PROJECT 1.2

COMPOSING MELODIES WITH TUNEBLOCKS

For Project 1.2 you will be composing your own tunes, but as in Project 1.1, you will still be working within the constraints of pre-composed tuneblocks.

The Tasks

> 1. **Using a given set of unfamiliar tuneblocks, make a tune of your own that <u>makes sense</u> and that you <u>like.</u> Try to use all the blocks in the set in making your tune. There is no given TUNE to match; <u>there is no right answer</u>.**
>
> 2. **Make an analysis of the structure of your completed tune using the models of structural analysis (such as structural trees) from Project 1.1.**
>
> 3. **Keep a running log of your progress. These notes and your analysis of your tunes will be the bases for your paper on this project.**

There are thre esets of blocks to work with for Project 1.2.

Group 1:	Group 2:
ELI	PORTALS
ENGLISH	AMBROSIAN

Begin with ELI and then do English.   Do one of the sets in Group 2.   The blocks in Group 2 are more challenging.

NOTE: if you find that a block in Group 2 just doesn't work for you, you can experiment with making a few changes in <u>some </u>of its pitches and/or durations to make it work better

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(see Editing Blocks, below).   But if you do so, you need to account for why the block (s) didn't work and how your changes helped.

Procedure for composing tunes with tuneblocks

In composing your tune follow these steps for each block set:

1. Scroll down in the Catalog and <u>double click </u>on ELI (or ENGLISH)
2. Listen to each block in the TUNEBLOCKS area.
3. As you listen to each block, jot down your impression in your Log: distinctive features that you hear, possible structural functions (beginning, ending, etc.), and make a sketch of the block's pitch contour.   This will also help you to remember each block.
4. Experiment with possible sequences of blocks: Drag blocks into the Playroom and arrange them in differing ways. Listen carefully to each of your experiments, remembering that you want to end up with a tune that you <u>like </u>and that <u>makes sense</u>.
5. In your log, keep track of your progress:
    • the blocks you tried;
    • what worked, what didn't, and <u>why</u>;
    • surprises, shifts in possible functions of blocks;
    • try to <u>account for </u>the decisions you make along the way.

> **You can repeat blocks, insert blocks between other blocks, rearrange blocks within the PLAYROOM area, and you can always drag blocks into the TRASH.**

5. When you have completed your tune, you may, if you like, play your whole tune on your piano or electronic keyboard using the procedure described in Project 1.1.
6. Make a description of the structure of your tune. Your description can take the form of a diagram. It should also include the <u>functional relations </u>among the blocks as you use them in your tune--e.g., antecedent-consequent relations, repetition, return, middle, ending, etc.   Also describe how you hear tuneblocks grouping together--i.e., move on up the structural hierarchy to form bigger blocks (phrases and sections).
7. In analyzing your tunes (and in playing your piece on the keyboard), pay attention to recurring structural patterns that could help to account for your decisions in composing your tune.

Things to Think About in Composing Your Own Tunes
-I-
The compositional process

Composing your own melody with tuneblocks is a rather different process from simply reconstructing a given tune.   You will need to <u>experiment</u>, listening carefully as you try various arrangements of the given blocks.   As you experiment, you may be surprised to discover that you are usually able to hear quite intuitively what you like and what you don't, what sounds well and what doesn't.   This is good evidence that in listening to the familiar music around you, you have developed a kind of <u>intuitive model of a sensible tune.</u>   To search for and make explicit the characteristics of this intuitive model--that is, what you know how to do already--is a primary goal of this and also future projects. Paying attention to the decisions you make along the way in building your tunes will help you move forward in this process. For example, in writing notes in your log, consider the following questions as you listen to and experiment with the blocks:

> • What are the specific features and relations that differentiate one block
>   from another?

> • What are the musical features that seem to generate the possible <u>structural</u>
>   <u>function </u>of each block (beginning, ending, middle, etc.)?

> • Which blocks seem to go well together and why?   Why do you
>   <u>dislike </u>a particular sequence of blocks?   What did you do to fix it,
>   and why is the new sequence better?

As you go along, pay attention to surprises. For example, notice that putting the same block in a new context may change the way it sounds to you. The blocks obviously remain exactly the same, but as you arrange and re-arrange them, the same block may take on differing functional meanings.   These are moments to take out your log, to stop and ask:

I wonder why <u>that </u>happened?

Why didn't this series of blocks sound like I expected it to?

How would I describe what I just heard?

What are the differences between what I expected and what I heard?

How can I make use of what just happened?

-II-

Common organizing principles

In analyzing the tunes you composed using Group 1 blocks, you may find that you have quite spontaneously made use of some of the same organizing principles found in the melodies for Project 1.1. This is partly because of the structure of the materials you are working with--the given tuneblocks.   But your use of these shared organizing principles also supports the notion that you were strongly influenced by the intuitive knowledge you have developed through familiarity with the structures of these and other common folk songs.   For instance, in looking back at your completed tune, make note of whether you had built in some of these common organizing principles:

Repetition: Did you intuitively repeat blocks and perhaps even repeat whole

phrases?

Sequential relations: Did you juxtapose blocks that share the same pitch contour

to form a "sequence?"

Antecedent-consequent phrase relationships: Did you create phrases that begin

the same but move from tension to resolution in their respective endings?

-III-

Strange blocks

The two sets of blocks in Group 2, Ambrosian and Portals, may have sounded "strange" or unusual.   The question is why do they sound that way?   Thinking about what makes some melodies sound "strange" can help you to think about what sorts of features and relations you are taking for granted as generating coherence in the tunes you find "ordinary." Consider the following questions and make note of them in your log:

• In what ways are the features (rhythm, pitch relations) of these "strange" blocks different from the other sets?

• What can these differences tell you about the kinds of relations that you are used to and that you have come to take for granted as generating coherence?

• In composing with these blocks, did you discover some new ways of generating coherence?

• Do these relate in any way to the organizing structures you used in making tunes with the blocks in Group 1?

LOOKING AT AND EDITING THE "CONTENTS" OF BLOCKS.

To look into the contents of blocks:

a. Click on the magnifying glass cursor at the top of the screen.

b. With the magnifying glass as your new cursor, click on the block that you want to look into.

c. The Edit window will open up.

Edit Window

There is a lot of information in this window that we will come back to shortly.

Right now, notice particularly the two lists of numbers, one labeled **P**, for pitches; the

other labeled **D**, for durations.   A good way to explore the meaning of these

numbers is to see what happens if you change them.   To experiment, you can

change one or two of the pitches and/or durations of a block and listen to what

happens. If you find that some changes make the block work better for you <u>keep</u>

<u>track of the changes in your log</u>.   In your paper, you will need to say what you didn't

like about the original block and how your changes improved it.

<u>To Edit Blocks:</u>

a. To change the given pitches, drag the cursor over the number (s) you want

to change. The pitch number (s) will be highlighted.

b. Type the new pitch number (s) that you want to try. [**Note: An R in the**

Pitch row makes a REST--i.e., a silence. The duration of the REST is in

the Duration row.]

c. Click on PLAY in the <u>Edit window </u>to hear the result. If you are not satisfied,

try some other changes.

d. Experiment with durations in the same way.

e. When you are happy with the results of your experiments, make a <u>NEW </u>

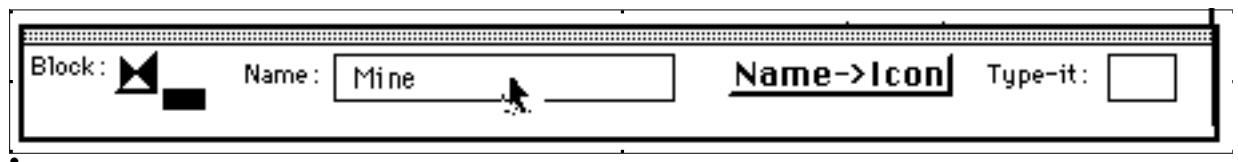<u>BLOCK </u>that incorporates them.

g. To do so, click on NEW.

Click on NEW

NOTE: Do not just click on Save; that will incorporate your changes into the original block.

Naming your New Block

• In the space labeled, "Name," type the name you choose, then, click on "Name->Icon".   Please make a name that includes some recognizable part of your name. The name you type will appear on the block icon.


After making any changes to your block, click on DONE. You will be prompted to select SAVE or DON'T SAVE to return to the Tuneblocks screen Clicking on DON"T SAVE will leave things just as they were before. If you select SAVE, you will see that a new block has been added in the TUNEBLOCKS area that has an icon with your chosen name.   Your can use your new block just as you do the given blocks.
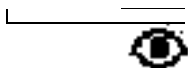
REPEATING THE PLAYROOM

You may repeat (up to 10 times) <u>all the blocks </u>that are currently in the PLAYROOM area. Experimenting with the repetition of a group of blocks often creates surprising results. To repeat the blocks in the PLAYROOM:
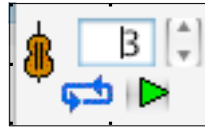
•Click on the small window to the right of the instrument icon.
Click on the up arrow till you have the number of desired repetitions.
Click on the down arrow if you selected more repetitions than you wanted.
•   Click on PLAY.
• Notice that the graphics also include the repetitions you have indicated.

There are more new things to do using the Edit window, which we will return to later.

<u>Be sure to SAVE your finished compositions so that you can play them in class. </u>

To save your work on your computer, follow these steps:
1. In the File menu, select SAVE.
2. In the window marked SAVE AS, type the name you want for your tune.
3. Click on SAVE at the bottom of the screen.
Your tune will be saved:
A. Impromptu Folder
  b. Impromptu Tunes
    c. Tuneblocks   [here]
Your paper for Project 1.2 should include at least the following:
• A <u>summary of the log </u>that tracks your composing process: your requests, your initial comments on each block, the sequences of blocks you tried.
• Your decision-making process: expectations, surprises, new hearings, <u>how you would account for what "worked" and what didn't.</u>

- Examples of how you <u>fixed a problem</u> and why you like the new tune better.
- An <u>analysis of the structure</u> of your tune following the models in Project 1.1
- A beginning speculation on what features create a "sensible tune."
- Discussion of issues that came up in learning to play your tune on the keyboard.