Stony Brook University

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Toward Innumerable Futures

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(Composition)

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*Toward Innumerable Futures* was composed during a period of study centered around the aesthetics of time and process in the artworks and writings of Robert Smithson. Smithson’s work is never simply about the art object as a fixed entity but as an object engaged in a potentially never-ending process. In short, much of Smithson’s work seeks to temper the fixity of the object with the dynamism of the environment and the resultant ambiguity of meaning.

This piece can be viewed as an interruption of an ongoing and potentially never-ending process. The piece begins and ends with the sounds of melting ice created by freezing six contact microphones into a block of ice measuring 3 feet in all dimensions that is to be placed on stage and illuminated during the performance. These sounds may begin at any point prior to the arrival of the audience and end at any time after the audience leaves. The performance of the main “section”, scored for Soprano, Mezzo Soprano and large mixed ensemble, effectively creates a 30–35 minute interruption of this process.

The notated “interruption” is created by a number of procedures including spectral, 12 tone technique, the manipulation of pitch sets, tone rows created by random number generators and vague allusions to tonal practice. Although the piece moves through spectra based on F#, G, Ab and E, the formal divisions are more dependent on rhythmic, textural and timbral variations than the pitch material. The rhythmic material falls into two broad categories in that it is either specifically notated or presented as linear and vertical events that are to take place within a given time period (for example, unmeasured events that should be completed in 5 seconds). Therefore, as in Smithson’s work, time is treated as flexible and, to a certain extent ambiguous, construct within a fixed structure. Still, this fixed structure is part of a larger structure whose temporal limits cannot be known.
Toward Innumerable Futures

**Instrumentation:**

Soprano  
Mezzo Soprano  

Flute/Piccolo/Alto Flute (1 player)  
Oboe  
Clarinet  

Horn  
Trombone  

Piano  
Harp  

Percussion I:  
Tom - Toms (4)  
Temple Blocks (3)  
Ratchet  
Snare Drum  
Tam – Tam  
Kick Drum  
Thunder Sheet  
Vibraphone

Percussion II:  
Ratchet  
Claves  
Wood Block  
Wind Gong  
Tam – Tam  
Bass Drum  
Crotales  
Marimba  
Xylophone

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Cello  
Contra Bass  

Amplified melting ice
Performance Notes

This piece may begin at any point before the audience arrives and end at any point after they leave with the sounds of amplified melting ice. If the performance is to be unstaged, the ice should be placed in the center of the stage and illuminated with either a soft blue or soft red stage light. If the performance is to be staged, the ice should be placed in the center of the stage and the director should allow the singers to interact with it.

The general specifications for the ice are as follows:

1. The dimensions of the ice should be approximately 3 feet X 3 feet X 3 feet. If it is not possible to find a service that can provide this size several smaller blocks may be combined. A drill bit suitable for soft materials (such as sheet rock or plaster) may be used so that reinforcements can be placed in the ice to keep the cube together. A 1/8” dowel will work well.

2. Six contact microphones should be frozen in the ice at different levels in the XYZ planes.

3. It is preferable that the sound be distributed around the hall through 6 loudspeakers. If this proves to be impractical, a stereo set will suffice. Any number of speakers between 2 and 6 may be used.

4. The amplified sound of the ice should be processed with a ca. 2 second reverb. The reverb should be tailored to the acoustic characteristics of the hall. Smaller blocks of ice can be used for the purpose of testing.

5. In general, the amount of sound the ice produces accelerates as it is given more time to melt. If the ice will not have sufficient time to melt before the instruments begin performing, heat lamps, hot water or small, quiet radiant heaters may be used to facilitate melting.

General Instrumental Notes

- Pitches without stems are to be performed out of time for the duration of the measure.
- Eighth notes with slashed beams are to be performed as fast as possible.

- Hold pitch for the duration indicated by the line.
- Fermata ad lib. (2 – 5 seconds)

Singers:
- Use as little vibrato as possible. Straight tone is preferred throughout.
- Text in blank measures is to be spoken within the number of beats indicated by the number in brackets. Text without a number in brackets should be spoken within the duration of the measure taking into account any rests.
- [aeiou] – Constantly change vowel formant. Rhythm should be varied.

Strings:
- Double bass harmonics sound as written:
- e.g. = sul ponticello
- e.t. = sul tasto
- cl. = col legno tratto
- clb = col legno battuto
- Downtune with too much bow pressure (noise)
- Upbow with too much bow pressure (noise)
- Vary the width and intensity of the vibrato based on the width and intensity of the line.
- Straight line = senza vibrato

Percussion:
- Super Ball – Rub a superball fixed to a bamboo skewer on the drum head for the duration of the note
- The mixer for the ice may be controlled by either percussionist.

Notes for Specific Instrument

Notes for Specific Instrument
Minus Twelve – Robert Smithson

1. USELESSNESS
   A. Zone of standard modules.
   B. Monoliths without color.
   C. An ever narrowing field of approximation known as the Method of Exhaustion.
   D. The circumscribed cube.

2. ENTROPY
   A. Equal units approaching divisibility.
   B. Something inconsistent with common experience or having contradictory qualities.
   C. Hollow, blocks in windowless room.
   D. Militant laziness.

3. ABSENCE
   A. Postulates of nominalism.
   B. Idleness at the North Pole.
   C. Exclusion of space.
   D. Real things become mental vacancies.

4. INACCESSIBILITY
   A. Gray walls and glass floors.
   B. Domain of the Dinosaurs.
   C. Toward an aesthetics of disappointment.
   D. No doors.

5. EMPTINESS
   A. A flying tomb disguised as an airplane.
   B. Some plans for logical stupefactions.
   C. The case of the "missing-link."
   D. False theorems and grand mistakes.

6. INERTIA
   A. Memory of a dismantled parallelepiped.
   B. The humorous dimensions of time.
   C. A refutation of the End of Endlessness.
   D. Zeno's Second Paradox (infinite regression against movement).

7. FUTILITY
   A. Dogma against value.
   B. Collapses into five sec
   C. To go from one extreme to another.
   D. Put everything into doubt.

8. BLINDNESS
   A. Two binocular holes that appear endlessly.
   B. Invisible orbs
   C. Abolished sight.
   D. The splitting of the vanishing point.

9. STILLNESS
   A. Sinking back into echoes.
   B. Extinguished by reflections.
   C. Obsolete ideas to be promulgated (teratologies and other marvels).
   D. Cold storage.

10. EQUIVALENCE
    A. Refusal to privilege one sign over another.
    B. Different types of sameness.
    C. Odd objections to uncertain symmetries in regular systems.
    D. Any declaration of unity results in two things.

11. DISLOCATION
    A. Deluging the deluge.
    B. The Great Plug.
    C. The Winter Solstice of 4000 B.C. (a temporal dementia).
    D. Toward innumerable futures.

12. FORGETFULNESS
    A. Aluminum cities on a lead planet.
    C. A compact mass in a dim passageway (an anti-object).
    D. A series of sightings down escarpments.

Used by permission of the Estate of Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt and the James Cohan Gallery.
Toward Innumerable Futures

Score in C

Joseph F. Di Ponio

Soprano

Mezzo Soprano

Flute

Oboe

Clarinet

Horn

Trombone

Piano

Harp

Percussion I

Ice: Mixer on

Thunder Sheet tap with triangle beater

Percussion II

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Bass

Repeat ad lib

Ice: Mixer on

Bass Drum

œ sim.

œ sim.

œ sim.

œ sim.

œ sim.
Begin decreasing volume of mixer. Mixer should be out at measure 13.
*Constantly change vowel formant. Rhythm should be varied.*
* Gliss for full duration of the note
The Fermatas should not be synchronized the last pitch in the series.

Flute performs the pitches in any order, out of time but with a varied tempo. All instruments hold the last pitch in the series.

The Fermatas should not be synchronized.
* Rhythm should be performed rubato in all parts (rhythm should not be synchronized). Gliss to the highest possible pitch in the series.
A. Zone of standard modules

B. Monoliths without color

C. An ever-narrowing field of approximation known as the method of exhaustion
[5] B. Something inconsistent with common experience or having contradictory qualities


[4-4] Real things become mental vacancies
A. A flying tomb disguised as an airplane
[2] collapses into

[3]

collapses into

[4]

collapses into

[5]

collapses into
Perform fast as possible by listening and reacting to the other performers.

Pitches may be performed in any order after the first time. Repeat as necessary.

** Fast as possible, repeat as necessary.

Rapid up and down bows for the duration of the measure.

** Produce a noisly sound with very heavy bow pressure.

Rhythm should be varied.

Bow changes between players should not be synchronized.
Singers leave stage
* Multiphonic – sing pitch indicated by the diamond notehead
Conductor leaves stage

House manager turns down stage lights and raises house lights

- Clarinet leaves stage
- Piano leaves stage
- Cymbals
- Percussion leaves stage
- Bass leaves stage

Each line equals 1 second

Ice:
1. Turn up volume on mixer
2. Ice: tap with triangle beater
3. Turn down stage lights and raise house lights
4. House manager turns down stage lights and raises house lights

Tempo blocks
5 times

House manager turns down stage lights and raises house lights