

***a somnolence so dense it seemed to inhibit breathing***  
*for metal whistles, fans, audiovisual electronics, and environment*

marcus jackson [2018]



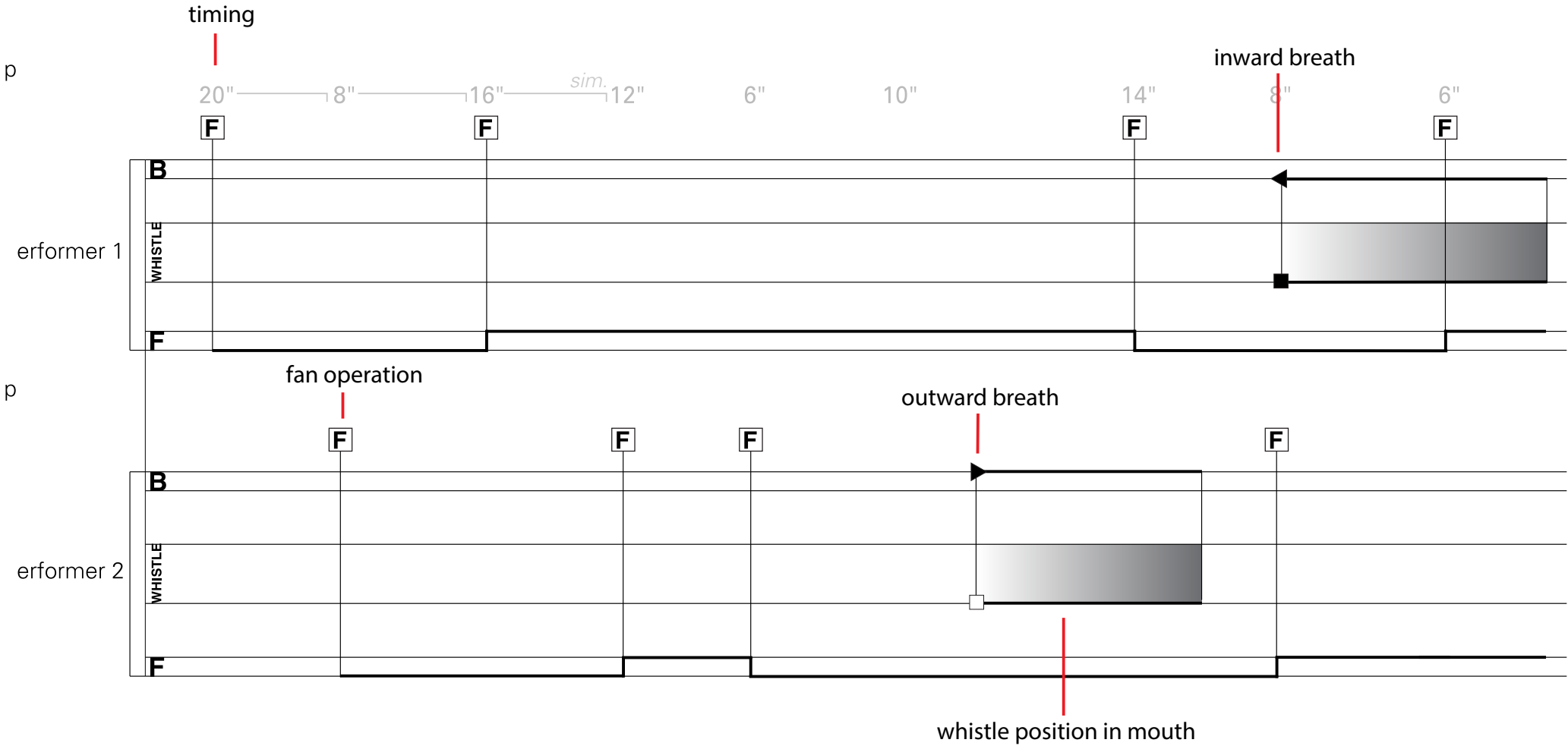
***programme note***

The title of the work comes from Joan Didion's *South and West: From a Notebook*.

*"A somnolence so dense it seemed to inhibit breathing hung over Hattiesburg, Mississippi, at two or three o'clock of that Sunday afternoon. There was no place to get lunch, no place to get gas. On the wide leafy streets the white houses were set back. Sometimes I would see a face at a window. I saw no one on the streets."*

The work is, throughout, restrained yet unyielding. Every push has an equal pull, and there should be a feeling throughout that the sound is on the cusp of dissipating—that it never quite actualised.

performance notes



The score is notated in time-space notation. The numbers up the top indicate the number of seconds to be counted by the performers until the next number. Thus, in the first system, the first action occurs, followed by 20", until the second event (fan activations, in this case).

The performers will wear discrete earphones, which will deliver a click, to facilitate the performance. The first beat in each set is higher in pitch than the others.

The staff is such that the breathing and whistle manipulation are decoupled. The staff with the "B" clef indicates breathing. The top line indicates outward breath, and the bottom line indicates inward breath. The second staff is the whistle. The noteheads (described below) are positioned from high to low. The highest position indicates a maximum air breath pressure, the lowest indicating minimum air breath pressure. The lowest staff—"F"—is the fan, one of which is operated by each performer. These turn on and off the fans, and aid the score following in the electronics. The low line indicates the fans should be on, the upper line indicates that it should be off.

The shading on the whistle staff indicates the positioning of the whistle relative to the mouth. White indicates that the whistle should be held barely touching the lips, so that a lot of air escapes. The darkest indicates that the whistle should be completely in the mouth.



Fluttertongue into the whistle



Multiphonic (outward breath, open fipple, low pressure). This is asking for a less pure tone of whistle, can be achieved by speeding up the air

















Indicates a change in the fan — on or off



Indicates a rapid trill between fully open fipple and fully closed fipple

## Notations

The square noteheads indicate various manipulations of the fipple with either one or fingers. The whistle should remain in the mouth throughout the piece. The bottom of the notehead is closest of the moth, the top is farthest away, as far as the fipple is concerned. Below, the extremes of the manipulations are shown, and there are gradations between these extremes.

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
|    |    | open and closed   |
|    |    | one finger on the left hand side of the fipple                      |
|    |    | one finger in the middle of the fipple                              |
|    |    | one finger on the right hand side of the fipple                     |
|    |    | one finger farthest away from the mouth, covering towards the mouth |
|   |   | one finger closest to the mouth, covering away from the mouth       |
|  |  | one finger on each side of the fipple, covering inwards             |

The vertical dashed lines and thin lines are present to aid the performer in placing the notation accurately within the beat. Dashed lines are attached to the first beat in any time segment. Thin vertical lines show that two actions are paired, and should occur simultaneously.

The **thick black lines** indicate the amount of breath pressure that should be employed. The **thick red lines** indicate the amount of breath pressure to be employed, as well as indicating that the performer should try to transition smoothly between two fipple positions. Where there is no red line, changes in fipple positions should be immediate and un-smoothed.

**IT IS ABSOLUTELY IMPERATIVE THAT THERE ARE NO FULL WHISTLE SOUNDS THROUGHOUT THE PIECE.**

The dynamic range should not exceed approximately mezzo-piano.

Performers should attempt to be as visually and emotionally still as possible.

This piece could be thought of as meditative, although calm does not accurately describe the feeling of the piece. Quietly anxious, perhaps.

## Electronics

The audio and lighting electronics are all automated. The lights will turn on and off during the work, and the audio will self-modulate. The lights should be attached to some kind of relay system that is controllable by an Arduino or similar. Any lights will suffice, and they should be placed in front of or near the mylar.

The performers should be amplified subtly, and sent through speakers situated as close to them as possible. The environment is customised for each performance, however, it comprises walls of mylar that are rustled by more fans. The house lights should be off, and there should be lighting near the performers for viewing the scores, but this should be as minimal as possible.

A technical rider can be provided by the composer—please do not hesitate to contact him with any queries: [mracsjksn@gmail.com](mailto:mracsjksn@gmail.com). The scores and electronics are supplied at the following URL: <https://github.com/mracsjksn/somnolence>

## Final words

The work may be performed in a small space with no amplification. In this case, the electronics should be dealt with such that they do not override the natural sound of the whistles. The work may also be performed with no electronics, just whistles. In this instance, the house lighting should still be low/off, and the performers should be subtly lit.

As mentioned, the environment changes with each environment. The general idea is to create some kind of surrounding that works itself sonically into the piece. This is very open, and the composer is open to discussing other ways of achieving this.

*a somnolence so dense it seemed to inhibit breathing*  
*for metal whistles, fans, prepared guitar amplifier, and motorised environment*

M. JACKSON [2018]

