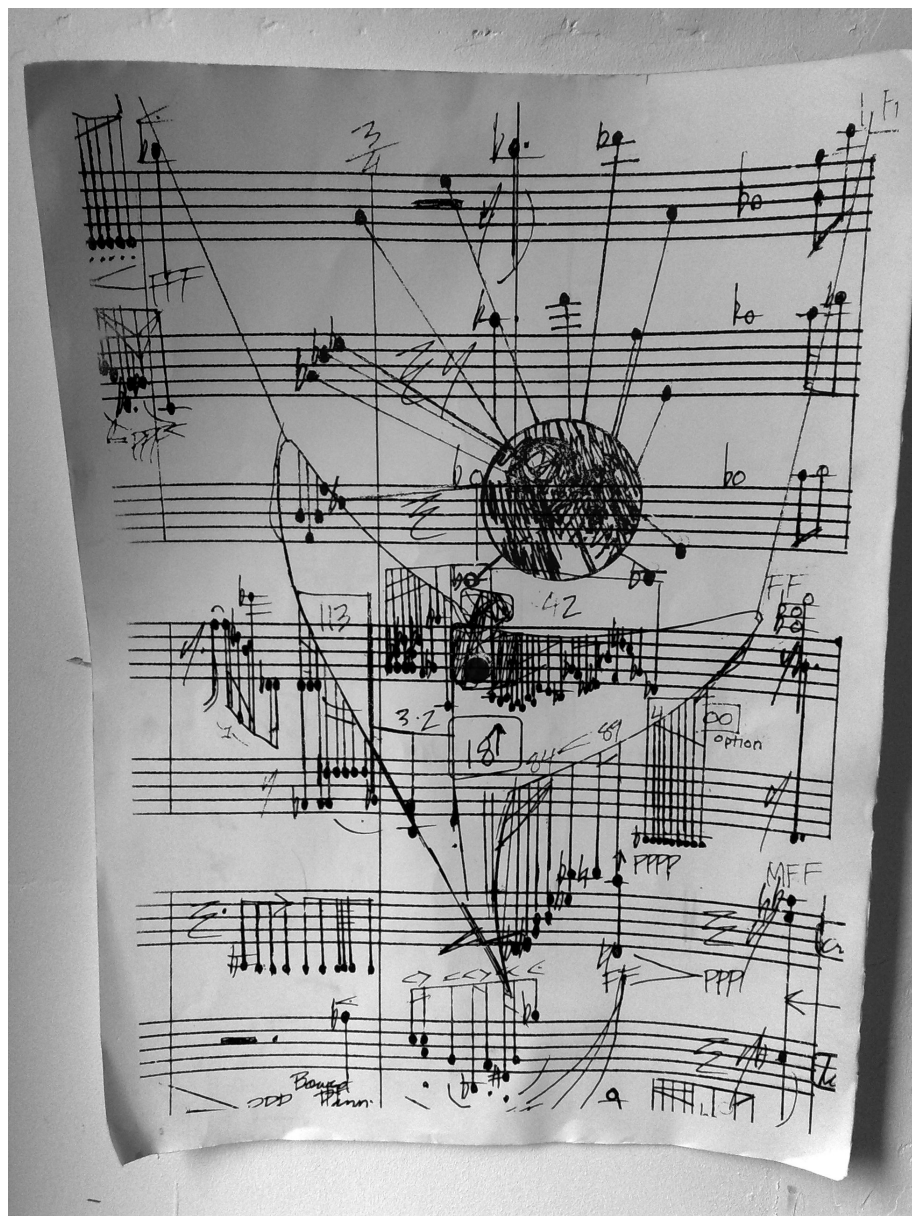


The

L—O

O—M

André Vida



Glory, edition of five. NYC, 1997



Installation of *Animated Scores and Shadows* at
the Black and White Studios, CalArts, Valencia,
California, 2005

“Western music is a highly complex organization of notes which constitute a score, a musical work. All the notes in a score are interrelated, but the relationships are defined in terms of intervals, numerical ratios, not in terms of the quality and meaning of sounds.”—Dane Rudhyar, *The Magic of Tone and the Art of Music*, 1982

In my approach to creating scores the relationships between intervals have ceded importance to those existing between performers and their imaginations, instruments, and bodies. The language of notation has followed, its paper-bound symbols emerging into animations that catch the shadows of its interpreters’ corporeal gestures in its open-ended, evolving matrix. No longer resting in one position this notation seeks definitions for its newly cinematic codes. Zooming, cross-cutting and rotating symbols open up a Pandora’s box which for a second seemed like it might contain freedom – instead the illusion of freedom appears, luring.

Exploring the terrain between composition and improvisation, we discover that place where players are allowed to draw from their own repositories while shape and arc and weight belong to the composer. In that crawl space of improvisation I elaborate a straightjacketed, struggling freedom that has more aesthetic direction and energy than freedom itself. And this leads me to view notation in the form of those straightjackets, as if you turn the tense of freedom on its side. It becomes an active state mediated through a highly structured series of activities. A body of tasks, maintained as a juggler would with eyes fixed on the distance – taking in the whole without ever missing a catch.

Interconnected, the violinists play off and against each other’s arms. They feel the ropes around them yanking at their concentration, the material reality of the score actively challenging their gestures. A masochistic inversion, a photographic negative, the system approximates and disenchants the shimmering, almost telepathic web of Jelly Roll Morton’s seamless orchestras of the 1920s. Where were his scores? Embedded in musculature and repetition and proximity. Like a spider I try to capture the ancestors and their songs,



Still from *Sonic Shadows*, a work using blank paper and coloured light to turn Yona Friedman and Jean-Baptiste Decavèle’s *Architecture without Building* exhibition into a temporal score. De Vleeshal, Middelburg, The Netherlands, 2012. Photo by Jean-Baptiste Decavèle



Still from *Tie Me Up* at the Black and White Studios, CalArts, Valencia, California 2005. Photo by Scott Groller

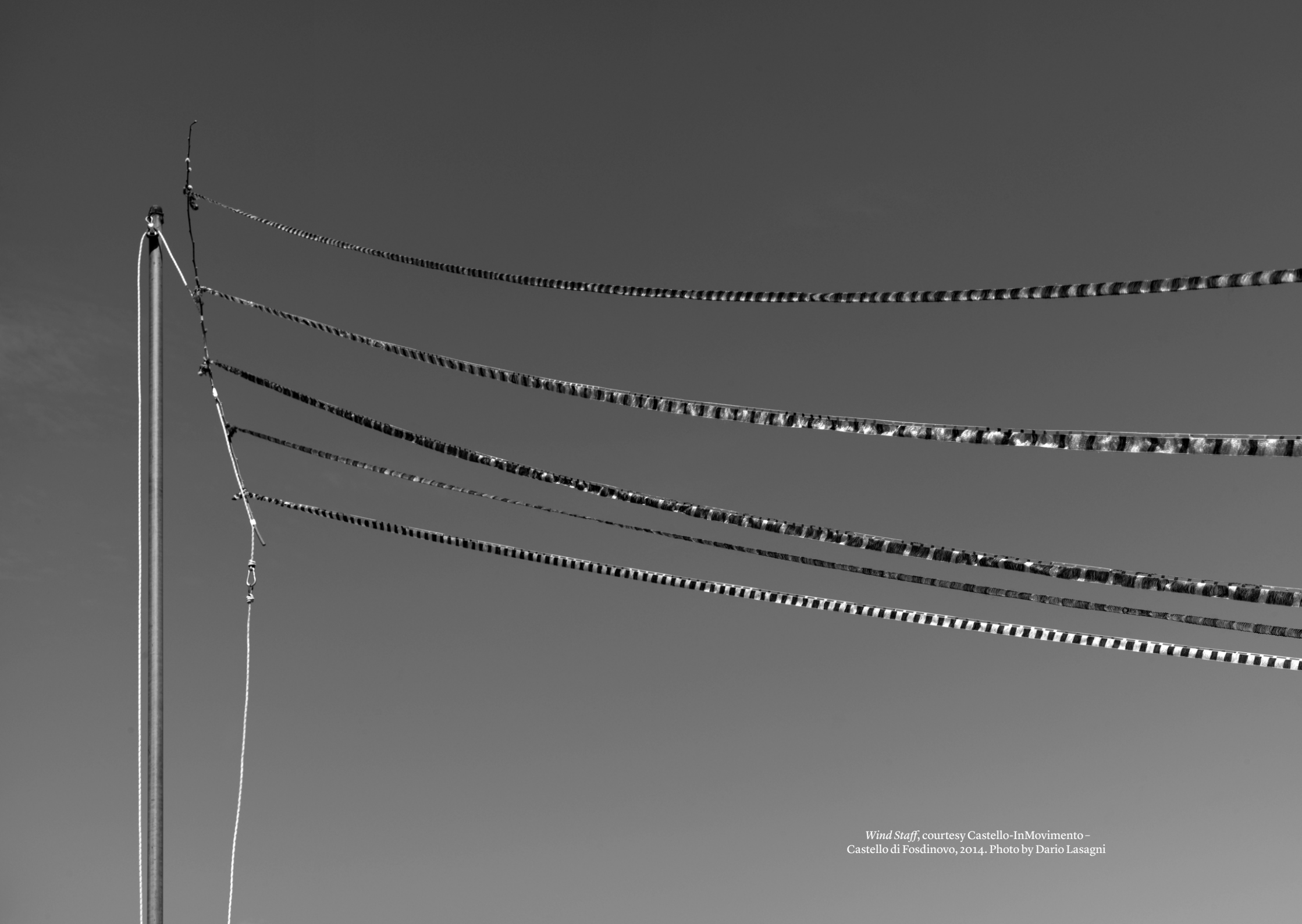
to weave these guardians of a lost musical culture into a new system, but fall asleep.

And does the score need to exist? Lawrence Weiner drops the gauntlet, declaring “THE WORK NEED NOT BE BUILT. EACH BEING EQUAL AND CONSISTENT WITH THE INTENT OF THE ARTIST THE DECISION AS TO CONDITION RESTS WITH THE RECEIVER UPON THE OCCASION OF RECEIVERSHIP.” The artist is a composer, the work is a score, and my score is a body, the paper on the shelf as potent as my intuitive gestures on the saxophone. A work unfolds itself within cyclical breathing. The body plays the players of our instruments.

The void is increasing as if a weight is on my fingers and breath to produce endlessly. Language turns flatulent; meaning and syntax dissolve. I battle against this sense of endlessness with my shadow. My body moves regardless of my fingers, my breath continues regardless of my sax. I focus on these rhythms, drawing from their natural course. I often think that the purpose of playing is to hide these natural rhythms. They take over so often. When I listen back and hear the rhythm of breathing, I often think I have failed to author something, that I am being played by my body.—*Serpentine Journal*, 2011

The score need never be built in a culture where the music vibrantly lives. The score inhabits the living body. Timed out in twitching fingers, each holding the minute timings of a language that lives more easily in a spoken cadence. And in this outdated culture the musician becomes both historian and politician. The day the oral historians turned into score, I had already been unborn for years.

Up amongst soapboxes, projecting allegories and singing songs for the walking public. Orbits of attention determined by slowing the pace of passerby. With some technique we call music, some trickery that is entertaining, the intimacy between performer and audience ebbed and flowed. Traffic, escalators, and windmills timing out public space in discrete units of motion. Two centuries between those two buildings.



Wind Staff, courtesy Castello-InMovimento –
Castello di Fosdinovo, 2014. Photo by Dario Lasagni

Two planets between these two feet. Walking, carrying a genetic code that once experienced timelessness.

This relationship to time is of a very special nature: everything takes place as though music and mythology needed time only in order to deny its place. Both, in effect, are mechanisms designed to do away with time. ... The act of listening to the musical work has immobilized the passage of time because of the work's internal organization; like a cloth billowing in the wind, it has caught up and infolded it.—Claude Levi-Strauss, 1967 Yale French Studies [underlining Robert Smithson's]

The parabolic space of that fabric billowing from the trumpet of Louis Armstrong, billowing out the chorus, extending the bridges, ballooning improvisations. One microphone – capturing an entire musical culture with such efficiency that the power remained on the stage, between the instruments. Where was the score? Almost a century later and splayed out in its digital translation on a computer screen, hermetically sealing all of its wisdom on one single track. There is nothing extrinsic, nothing to edit and mutate to fit the expression of some latecomer's editorial wisdom.

Escalators, windmills and traffic.

Time passed in flashes. If someone called this automation it would be equally inaccurate. The trance is another state of grace – in this setting I would say that I become the breath of the media in the rooms. The unity in both the details and the macrostructure obliterate the linear passage of time. The saxophone sounds arc over me like the skeleton of an ancient whale, each bone existing independently but held together by the path of my feet. A spine shifting continuously to avoid the amused parents, curious children, art insiders, and confused park tourists.—*Serpentine Journal*, 2011



Still from *Sonic Shadows*, a work using blank paper and coloured light to turn Yona Friedman and Jean-Baptiste Decavèle's *Architecture without Building* exhibition into a temporal score. De Vleeshal, Middelburg, The Netherlands, 2012. Photo by André Vida

Virtuosity is no longer expressed in playfulness or by amateurs or by those editors who manage to avoid a state of paralysis brought on by infinite digital options. Before the webbing on her hands started to set I saw my Grandmother's fingers in a dance that rivaled the better parts of automation, crashing down on my unelevated plastic laptop keyboard. Carrying the weight and wisdom of a century of typewriters she typed out the evolution of the tool, its repetitive clock and task. It sounded like praying.

The weaver-god, he weaves; and by that weaving is he deafened, that he hears no mortal voice; and by that humming, we too, who look on the loom are deafened; and only when we escape it shall we hear the thousand voices that speak through it. For even so it is in all material factories. The spoken words that are inaudible among the flying spindles; those same words are plainly heard without the walls, bursting from the opened casements. Thereby have villainies been detected. Ah, mortal! Then, be heedful; for so, in all this din of the great world's loom, thy subtlest thinkings may be overheard afar.

—Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, 1851

The constant beating of one metronome multiplied and layered into a tapestry of subdivisions. The central gravity of that original metronome undermined and transformed by the larger matrix of oddly paced relations. I began to use the tool to blind myself to the details. In my messy room, I placed one microphone very close to the instrument, picking up the clack and clop of the saxophone keys, and recorded one strand of fabric. An instrument originally invented for French military marching music and later subverted in New Orleans into a tool of improvisational flight. The evolution of these languages all dripping from that isolated strand. And thirteen times faster a new metronome beating out a ghostly trigger and then seventeen times faster again and so the idea of a fabric, its pattern emerging around me. The close-up sounds of the saxophone started accumulating in all different paces and refractions, hanging there dormant, filling up the room.

Holding the feeling of what I'd done in my immediate memory, I started the loom. Moving from one thread to the next, filling out the larger patterns. Shaping figures formed of twenty-one and nineteen breaths, colliding, all framed by five bass key clacks. Stopping and restarting, the grace of synthetic time carrying the shuttle back and forth. Not hearing the entirety of it, experimenting with the feel of it, until at the end of those days, some shape hanging on my wall, a grid, and an orchestra of minor differences.

Now, amid the green, life-restless loom of that Arsa-cidean wood, the great, white, worshipped skeleton lay lounging—a gigantic idler! Yet, as the ever-woven verdant warp and woof intermixed and hummed around him, the mighty idler seemed the cunning weaver; himself all woven over with the vines; every month assuming greener, fresher verdure; but himself a skeleton. Life folded Death; Death trellised Life; the grim god wived with youthful Life, and begat him curly-headed glories.—Melville, *Moby Dick*, 1851

As Adolph Sax invented his first bass saxophone in Paris in 1846, Melville's first book, *Typee*, was being published; two experimental freaks starting their careers less than a month apart. One fascinated by human interface, compelled by mobility, hands and breath, the other capturing our last supra-human leviathan with pen and ink. In the sounds of this recording five generations of saxophone all possessing their own idiosyncratic intonations. The alto saxophone my Grandpa bought me for "50 bucks" is from 1926 and deeply enigmatic to me. He told me to play it rather than become a lawyer and spend my life on my ass in an office. The tenor from 1951, also from France, was once played by Illinois Jacquet and sold because it "sounded darker than it tasted." The baritone was made in Indiana around 1971 and the Yamaha soprano is from the mid-'80s, though its exact date is harder to trace. The sopranino, built in 2012 in Taipei, is the only of my horns I ever played almost new. The saxophone is an imbalanced instrument designed to fit the asymmetrical human bodies that play it.



Still from *Tie Me Up* at the Black and White Studios,
CalArts, Valencia, California, 2005. Photo by Jeanette Yew

*My left middle finger is
longer than the right.
Wrapped around the
absence of a saxophone,
my fingers curve inward
toward my heart and
stomach. I feel them
pressing down on my
organs though the
electrical pulses in
between. And they fit
back into a saxophone
with the ease of a
symmetrical illusion.*

The Loom, commissioned by Shumon Basar,
was originally published by Entr'acte (EP5)
on the occasion of Global Art Forum 7 in
Doha, March 2013. Revised and republished
to coincide with the release of André Vida's
Minor Differences (E179), November 2014.

Edited by Sasha Wachtel.

vidatone.com