

Everyone, always, honestly

[this section was written for a feature in the Berlin based zine BLATT3000 #05, I leave it in here for contextual interest]

I've always been interested in finding and confronting the restrictive forces or boundaries that are around/within us. Often they aren't obvious - to the point where we might not notice them - but of course, they are there. Observing these forces and challenging them when making decisions to take/not take action is important. Pushing against boundaries is what gives a creative activity honesty and depth.

A subject I've spoken to many friends about is the impact that different levels of support for the arts can have on a music scene locally and nationally. Having spent time in Scandinavia (generally well supported arts) and the UK (generally not so well supported) I've been able to observe two fairly different funding models. It's clear there are actually benefits and negatives to both situations: misguided funding is damaging, no funding is ridiculous, grass roots movements are incredible, a high regard for creativity is empowering - these differences should of course be discussed and changes made where needed, however the most important thing is for individual (or group) activities to be able to develop in a way that is personal and honest. Reading Kaj's text¹ on conservatism and Konstmusiksystrar's² on inequality in the new music scene both reminded me how damaging (creatively, personally and socially) being passively involved in a faulty system can be, and demonstrates how important it is to question the systems we find ourselves a part of.

Functioning within a system which is designed to work against you is tiring and confusing and can lead to a disconnect between creative actions and the true intentions behind them. I can remember working (struggling) towards a certain goal for some time before realising the decisions/actions I found myself making were actually moving me away from where I wanted to be. To me this means that either my goal lies elsewhere (this wandering path is of course a fine and natural part of development), or that at some point my creative process has been derailed by unwanted interference. Many of the boundaries we find ourselves pushing against might not be immediately visible, often they are simply habitual patterns (learned through education, media, behaviour etc.), but striving for creative honesty at each step of a creative process - from conception to interaction with others and presentation - can lead one to find and confront these boundaries in a very natural and honest way.

I had these ideas in mind when I sat down to write this text and realised quickly I wanted to express my thoughts not only theoretically but practically as well. Therefore the rest of this article outlines a graphic composition method which is informed by my thoughts on some of the above subjects. In order to read this article completely you will need to create and perform your own scores (two other people needed, audience optional, beverages acceptable) using the following instructions as your guide.

¹ Kaj Duncan David, *Independent Together* in : BLATT 3000 #04 2015

² Konstmusiksystrar, *To All It May Concern* in : BLATT 3000 #04 2015

EVERYONE ALWAYS HONESTLY

a compositional method for trio (or multiple trios)

Introduction:

The aim of this methodology is to create systems for improvisers to function within, boundaries and interactions within the group can be explored, established and challenged. Performers should be able to playfully improvise with not only sound and gesture, but also ensemble elements - interaction patterns, structure, instrumentation, thematic material - which would normally demand more rigid composed directions. I always enjoy the honesty, fragility and nakedness of performance (often improvisation) without a safety net. Music when everything actually could fall apart, or has already, but where the performers - through their interactions and imaginations - are able to maintain some inexplicable sense of balance is most exciting to me. Even very open compositions seem to provide too much safety by giving performers knowledge of what will be coming next and information about the overall structure (the ability to rehearse and “perfect” a composition only exacerbates this problem).

Music is a social activity where we learn about others and ourselves, we can express or explore our ideas of society through it and come to conclusions that impact our everyday lives. Improvised music can maybe be seen as a search for freedom, but there is no one idea of freedom, it can be very subjective and even contradictory. These compositions are my attempt to reflect a person's state of mind, or the functioning of a chaotic/organic system simultaneously in a state of constant change and stasis. Anarchy, sabotage, childishness, democratic decisions, stasis, constant change, co-operation, anger, annoyance, humour, joy, desire, confusion, boredom - all these characteristics can become an active musical element, and tension or harmony between performers can lead the entire performance into unfamiliar territory.

Notes for performers and composers:

This method uses graphics to express gestural or sonic events with the possibility to define some performance elements using colour. Position or shape of a graphic on the page can be interpreted in any way the performer wishes. If the score has a group of objects (sound/gesture events) these can be connected together into phrases or dependent events between performers, either spontaneously in performance or graphically as part of the composition. For example, a blank page should be silence, a blank page with a circle could be a silence followed by - a clap, someone drawing a circle 3000 v2 CORRECTIONS in the air, the word “circle” etc... - followed by silence, a blank page with two circles connected by a line could be a clap from one performer followed by a clap from another performer. These are some examples of the kind of open interpretation these scores lend themselves to.

Performers/composers should focus on the (often playful) possibilities for dependant interaction when performing these pieces, where your partner's perception of what you do is an element within the composition. Considering how your interpretation of a graphic is perceived by the rest of the ensemble is a key part of these performances. For example, by being explicit in my interpretation of a graphic element, the others in the group should be aware of “where” I am in the score. Equally, if I'm more abstract, then they won't know. Both are fine, but each situation has it's own implications.

Notes for score making:

Equipment for score making:

- 3 coloured pencils/pens/both
- 1 black pen
- several sheets of blank paper (A3 best)

This is a composition for groups of 3 people, there can be any number of groups.

Several scores should be prepared for each performance. These scores will be selected and changed by the players during (and as part of) the performance.

Coloured lines or shapes represent sound or gestural events in time.

The colour can signify a certain performer, instrument or performance element such as dynamics or timbre. The assigned colour coding should be chosen and written down on the back of the score. Your choices here will have an impact when constructing the score, as each different key will generate a whole different set of possible interaction types within the group. I would recommend that one of these elements should always be the use of the voice, having the opportunity to use your voice during a performance is very liberating, I find it immediately broadens your sound palette and imagination. Including some scores specifically for a trio of voices is a great element to have available during performances.

A thin black line signifies a non-audible connection between events. This instruction can be interpreted quite freely. As a performer, I like to interpret this as one event following another, maybe waiting for another performers event before mine happens, or constructing phrases with the graphic material.

After considering the previous instructions you should take a blank sheet of paper and make several scores³. Think about how different graphics will be interpreted by a performer - what shapes will offer possibilities for patterns or repetition? What happens if you are purposefully ambiguous? Can you provoke an emotion from the performers? How to create structures for a group to function within?

Notes for performance:

Equipment for performance:

- table
- minimum 3 prepared scores
- objects/instruments for making sounds

Players have total freedom in how they interpret the graphics shape and position on a page. When performing the score, just let your eye move around the page and make choices about how you want to translate what you see into sound or gesture. You don't have to perform the whole score, you could focus on one element, or you could jump between several or you could equally inhabit a blank/silent area.

Once you have landed on something on the page it's important to make concrete decisions and then take action, then make another decision and take another action. Don't think for too long on your interpretations, spontaneity and playfulness is important. Continue like this while listening and interacting with the other players.

Consider gesture as an important element when demonstrating intention to your fellow performers and helping with synchronous moments/events.

For each performance several new score pages can be made (by one or all members of the group) or favourite previous scores can be included.

³ A selection of my own scores are attached for reference (with colour labels added due to black and white printing). Visit www.vimeo.com/samandreae to see a performance of these scores and to get the download link for full colour versions.

The length of any performance should be decided beforehand and a stopwatch, visible to all performers, should be used for accuracy. Different timings should be explored, a performance could be made up of thirty 1 minute improvisations, or one 30 minute improvisation.

Consider all the sound possibilities you can draw from your voice and the objects you choose to use, be playful, and try not to give yourself much time to think during the performance, just interpret the score intuitively and search for corresponding sounds. The objects you choose can be musical in nature, or everyday items, but in either case please try to consider them outside of their intended function. Approach them all as equal sound sources, be indiscriminate.

For creating an open performance environment the scores (one copy of each) and sound objects should be placed on the table accessible by all performers. Any performer can select or change the score page during the performance at a fast or slow pace, not all scores need to be played, or all could be used many times, or one could be used many times. Feel free to exert your will on the structure of any performance, even to the annoyance of your fellow performers, they are free to react/co-operate as they choose.