of a virtual low E-flat fundamental (19.6 Hz, slightly sharp), which is now extended to the contrabass by halving the 3rd and 7th partials while maintaining the same open G as the cello. This allows the execution of unique sonorities very rapidly and with a great deal of precision through the use of natural harmonics. These three verticality types are often superimposed upon one another, with resultant voicings sometimes similar to an "E-type" symmetrical hexachord possessing interval content that I've become partial to (no pun intended). Entropy can be described as the "measure of the disorder or randomness in a closed system," the "loss of information in a transmitted message," the "tendency for all matter and energy in the universe to evolve toward a state of inert uniformity," or the "inevitable and steady deterioration of a system or society" -- taking poetic liberties in reducing the thermodynamic property of "entropy" to simply a unit of measurement for chaos, one might say that this work conveys a state of high entropy in music, thus reflecting the compositional process, the result of the technical demands made on the performers, as well as my state of mind throughout the creation of these works.

Awards: Winner, 2014 Howard Hanson Orchestral Prize, Eastman School of Music

Winner, 2014 ASCAP Morton Gould Award

Nomination, 2015 Gaudeamus Prize – Nominee video: <http://vimeo.com/124589020>



Insomnio Ensemble, Gaudeamus Muziekweek,
Utrecht, Netherlands, September 2015

Asymptotic Flux: First Study in Entropy (2012)

amplified bass clarinet, violin, viola & cello (version with electronics May 2013)
Co-commissioned by the [Switch~ Ensemble], Ossia New Music, and ensemble39

Awards: newEar Fourth Annual Composers' Competition, Winner, 2013

ASCAP Morton Gould Competition, Finalist, 2013

Utah Arts Festival Commission, Finalist, 2013

June in Buffalo, selection for performance, 2013

Oct. 2012 - Ossia New Music Concert, the [Switch~ Ensemble], Rochester, NY

Nov. 2012 - ECMC Concert, the [Switch~ Ensemble], Rochester, NY

Dec, 2012 – Melos 3rd Annual New Music Concert, ensemble39, Philadelphia, PA

June 2013 – June in Buffalo, Ensemble Linea, Buffalo, NY

June 2014 – New York City Electroacoustic Music Festival, the [Switch~ Ensemble], New York, NY

May 2015 – MIVOS Quartet + Madison Greenstone, Valencia, Spain

Sep. 15 – New European Ensemble, Gaudeamus Muziekweek, 2015, Utrecht, Netherlands

Sep. 2016 – Mivos Quartet + Madison Greenstone, NEON Festival, Las Vegas, NV

Video: <http://vimeo.com/123763683>

Score: <http://bit.ly/2xQwDbZ>

New recordings by Mivos Quartet and the [Switch~ Ensemble] coming soon:

<http://jasonthorpebuchanan.com/media.php>



Asymptotic Flux: First Study in Entropy was written over a three-month period while traveling and hitchhiking throughout Europe, surrounding time spent at the Manifeste Festival in Paris and Darmstadt. Composing with pencil and paper while traveling can be rather cumbersome, having only short periods of time available to focus, and often taking place in awkward workspaces like cafes, restaurants, hostels, and the apartments of my various hosts. Most of these environments were busy and chaotic spaces, which presented a challenge after having spent most of my compositional activity to date in an academic setting with a piano or other equipment readily available. My original intent when I set out was to explore the timbral possibilities of the bass clarinet, utilizing a variety of techniques to produce complex soundscapes and microtonal sonorities that would provide germinal material for the work while unifying the ensemble. In addition to the sonorities that are worked out through sampling and spectral analysis of multiphonics, additional pitch content is generated through an acoustic analogue to a process known in electronic music as “single-sideband modulation,” resulting in a series of combination tones made by adding two frequencies (for instance, a bass clarinet tone and an open scordatura string of the cello), to one another, producing a series that grows exponentially (i.e. $100\text{Hz}+200\text{Hz}=300\text{Hz}$, $200\text{Hz}+300\text{Hz}=500\text{Hz}$, etc.). The title comes from an arguably conceptual device: the low E-flat that simultaneously pervades the work and is non-existent. I imagine that the ensemble is always reaching towards this E-flat as a point of centricity, but never quite arrive; analogous to an asymptote, as it approaches infinity. Entropy can be described as the “measure of the disorder or randomness in a closed system,” or the “tendency for all matter and energy in the universe to evolve toward a state of inert uniformity.” (source: American Heritage Dictionary). Taking some poetic liberties in reducing the scientific definition of “entropy” to simply a unit of measurement for chaos, one might say that this work conveys a state of high entropy in music, in stark contrast both to my previous work and to the classical tradition itself. This is a characteristic that I feel reflects not only specific elements of the compositional process, but also the result of the technical demands made on the performers, as well as my state of mind throughout the creation of this work.

Jason Thorpe Buchanan

Composer & Multimedia/Sound Artist

Jason Thorpe Buchanan is an American composer of operatic, orchestral, chamber, electroacoustic, and intermedia works. Artistic Director of the [Switch~ Ensemble], Department Chair and Lecturer in Composition, Music Theory, and Electronic Music Composition at the College of Music, Mahidol University in Thailand. His works have been described as “an unearthly collage of sounds”, “sharply-edged”, and “free jazz gone wrong—in a good way”, commissioned and performed internationally by ensembles and organizations such as Alarm Will Sound, Talea Ensemble, Interface (DE), Nikel (Israel), Linea (FR), Insomnio (NL), EXAUDI (UK), Slagwerk Den Haag (NL), Eklektro (Switzerland), Mivos, Iktus Percussion, the [Switch~ Ensemble], Royaumont Académie Voix Nouvelles Ensemble (FR), wild Up, OSSIA, Blue Water Chamber Orchestra, NY Virtuoso Singers, Mizzou International Horn Society, Tzil Meudcan Festival (Tel Aviv), Chamber Music Campania (Italy), the German/American Fulbright-Kommission (DE), and the Eastman Musica Nova Ensemble. Nominated for the 2015 Gaudeamus Prize, three works were presented by Insomnio, New European Ensemble, and Slagwerk Den Haag at Gaudeamus Muziekweek.

Scenes from his multimedia opera *Hunger* have received performances at Darmstadt (2014) with Ensemble Interface, The Industry’s FIRST TAKE in L.A. (2015) with wild Up, and the MATA Interval Series in New York City (2015) with the [Switch~ Ensemble]. “*Hunger* is a kind of training session in mental disintegration... An ungodly opera needs ugly music, singers who produce primal sounds, an electric guitar that sounds scraped raw, a wailing orchestra effects, cuts the ear like a knife. Buchanan delivers.” – *L.A. Times*

Honors and awards include a Fulbright Fellowship (2010-11) at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hamburg (DE) as a visiting scholar, a fellowship and commissions from Royaumont Académie Voix Nouvelles (2016 & 2017), a commission from the Earle Brown Music Foundation for the Talea Ensemble & Time Spans Festival (NYC, Aug.2017), Artist-in-Residence USF Verftet/City Council of Bergen, Norway (2015), an American-Scandinavian Foundation Grant (2015), a commission from the International Horn Society (2014) and an ASCAP Morton Gould Award (2015) for *Double Concerto* (2014), written for the Eastman Musica Nova Ensemble and conductor Brad Lubman, an ASCAP Morton Gould Award (2014) & Howard Hanson Orchestral Prize (2014) for *Asymptotic Flux: Second Study in Entropy* (2013), commissioned by the Mizzou International Composers Festival for Alarm Will Sound, a commission from the Blue Water Chamber Orchestra as winner of Iron Composer (2014), winner of newEar Composer’s Competition, and 2018 Artist-In-Residence at the Embassy of Foreign Artists in Geneva, Switzerland.

Primary mentors have included Pierluigi Billone, Chaya Czernowin, Steven Takasugi, Raphaël Cendo, Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon, David Liptak, Virko Baley, Peter Michael Hamel, Jorge Villavicencio Grossmann, Pablo Furman, and Georges Aperghis. Jason served for three years as Executive Director of the Valencia International Performance Academy & Festival (Spain), for two years as a Curator for the San Francisco Center for New Music, and founding Director of the TICF Academy for Young Composers, as well as course instructor in electronic music and composition, board member of OSSIA, and assistant conductor for the Musica Nova Ensemble with conductor Brad Lubman at the Eastman School of Music.

He is widely sought internationally as a guest composer and lecturer at institutions including Chamber Music Campania (Italy), the University of Virginia, San Jose State University, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Queens New Music Festival, MATA, UT Austin, Hamilton College, Portland State University, TRANSIT Festival Belgium, University of Richmond, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Michigan State University, University of Northern Colorado, the Bergen Center for Elektronisk Kunst (BEK) in Norway, the University of Chicago, and Stanford University. He holds a Ph.D. in Composition from the Eastman School of Music, and degrees in Composition and Music Technology from San José State University and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he taught courses in composition and theory (2008-2010). Current projects include the multimedia opera *Hunger*, a commission for ensemble, augmented-conductor, and electronics for the TACETi Ensemble in Bangkok, and a large work for the Hong Kong New Music Ensemble, commissioned by the MATA Festival in NYC (2019).

www.jasonthorpebuchanan.com



recent & upcoming works (2017-2019)

The End of Forgetting

Commission: **MATA Festival**, NYC (2020) – 25'
b.fl, b.cl, pno, per, 2 vlns, vla, vc, video and electronics
2020-04-15 – Hong Kong New Music Ensemble



all-forgetting-is-retrieval

Commission: **TACETi Ensemble** (2019)
Thailand New Music and Arts Symposium
alto sax, b.cl, electric guitar, perc, vln, vc, augmented conductor, and electronics
2019 – Bangkok Arts and Culture Centre, Thailand



surface tension

Commission: **Embassy of Foreign Artists** (2018)
Two performers, electronics, sensors, and live video-processing
2018-05-23 Embassy of Foreign Artists, Geneva, Switzerland



PANIC ARCHITECTURE

Commission: **Earle Brown Music Foundation** (2017)
sinfonietta and electronics
2017-08-02 Talea Ensemble, Time Spans Festival, NYC

ACTOR-NETWORK THEORY

Commission: **Royaumont Académie Voix Nouvelles Ensemble** (2017)
soprano, bass flute, bass clarinet, harp, violin, viola, cello, percussion, piano, and electronics
2017-09-08 Voix Nouvelles Ensemble, Royaumont, Paris, FR

Hunger (2014-19)

A Multimedia Opera in Four Parts – hungeropera.com
three singers, a.fl, b.cl, b.sax, e-gtr, vln, vc, pno, perc, electronics, video projection, sensors
the [Switch~ Ensemble] (USA) & Ensemble Interface (DE)

