

Raphaël Belfiore

Greenwich House, 1957

reenacted recording sessions for *Octandre* ensemble, conductor and composer

written for Ensemble Phœnix

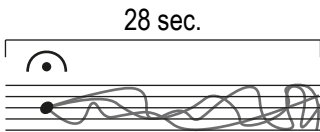
duration: 45 min

SECTION 1
00:00 - 05:34

tutti

SECTION 1.1
(00:00 - 00:28)

The members of the ensemble prepare themselves and test their instrument freely if necessary. If nothing is necessary, staying silent is also possible.



conductor

Start	00:00
Middle:	02:46
End:	05:33

composer

SECTION 1.2

In the spring and summer of 1957 Edgard Varèse led a series of improvisation sessions in downtown New York with jazz musicians who included Eddie Bert, Don Butterfield, Bill Crow, Art Farmer, Teo Macero, Hal McKusick, Charles Mingus, Hall Overton, Frank Rehak, and Ed Shaughnessy. The sessions took place at Greenwich House, one of the city's oldest settlement houses, which by mid-century had also become a venerable classical music venue at which Varèse held an informal teaching affiliation. Most of the jazz musicians present, as recalled in oral accounts, had been participants in the Jazz Composers Workshop, a loose, racially integrated group of musicians invested in crossover between classical concert and jazz traditions. Their interactions with Varèse at the Greenwich House sessions created something of a sensation, attracting John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and others who observed the music making from the sidelines.

Like Varèse, these informal audience members tended to be associated with the newly crystallizing canons of the New York School and American experimentalism. Composer and alto saxophonist Teo Macero and composer Earle Brown organized the sessions, using their contacts as commercial recording engineers at Columbia and Capitol Records respectively to assemble the sessions' personnel.

[...]

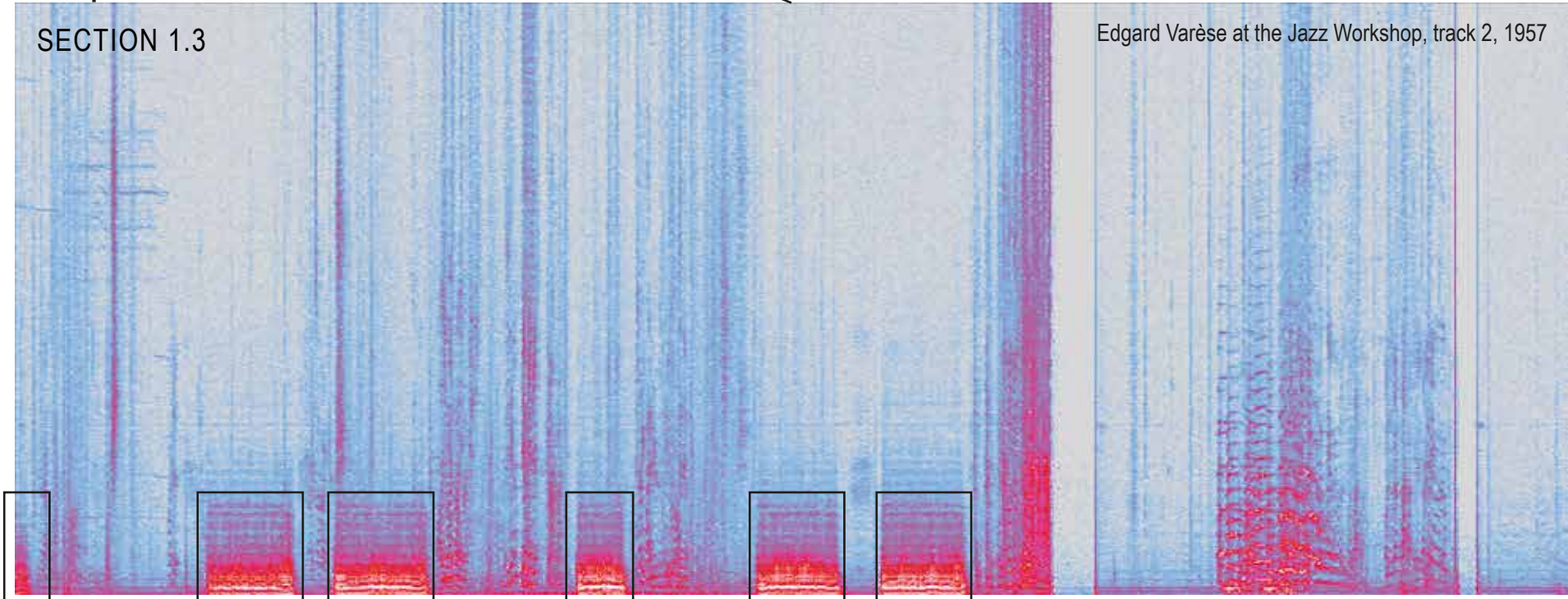
For a second we hear the jackhammer-like sound of a low-register, flutter-tongued tuba. At least two indistinct voices respond, followed by static in the recording. Someone says, "Shh!" Someone else (not Varèse) commands, "Now hit it!" The flutter-tongued tuba sound returns for four seconds. "Alright, stop guarding that." "Shh!" The sound returns for five more seconds. Voices mumble in the background. "Shh!" Another musician (Butterfield on tuba?) asks, "Is he taping it?!" Varèse replies, "Yes, yes, yes!" Another musician with a strong, nasal East Coast accent (perhaps Macero) insists, "You're on, you're on!" Three more seconds of flutter-tonguing follow. Another voice enters, possibly that of Earle Brown: "It's gotta be quiet in here, because we're gonna use this, fellas!" A chorus replies, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." We hear rustling and movement. "Shh!" Then the tuba flutter-tongues for five seconds more, followed by a pause and four more seconds of the same rumbling sound. After the sound dies away, the musicians burst into applause. "That one feels good!," someone calls out.

— Brigid Cohen: Enigmas of the Third Space: Mingus and Varèse at Greenwich House, 1957.

loudspeaker

SECTION 1.3

Edgard Varèse at the Jazz Workshop, track 2, 1957



Tuba pedal tones for next section

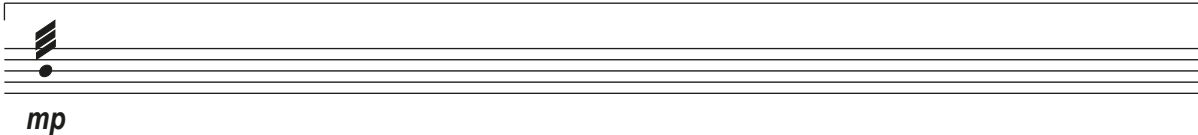
Some verbal indications may be used during the performance of the instructions. Continue playing uninterrupted.(This is valid for all sections)

tutti

SECTION 2.1

Translate as closely as possible the tuba pedal note from the **sonic** perspective. Try to create an "image" of the original sound in your instrument. Any complex and special technique can be used.

~ 52 sec.



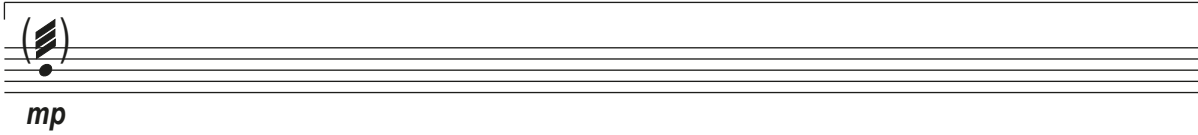
mp

tutti

SECTION 2.2

Translate as closely as possible the tuba pedal note from the **idiomatic** perspective. Try to imagine what it feels like to play the original sound and propose a sound/technique that you imagine being similar with your instrument. It might not sound at all like the tuba pedal tone.

~ 52 sec.



mp

conductor

Start 05:33

Middle: 07:25

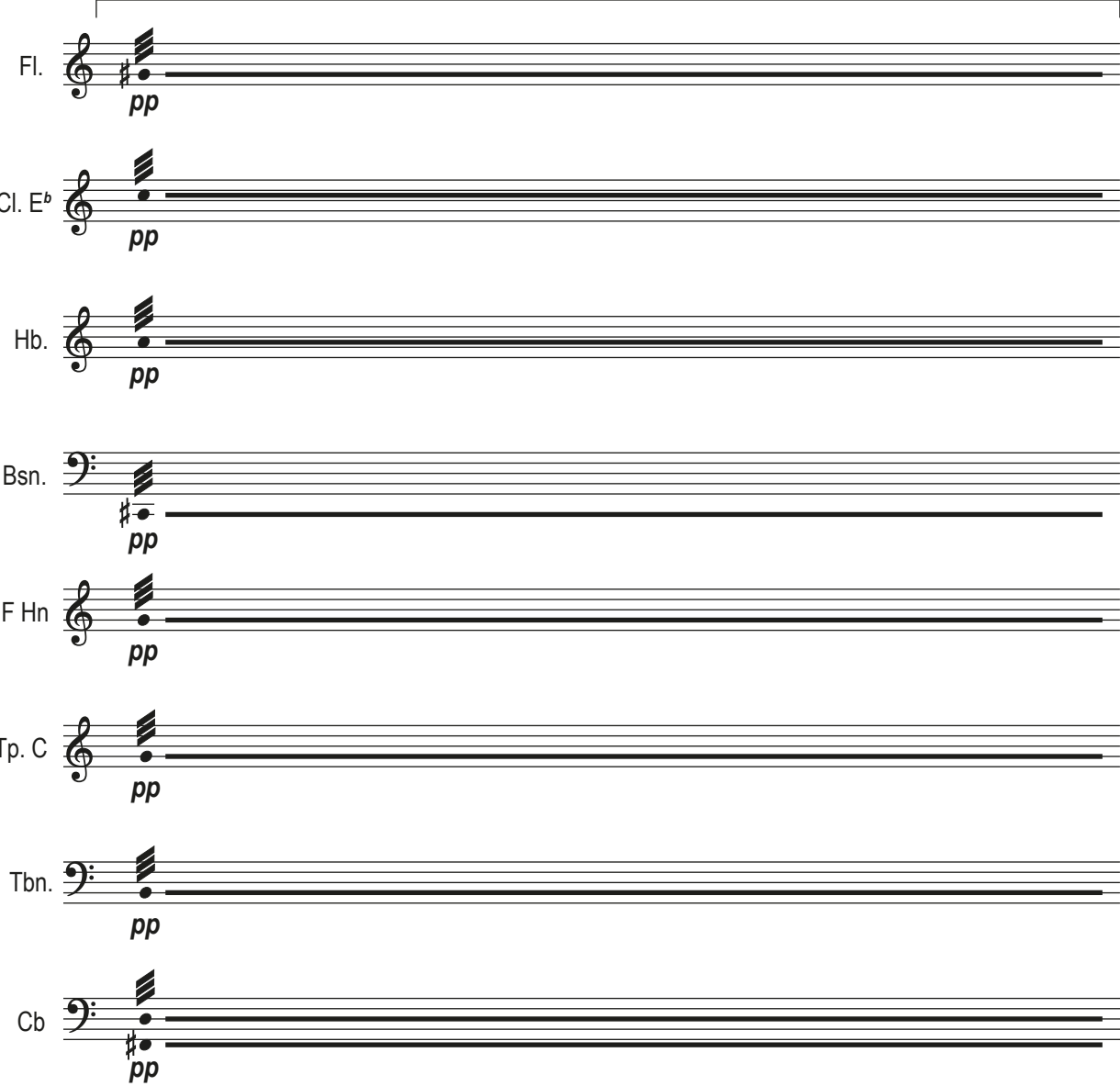
End: 09:16

tutti

SECTION 2.3

Adapt one of the two techniques to the given note, trying to preserve the sonic and/or idiomatic character of the original tuba sound. Try various possibilities.

~ 52 sec.



Fl. pp

Cl. Eb pp

Hb. pp

Bsn. pp

F Hn pp

Tp. C pp

Tbn. pp

Cb pp

tutti

SECTION 3.1

Using the sound from the previous section, take this Varèse painting as a reference for altering the quality of the sound (and not its pitch).

Recently (1957-1958) he has found a notation for jazz improvisation of a form controlled by himself. Though the specific notes are not determined by him, the amplitudes are; they are characteristic of his imagination, and the improvisations, though somewhat indeterminate, sound like his other works. In these respects Varese is an artist of the past. Rather than dealing with sounds as sounds, he deals with them as Varese. "

— John Cage, Silence : Edgard Varèse

2 min. 47 sec.



Edgard Varèse, [no title], oil on wood, 1951

composer

SECTION 3.2

Organized sound seems to me to encompass the dual aspect of music as an art-science, as well as the very latest laboratory discoveries that allow us to contemplate the unconditional liberation of obsolete systems, and to designate without question my own music and what it requires.

— Edgard Varèse, Conversations avec Georges Charbonnier

"There should be at least one laboratory in the world where the fundamental facts of music could be investigated under conditions reasonably conducive to success. The interest in music is so widespread and intense, its appeal so intimate and poignant, and its significance for mankind so potent and profound, that it becomes unwise not to devote some portion of the enormous outlay for music to research in its fundamental questions." [...]

"I should like you to consider what I be definition of music, because it is all-inclusive: "the corporea- lization of the intelligence that is in sound," as proposed by Hoëné Wronsky. If you think about it you will realize that, unlike definitions which make use of such subjective terms as beauty, feelings, etc., it covers all music [...]"

— Varèse, The Liberation of Sound

conductor

Start 09:16

Middle: 12:49

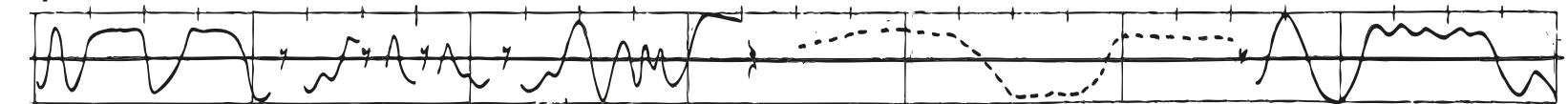
End: 16:21

SECTION 4.1

Using timbres as neutral as possible, at least mezzo forte, try to precisely copy the curve assigned to your instrument. The range is decided by the ability to make pure glissandos. If there's only one tone in which this is possible, it's not a problem. When two instruments have the same curve, they don't need to play together.

1 min. 29 sec.

Tp. C



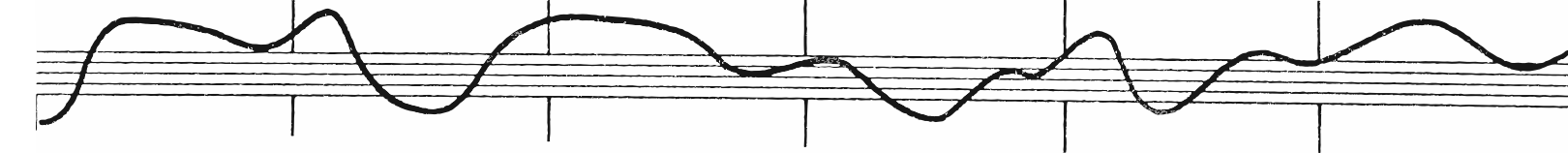
Edgard Varèse, «Jazz Graphs», 1957

Cl. E^b + Bsn.



Earle Brown, Hodograph, 1959

Fl. + F Hn



James Tenney, Quintext IV. Parabolas and Hyperbolas for Edgard Varèse, 1972

Hb.



Teo Macero, Fusion, 1958

Tbn + Cb.



Edgard Varèse, Extracted shape from a collaged preparatory diagram for Poème Electronique, 1957-58

composer

SECTION 4.2

Although this new music is being gradually accepted, there are still people who, while admitting that it is "interesting," say, "but is it music ?" It is a question I am only too familiar with. Until quit recently I used to hear it so often in regard to my own works, that, as far back as the twenties, I decided to call my music "organized sound" and myself not a musician, but "a worker in rhythms, frequencies and intensities ties." Indeed, to stubbornly conditioned ears, anything new in music has always been called noise". But after all what is music but organized noises? And a composer, like all artists, is an organizer of disparate elements. Subjectively, noise is any sound one doesn't like.

— Varèse, The Liberation of Sound

That is, in tracing a continuous transition through an infinity of tones, a siren's glissando might be thought to occupy, and therefore destabilize, precisely that slim, curvilinear boundary between the rational, discrete pitch space of common-practice European music and the expansive, unruly space outside of that practice, inhabited by noise, or everything that music was thought to exclude

— Benjamin Steege, Varese in vitro: On Attention, Aurality, and the Laboratory

conductor

Start: 16:21

Middle: 18:58


End: 21:34


tutti

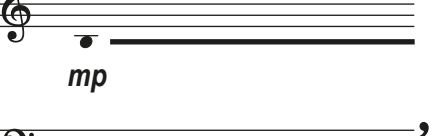
SECTION 5.1


Play this chord the first time with the "purest" technique possible from a classical perspective. After each repetition, change the embouchure or technique to make each sound less "classical". Repeat until the given note is completely unstable. When the instability is too great for the note to be heard, try to return to the limit..


~ 12 sec.

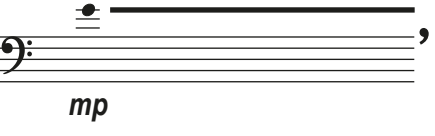
Fl.


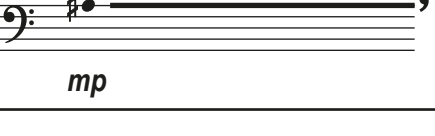
Cl. E^b



Hb.


Bsn.


F Hn


Tp. C


Tbn.


Cb


12x

Edgard Varèse, Octandre, 1923, Mvt 2, mes. 65: chord

composer

SECTION 5.2

What remains fascinating about this sound excerpt is the way Varèse’s personal discipline of attentive listening resituates itself within a collaborative setting—itself an open-ended “experiment” or “try” at something—to rather comic effect. Varèse allowed others (most likely Macero and Brown) to command the scene, and they do so with a casual style of interaction and language. Though the musicians agree that it is important to “be quiet in here” (“Yeah, yeah, yeah”), the group’s overall noisiness precludes a hushed listening and recording environment. The tape recorder becomes a character in its own right, demanding responsiveness to its presence. Moreover, despite the lack of quiet, the musicians attend to the flutter-tongued sounds with an “attentive listening” comparable to Varèse’s intended discipline, so that the right sound might be captured on tape.

[...]

In July 1928, after fourteen years in the United States, Varèse made the following statements about race, music, and American identity in an interview published in Le Figaro hebdomaire on the subject of the “American musical avant-garde” while preparing for an extended stay in Paris the following October: “Jazz is not America. It’s a negro product, exploited by the Jews. All of its composers from [the United States] are Jews. Jazz does not represent America any more than slow waltzes represent Germany. . . . I do not write jazz. . . . Jazz is without ideas. It’s noise on which you hop around

Brigid Cohen: Enigmas of the Third Space: Mingus and Varèse at Greenwich House, 1957

conductor


Start: 21:34

Middle: 23:21

End: 25:08

SECTION 6.1


Hb.



Hb.




Hb.

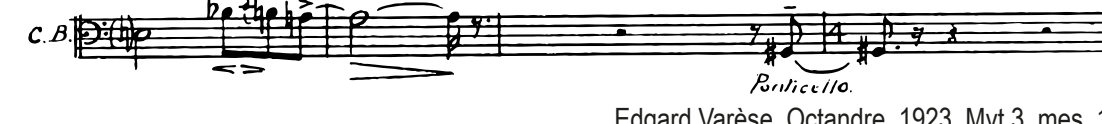


Edgard Varèse, Octandre, 1923, Mvt 1, mes. 1 - 10

C.B.

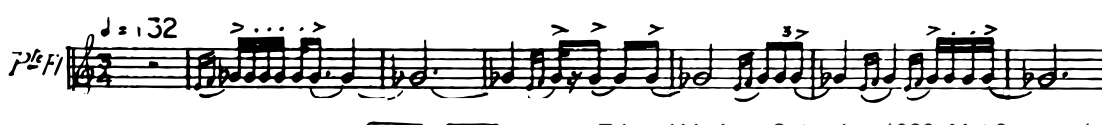


C.B.



Edgard Varèse, Octandre, 1923, Mvt 3, mes. 1 - 9

P¹ & P²



Edgard Varèse, Octandre, 1923, Mvt 2, mes. 1 - 10

Cl. E^b




F Hn




Edgard Varèse, «Jazz Graphs», 1957

Trb.




Trb.




Charles Mingus, Revelations, 1957, mes. 17 - 20

Bass²

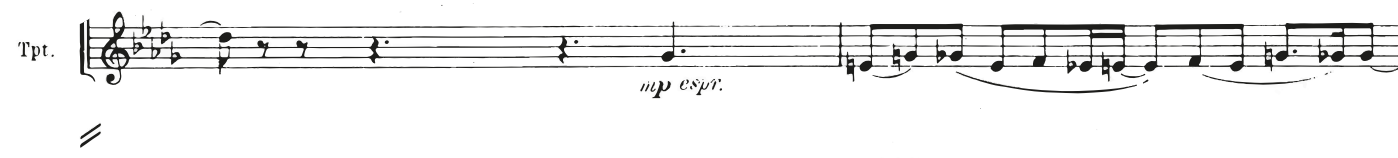


Bass²




Edgard Varèse, Octandre, 1923, Mvt 3, mes. 1 - 9

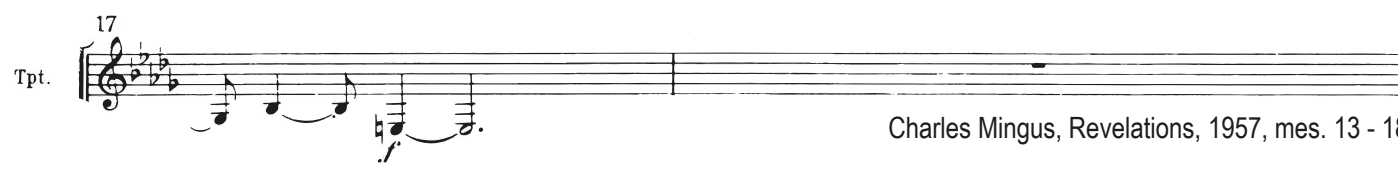
Tpt.



Tpt.



Tpt.



Charles Mingus, Revelations, 1957, mes. 13 - 18

conductor

Start: 25:08

Middle: 27:36

End: 30:04

composer

SECTION 7.1

Since the early 1950s, controversy over the nature and function of improvisation in musical expression has occupied considerable attention among improvisers, composers, performers, and theorists active in the sociomusical art world that has constructed itself in terms of an assumed high-culture bond between selected sectors of the European and American musical landscapes. Prior to 1950, the work of many composers operating in this art world tended to be completely notated, using a well-known, European-derived system. After 1950, composers began to experiment with open forms and with more personally expressive systems of notation. Moreover, these composers began to designate salient aspects of a composition as performer-supplied rather than composer specified, thereby renewing an interest in the generation of musical structure in real time as a formal aspect of a composed work. After a gap of nearly one hundred and fifty years, during which realtime generation of musical structure had been nearly eliminated from the musical activity of this Western or "pan-European" tradition, the postwar putative heirs to this tradition have promulgated renewed investigation of real-time forms of musicality, including a direct confrontation with the role of improvisation. This ongoing reappraisal of improvisation may be due in no small measure to musical and social events taking place in quite a different sector of the overall musical landscape. In particular, the anointing, since the early 1950s, of various forms of "jazz," the African American musical constellation most commonly associated with the exploration of improvisation in both Europe and America, as a form of "art" has in all likelihood been a salient stimulating factor in this reevaluation of the possibilities of improvisation.

— George E. Lewis, *Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives*

You, my audience, are all a bunch of poppaloppers. A bunch of tumbling weeds tumbling 'round, running from your subconscious . . . minds. Minds? Minds that won't let you stop to listen to a word of artistic or meaningful truth . . . You don't want to see your ugly selves, the untruths, the lies you give to life. So you come to me, you sit in the front row, as noisy as can be. I listen to your millions of conversations, sometimes pulling them all up and putting them together and writing a symphony. But you never hear that symphony.

— Charles Mingus, quoted in Scott Saul, *Outrageous Freedom : Charles Mingus and the invention of the Jazz Workshop*

[Mattis:] "Well, so tell me about the piece." [Brown:] "Well, it wasn't a piece; it was just a kind of collective improvisation. And with Hal McCusick came a guy that just absolutely used to astonish me: a man named George Handy. He was an arranger for Boyd Raeburn and a lot of other orchestras, and George Handy did some very, very far-out arranging in the 40s [...]. And I remember after we finished this, or halfway through it or whatever it was, I asked George, 'What do you think of this?' He says, 'Aw, man, we did this all the time with the Woody Herman band; it's called head arrangements. 'You play this: p-ch ch, p-ch ch; you do this figure: po-po-ti-ta, po-po-ti-ta; po-po-ti-ta; the trumpet would go: bow, bow, bow. And they do that; they do that; they do that. It's called a head arrangement. You don't write it down; you just sort of verbally dictate. And George said, 'Aw, man, we've been doing this for years.' [Laughs.] But it was all new to Varese. It wasn't new to me, 'cause I was a jazz musician, but it was new to Varese."

— Olivia Mattis, *From Bebop to Poo-wip: Jazz Influences in Varese's Poeme electronique*

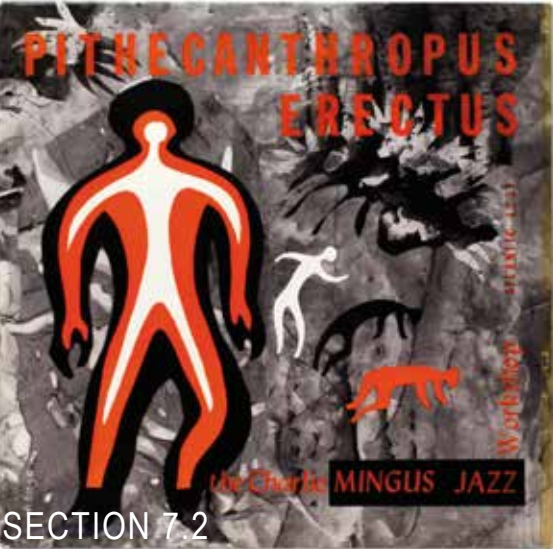
My whole conception with my present Jazz Workshop group deals with nothing written. I "write" compositions – but only on mental score paper – then I lay out the composition part by part to the musicians.

— Charles Mingus, *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, Liner Notes

When these preparations were far enough advanced, Varese came to Eindhoven to "produce" his composition with our cooperation. For this purpose a specially equipped studio was provided. In composing, Varese concentrated primarily on the character of the tonal pattern, and for the most part left us to decide on the "intonation" (the distribution of the sound over the loudspeakers, i.e. the spatial effect). The composition is characterized by an extraordinary wealth of sounds, the realization of which often involved considerable difficulties. The deficiency of language in this field, the lack of words to express what is intended, was keenly felt. Varese frequently indicated his wishes by such expressions as "more nasal", "less biting", "more rasping", and it was our job to meet his wishes as well as possible by means of filters, mixers and frequency-shifting circuits. To define the necessary operations we had to resort repeatedly to onomatopoeic words, such as "wow wow", "poowhip", "tick tock", "whoop" and "choochah".

— Willem Tak, *The Sound Effects: Philips Technical Review* 1958

loudspeaker



Charles Mingus, *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, 1956

tutti + composer

SECTION 7.3

head arrangement: composer and ensemble members set up together a piece orally from the material developed in the session.

tutti

At the conductor's end cue, begin playing immediately a sound as close as possible to pitchless noise (air sound for example) extremely quietly

conductor

Start: 30:04

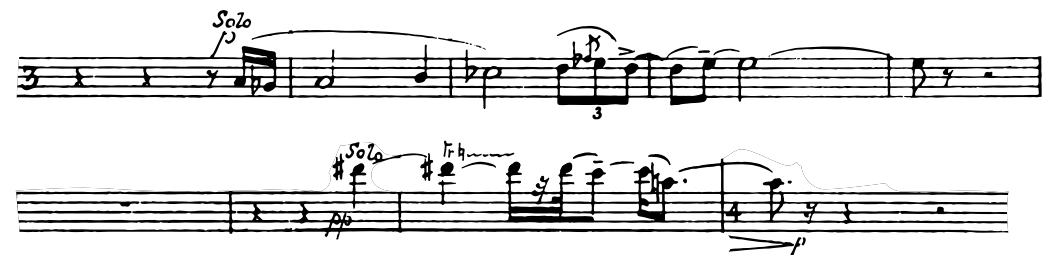
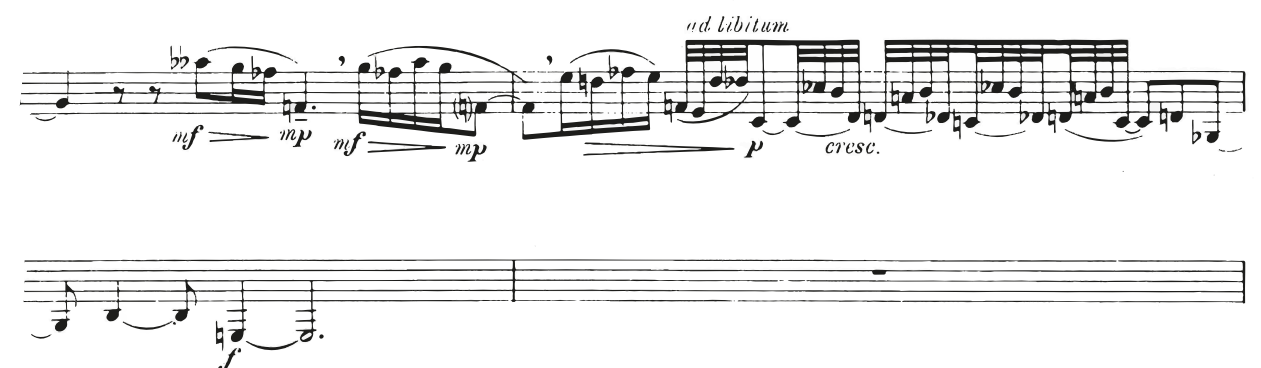
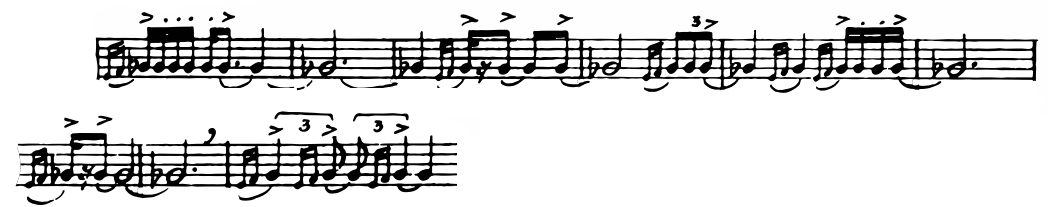
Middle: 35:46

End: 41:28

tutti

SECTION 8

As soon as you're given a verbal cue, choose one of these solos and start playing it below the audibility threshold, gradually increasing the dynamics. The moment you start hearing yourself, stop immediately and start again with another solo. Continue like this until otherwise indicated.



Consequently, if we define background noise as everything in sound that is unrecognizable and/or undefined as a form, and/or uninteresting (for the listener); and if we define rumour as noise composed of signs (forms and/or informations and/or influences); then the stranger is the one for whom the border between rumour and background noise is 'different' [...]

— Ray Brassier, Jean-Luc Guionnet, Seijiro Murayama & Mattin, Idioms and Idiots.

conductor

Start: 41:28

Middle: 43:14

End: 45:00