

seth cluett (2018)

a state of mutual tension

for alto flute, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, bassoon, percussion
with 3D printed acoustic modification and live electronics

commissioned by Nokia Bell Labs
for International Contemporary Ensemble

A State of Mutual Tension

The idea behind this work began with my fascination with George Sperling's research at Bell Labs in the 1960s. Sperling studied the function of memory for visual images, haptic experiences, and sonic events positing that repeat exposure, as well as time of exposure, led to heightened short-term memory of events. I was reminded of a text by Henri Bergson that made similar philosophical observations but in more humanistic terms:

From the Bergson Text:

Attentive perception is often represented as a series of processes which make their way in single file; the object exciting sensations, the sensations causing ideas to start up before them, each idea setting in motion, one in front of the other, points more and more remote of the intellectual mass. Thus, there is supposed to be a rectilinear progress, by which the mind goes further and further from the object, never to return to it. We maintain, on the contrary, that reflective perception is a circuit, in which all the elements, including the perceived object itself, hold each other in **a state of mutual tension** as in an electric circuit, so that no disturbance starting from the object can stop on its way and remain in the depths of the mind: it must always find its way back to the object whence it proceeds. (Bergson, *Matter and Memory*)

In this work, I am interested in Bergson's suggestion that the memory of a sensory event changes as the mind shifts between attention and reflection while perceiving. Score elements and technological interventions draw on this shifting perception to create the sound world: what kinds of form, energy, and engagement are possible when the fixity of elements begins to dissolve in memory?

Electronics/3D Prints/Percussion:

Each instrument in the ensemble is outfitted with a custom-designed 3D-print containing a loudspeaker. The output of the loudspeakers is fed by a software program that irregularly delays the sound of each instrument, allowing the percussionist to route the sound to one or more of the other players. Sometimes, delays are long enough that the performers engage with a version of themselves from minutes previous.

a state of mutual tension

like a taut wire, waiting to sound, factual actions

♩ = 54

in time, choose note each repeat
choose held rest each repeat

B. Cl. *p* (7-11)

Bsn - (7-11)

Fl. *p* (5-9) **4X**

A. Sax. - (7-11)

B. Cl. *pp* (5-9)

Bsn *p* (5-9) **4X**

Fl. *pp* (3-7)

A. Sax. *p* (3-7)

B. Cl. *p* (2-4)

Bsn *p* (2-4)

Fl. *p* (2-4) **3X**

A. Sax. *p* (2-4)

in time, at tempo, like waves

Elec.. 3rd time through, sparsely

Flute to Bassoon
B. Cl. to A. Sax

CUE:

1

less sparse, illusory

Add Bassoon to Flute
A. Sax to B. Cl.

2

shape phrases with ensemble

Prepare walking sounds
while blending echos

3

Blend and set instrument
levels, bring walking sounds
in slowly

∟ = finger pitches, no tone

B. Cl.

Bsn

Fl.

A. Sax.

4X

(2, 3, 5)

pitch duration is relative
choose rest duration

(1, 3)

pitches/rests

(1, 3)

4X

(1, 3, 5)

(2, 5)

pitch duration is relative
freely repeat, free choice of octave, free line choice (treble clef)
short rests
climbing in tension

repeat in tempo, play precisely, become more expressive with each repeat

4-7X

Elec..

CUE: 4

B. Cl. to Flute
Bassoon to A. Sax
Walking to B. Cl and Bassoon

5

each repeat pull walking sounds down

B. Cl. to everyone
Flute to Bassoon and A. Sax
Walking to B. Cl and Bassoon

6

tacet at first
A. Sax to everyone carefully
blend growing with ensemble

in tempo, at octave, freely and aggressively expressive, oversharing

B. Cl.

Bsn

Fl.

A. Sax.

tacet

with each repeat, bend sustained pitches more

5-9X

first line twice, then never again, play top to bottom end w/ long quiet breaths as rest

long quiet breath

Perc/
Elec..

A. Sax into A. Sax
at the edge of feedback

Duo, Sax into sax.
Balance, play.

Subtle mixing of A. Sax with others.
Leaves and branch recordings
blend with ensemble, cues end.

CUE:

7

8

9

end cued by breath
sounds, finish with
recordings in instruments
filtered by key-presses