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LeWitt Etudes

[illegible]

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NOMENCLATURE

V

one player produces a series of pitches that move up or down.

another answers by moving in the opposite direction, so that the pitches from each pair of players produces either a V or inverted V shape

X

similar to V, but the second player of each pair begins before the first ends, producing an X shape

O

A player produces pitches or sounds that describe a large very slow circle: if there is a pause before it starts again, we will call it an “o”.

sin wave

like an O but continuous, without stops

the LeWitt Etudes

adventures in group composition

These pieces are inspired by Sol LeWitt's compositions for wall drawings

LeWitt wrote instructions to create drawings that can be executed in innumerable ways, according to the tastes and skills of the artists who realize them

The LeWitt Etudes are meant to foster adventures in musical group compositions by players from any tradition at any level of training including none

GROUND RULES for the LEWITT ETUDES

1. no pitches, rhythms, or instruments are specified by classical scoring
2. each piece can be performed by musicians from any stylistic background or instrument
3. the performers must take the pieces seriously, even when they are a joke, and practice them at least twice, preferably thrice, before a public performance.
There are many decisions to be made as a group. The result must be music the performers would like to listen to.
4. the instructions for the compositions should be available for the audience to read

visual artists or dancers can interpret the compositions, following the same instructions adapted as required.

#1 five or more músicos PERHAPS five minutes

Courbet

anyone can play any material, but only two play at a time:

when a new player interrupts a duo at will, one who was playing must stop

strive for maximum color and variety, including when the variety is to sound the same

#2 five músicos five minutes

*opposites
for Maureen (Moe) Tucker*

one player plays a steady pulse, not too loud.

a second player interrupts and takes over with a steady pulse, the same or different, and the first player stops

That player can be similarly interrupted by yet another or an earlier player

Thus, at all times, one player holds a steady pulse

While this pulse is playing during the first four minutes, any of the other four players can climb or descend a wide series of pitches at any tempo:

another player answers, moving in the opposite direction:

thus, each pair of players produces either a V or inverted V shape

during the last minute, the second player of each pair starts before the first ends, producing X shapes

#3 At least five musicians at least four minutes

Fractals of O for Vladimir Ussachevsky

one player, the “parent”, produces pitches or sounds that describe a large and very slow circle - even two minutes of notes, or a chord from the bottom to the top and back again, or top to bottom to top:
and thus plays a large O shape

These large O's will be the parent of the subsequent smaller o's: when the first player finishes the O, the same or another player can repeat this

as the parent O plays, another player matches the pitch at any point on the large O and makes a faster and smaller o shape

another player finds another pitch on either the large or small o, and makes a smaller and faster o

eventually there is a series of very fast and narrow oooo shapes within particular pitch regions based on previous choices

start this process at moderate volume, become louder and louder to fortissimo and then to very quiet

#4 five musicians, open duration

*speed tic tac toe
for Anthony Braxton*

mark off a large tic tac toe pattern with 4 pieces of tape

a team of two musicians stands on one side and three on the other

the two motion silently with each other and choose a square, playing the X shape from Etude #2 relatively slowly as they stand in it

then, rapidly, the three choose another one, playing O shapes.

rapidly, one of the X pair moves to another square as those two players change their X pattern and play them faster

one from the O trio does the same and the trio also plays faster

continue until there is a tic tac toe winner, with a straight line established, and the piece is finished

if there is no winner, the teams move to the sides and play again, this time with the O trio starting

musicians on non-mobile instruments can improvise with either team from the sides

If the players have difficulty remembering which squares were occupied, they can use a piece of chalk to rapidly mark it

sounds in this piece should be fast, like "speed chess"

#5 five, or any odd number of musicians, five minutes

*FM and AM
for Miranda Cuckson*

one player makes a “sin wave” of pitches, choosing his/her own dynamics throughout the piece: instruments that cannot glissando do their best

the other players are in pairs: they have two ways to control the sin wave:

1. if a pair makes a rapid climb, the sin becomes faster, and if they make a rapid descent, the sin becomes slower.
2. fast O's (like a sin wave but a single cycle) make the sin narrower in pitch range and volume, and slow Os make the sin larger in pitch range and volume

in addition, any player can play a series of points (short notes): a fast series drives the fundamental pitch of the sin wave higher, and a slower series drives the pitch lower

#6 five musicians, at least 3 minutes

for William Schimmel, Gene Pritsker & Dan Cooper

Player #1 makes repeats any 5 note phrase in any rhythm

Player #2 takes 4 of the notes from Player #1 in any octave and repeats them

They both play a little slower

Player #3 takes 3 of the notes from Player #2 in any octave and repeats them

They all play a little slower

Player #4 takes 2 of the notes from Player #3 in any octave and repeats them

They all play a little slower

Player #5 takes 1 of the notes from Player #4 in any octave and repeats it

They all play a little slower, and Players 1,2,3,4 all fade out

Player #5 begins to accelerando the speed of his note

Player #4 plays the note from Player #5 in any octave and adds a new note

They both play a bit faster

Player #3 plays the notes from Player #4 in any octave and adds a new note

They all play a bit faster

Player #2 plays the notes from Player #3 in any octave and adds a new note

They all play a bit faster

Player #1 plays the notes from Player #2 in any octave and adds a new note

Everyone plays faster and louder and suddenly end together

#7 five or more musicians, open duration
after Amina Claudine Myers & Chuck Berry

One player plays a deep groove with a backbeat

There are four verses: for each, a different player leads one verse

The others imitate the leader's phrases in a call and response (harmonies are fine).

The leader creates a melody that would support the phrasing and rhythm of the following lyrics, and the others (answer back):

They say the joint was rockin'	(They say the joint was rockin')
A goin' round and round	(A goin' round and round)
Yeah reelin' and rockin'	(Yeah reelin' and rockin')
What a crazy sound	(What a crazy sound)
Well they never stopped rockin'	(Well they never stopped rockin')
'Til the moon went down	('Til the moon went down)

Verse 1 is loud & swinging

Verse 2 is quieter

Verse 3 is crazier

Verse 4 is fast and loud

#8 five musicians, at least three minutes

*The three ages of mankind
for Dan Blacksberg & Nick Millevoi*

Three players start with a series of points, any timbre, speed, or duration and gradually expand these to larger and larger Os

After the expansion to Os is noticeable, the other two start with a series of points and gradually expand them to triangles, i.e., three note patterns (if the same duration between each point it is an isosceles triangle, but they can be of any type of triangle)

the overall duration of the triangles grow longer, so that like the Os, they become larger and larger

At a midpoint cue, each players reverses the process and shrink their shapes until they again become simply a series of points

end together on cue

#9 five musicians, length unspecified

Sounds of failure, after Tom Johnson

Each player chooses a technique on their instrument that can be made impossible to cleanly execute

For example, playing scales with increasing speed, jumping large intervals with increasing speed, becoming louder or softer, reattacking the same note at shorter intervals, or making larger and larger tone clusters

Each player in rapid succession starts a solo at an easy execution and over time to one that they cannot manage: go for the failure as a form of beauty

At the end, all repeat this process together

#10 at least 3 musicians, at least 3 minutes

Breathless

after Matthew Barney, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Jean-Luc Godard

all players find a way to hobble their sound.

amplified instruments are unplugged, mics are turned off, wind instruments have a shirt stuffed into the bells or ends, drummers beat on a shirt, singers may tape their mouths

now play aggressive punk rock music, more and more fiercely until everyone is breathing very hard

#11 any number of musicians including a single player, 6 minutes

after Ornette Coleman

'It's O.K. to repeat a phrase, just don't say the same thing.'

repeat your phrase and each time make it different

#12 any number of musicians less than 3 minutes

Ready steady go

For William Hooker

steady phrase, the same or different, one by one, out of phase with the first
on a cue, maintain the tempo but make the phrases louder and more intense
on a second cue, either a whistle or a starter pistol, play the phrases with
exaggerated volume, intensity, pitch exaggeration, in every way as extroverted as
possible

the whistle or starter pistol cues everyone out

*#13 any number of musicians, even an orchestra, as long as
40 minutes*

A bark overturns off the coast of New England

for Richard Auldson Clark

an optional conductor or concert master may provide cues

half of the players enter and exit quietly with jagged small waves as if cresting on the shore, very quietly: these should be out of phase with each other

up to three melodists represent a boat, trading relatively peaceful solos that answer each other and do not overlap

on cue, one quarter of the other players make sounds of lightning, thunder to emulate an approaching storm

the melodists respond and up to two can now overlap

on another cue the storm hits, the first half produces very loud and jagged waves

the remaining quarter players, tacit until now, intensify the storm, make circular eddies of sound, starting extremely broad, then with high pitches

the pitches are lowered as the boat sinks, and the melodists begin to overlap during this section

the storm subsides, all ends peacefully and players drop out

two melodists end quietly

*#14 any number of músicos, even an orchestra, as long as
40 minutes*

bird migration at night in North America, or the Mediterranean

for David Rothenberg

*optional conductor or concert master to provide cues, optional video of radar of
night bird flock migrations*

two to four players play quiet drone like material representing either North
America or Italy in the dark

others play extremely short flickers of sound representing occasional small
flocks of birds that alight briefly

one group produces a large ruckus of fluttering that moves from quiet to loud to
quiet again before fading

another does the same

multiple flocks of birds proceed to do this

the flocks calm themselves as the sun rises with a giant sustained chord from two
thirds of the músicos

the others play bird songs, none longer than a few seconds, individually, as the
Dawn Chorus

cue out

#15 any number of musicians, under 3 minutes

for Sam Phillips

Each musician plays Jailhouse Rock, and singers sing it together, in tempo but in as many different keys as possible

#16 any number of musicians, under 5 minutes

Palimpsest

for Gidon Kremer & Alicia de Larrocha

One musician plays a movement of baroque solo, such as a piece by Bach, Biber, or Telemann, by memory, fading in and out in volume

the others play relatively quietly, improvising longish notes or sustained patterns when the soloist is louder. the others recede and vice-versa, allowing glimpses of the baroque piece to peak as through a gauze

#17 any number of musicians, about 5 minutes

Fours

for Butch Morris

with the exception of a designated soloist, each player chooses two pitches or two chords

a leader holds up 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 fingers in any pattern

in rhythmic unison with a steady pulse:

1 finger cues playing each pitch once per beat, i.e., a quarter note, 4 times, and then alternate with the other pitch four times: this pattern of alternating measures occurs throughout

2 fingers, alternate the same two pitches each for 4 beats, but now as eighth notes with a bit of accent on the first

3 fingers play the two pitches as triplets,

4 fingers as 16ths

5 as quintuplets, with a bit of stress on the beat

a designated soloist after a bit of this can improvise on top of the patterns

leader and soloist decide together when to cue the performers out

#18 three to seven musicians about 4 minutes

Pointillist family dinner

for Miya Masaoka

each player chooses a role in a family

reconstruct a holiday dinner including a list of conversations and topics ahead of time: for example, one may include a prayer, an argument, a discussion of the food, or obstinate silence

each role is played or sung in the manner of the painter George Seraut, with stuttering pointillist lines

#19 any number of musicians, aim towards at least 3 minutes

Triple sprint

for the Bad Brains & George Crumb

each player develops a technique that drives them to be out of breath

if this can't be produced by playing the instrument normally, try playing while running in place, balancing on one foot while doing lifts, perform during sit-ups, etc.

at a signal, play until you are out of breath: try to end together

rest for about 10 seconds

do it again

and then one more time

do not perform this piece if you have a head condition

#20 four or five musicians, about 4 minutes

le belvedere

for John Luther Adams

each player imagines they have hiked up a mountain and now see a beautiful valley, mountain, lake, ocean, glacier, or other beautiful natural scene

each player in turn performs a short solo inspired by describing what they see before them

#21 any number of musicians, 2 minutes

Mayan pyramid

for Marí Kímura

Divide into four groups

each player chooses a major scale and ascends and descends as many pitches as they like in eighth notes: it could be only two notes, to 16, up and down

overlap, do not play in unison

#22 any number of musicians, 3 minutes

the Devil's staircase

for Jonathan Kane

each musician chooses any scale, including chromatic and microtonal scales, and ascends and descends as many pitches as they like in eighth notes: it could be only two notes or 16, up and down

however within each ascent or descent, one of the notes in the scale series jumps at least one octave, and even more if practical

thus, no upward or downward scale will be in the same register from where it started

do not play in unison

#23 any number of musicians, 4 minutes

after Wall Drawing #118

for Sol LeWitt

Prior to performance, or rapidly at the start, the entire group chooses any fifty pitches, evenly distributed over the range of all the instruments: this requires writing down the 50 pitches

during the performance, each of the pitches is connected to the next by glissandi

#24 any number of musicians, 3 minutes

*1 bit code
after Tristan Perich*

each player produces a series of rapid “1s”, which are a single pitch,

and “0s”, which are silences

everyone plays these binary sequences quietly, aiming toward a group sound of a gently percolating humming

#25 any number of musicians, 3 minutes

*bytes
for Brad Garton*

as in #24, but each player can choose any note from a 7 note scale plus one note that is silent

each plays quietly, aiming toward a group sound of a gently percolating humming

#26 any number of musicians, open duration

telephone

for Meredith Monk

either before or during the performance:

one player invents a short musical phrase and sings or plays it quietly into the ear of the next at a volume that cannot be clearly heard by anyone else: this is repeated for each player

when the last player has heard the melody, in order and as fast as possible, each plays the phrase that they heard

#27 4 to 7 musicians, 4 minutes

aquarium

for Pharoah Sanders

each player improvises quietly on whole tone scales interspersed with long silences

produce an occasional loud violent phrases to provide the impression of darting rapidly

#28 any number of musicians, 4 minutes

after Wall Drawing #118, version 2

for Tom Hamilton & Mimi Johnson

players choose fifty pitches, evenly distributed over the range of the instruments

each player can play phrases made up of 50 notes divided by the number of players: If there are 5 players, each player would have 10 notes

every pitch should be connected to the preceding pitch by glissandi

#29 any number of musicians, 4 minutes

Grotte di Frassisi

for Sun Ra & Marshall Allen

two groups of players, one for stalactites and the other for stalagmites.

the music begins quietly, and more people and volume accrue:

stalactites (hanging like an icicle): produce long phrases representing one stalactite, each player starting with a pattern of pitches that tend downward over the long run, with as many detours as desired: these can be played slowly or quickly, loud or soft, with any timbre but finally taper to a point.

if the pattern is repeated, pitches should be removed to make it shorter.

stalagmites (tapering upward columns from the floor): produce long phrases representing one stalagmite, each player starting with a pattern of pitches that tend upward over the long run, with as many detours as desired: these can be played slowly or quickly, loud or soft, with any timbre and finally either tapering to a point or end on a long held sound like a table top

leave long breaths between each long phrase before starting a variation

about 30 seconds before the end, fade out

#30 any number of musicians and audience members, 4 minutes

John Cage's "They're playing my composition"

The players sit on the floor facing the audience except for a conductor who stands and can explain to the audience what to do

at the conductor's signal, the audience members can talk, read, sing, cough, use their cell phones or equivalent.

at 4 minutes, the conductor cues silence

if the performance is successful, the conductor may signal to the audience to rise and take a bow.

#31 any number of musicians, about 1 minute

Umbrian warfare

for Lorette Velvette

divide the performers in two or three equal groups

they fire and return arrows to each other

the arrows consist of a sharp beginning of a note, imitating a bow string: as the arrow traverses, there is a “Doppler” effect as the pitch glisses lower

there should be responses of arrows between the groups

start the war with a few back and forth arrows, which become denser

after a minute or two, a leader can call a truce

any player can also break a truce

for Ken Filiano

Ms. Pacman

begin with some player playing the Ms. Pacman theme

When another player is encountered, the other players make a one second gulping sound, and that player is silent

#34 any number of musicians, 3 minutes

Fractal Pentagram

for Pentangle

note: a reflection is a gesture is repeated as if reflected in a mirror, except with reverse symmetry in both left/right and up/down directions: e.g., a downward series of pitches would be reflected as an upward series

player #1 performs a slow an upward sweep, followed by a reflecting downward sweep, then a faster upward sleep, followed by a held note, followed by a reflecting downward sweep: this shape constitutes a pentagram

The player repeats the pentagram much more slowly

The other players form shorter duration pentagrams

Player #1 cues the others out

#35 any number of músicos, about 4 minutes

after La Monte Young

Each player uses a piece of furniture, including chairs and table or instrument cases or large instrument or music stands

in both the concert venue and outside from where the sounds can be heard:
scrape the furniture to make sound along the floor or windows.

each chooses two shapes from: X, sin wave, line, or circle and moves the furniture in that shape

#36 any number of músicos, 3 minutes

after Christian Marclay

each player uses another's instrument case to open, close, zip and unzip, or otherwise produce sound

start quietly, build to a climax, and cue ending roughly together

#37 any number of músicos, 6 minutes

after Daniel Goode

the players use mallets, hammers, bows, blow, or any other means to turn the concert hall and surrounding environment into musical instruments

#38 any number of músicos, 4 minutes

after Nicolas Slonimsky

Each musician plays their instrument with an orange

#39 any number of musicians, 3 minutes

for Kurt Hoffmann & Hans Tammen

Play the following in unison:

CHUNKa CHUNKa CHUNKa
CHUNKa CHUNKa CHUNKa
Chunka beep beep beep
Beep beep beeeeeeeep

Repeat

Chunka BEEP BEEP BEEP
Chunka BEEP BEEP BEEP
Chunka
Chunka
CHUNKa CHUNKa CHUNKa
Beeeeeeeep beeeeeeeep beeeeeeeep

Repeat

Beep beep beep-a beep
Chunka beep beep beep
Beep b-beep
Beep b-beep
Beep beep beep-a beep

rest, then play the entire piece again, slower

rest, then play it a third time, starting at the original speed, and accelerate

#40 any number of musicians, 5 minutes

after Phill Niblock

players choose a central pitch as a drone, and start on that pitch or an octave of it

very slowly drift in pitch a half step higher or lower, with no drift more distant than that

play with extremes of volume and try to create beats and difference tones

#41 any number of musicians, 2 and half minutes

after Wendy Carlos

quote phrases from any piece by J.S. Bach to each other: particularly on instruments he did not write them for

overlap phrases

#42 any number of musicians, 4 minutes

after Joni Mitchell

Each player holds a drone: if your instrument is capable of playing more than one pitch, while holding the drone, move the other pitches up and down in parallel motion

#43 three to six musicians, 2 to 5 minutes

after Hank Williams

A soloist plays the most lonesome possible solo
Then a duo plays the most lonesome possible duo
Another duo plays the same
A final different soloist does the same

#44 at least seven musicians, 5 minutes

after Pauline Oliveros

the players walk through the hall and the audience trading pitches with each other and with the audience members, who can also sing the pitches
cue an ending at 5 minutes, and everyone can bow

#45 at least seven musicians, 5 or more minutes

*Waves on the golfi di Napoli
after Maurice Ravel and Richard Wagner*

on cues:

play long note drones

open triads pop out, and can expand over octaves

the triads become get faster

scales run up

then scales run and often back down

faster and faster,

then softer and out

#46 at least four musicians, 5 or more minutes

after Takehisa Kosugi

set up music stands (preferably unstable wire stands), including any mics and lamps available on the stands

start switching chairs and stands for any reason, and constantly readjust your instrument and any paraphernalia

set up music paper on the stands: use different types and thicknesses of paper

some of the music paper should be in long parts, taped together poorly

be clumsy: stands should fall over, long taped together scores and parts become entangled and fall,

with as much variety as possible, fold, cut, or rip the paper with hands or scissors to make a variety of sounds

for string instruments, bow any surfaces including of the cut paper to make sound

end on cue and bow to the audience together

#47 any number of musicians, 3 or more minutes

HCAB

for Richard Lair & Miles Davis

play quotes from Bach's pieces

play quote inversions by standing or lying upside down

play quote retrograde by turning away from the audience

play quote retrograde inversions by being upside down and turning backwards

the ensemble moves from either: extremely quiet to extremely loud back to quiet

or extremely loud to extremely quiet to extremely loud

#48 at least three musicians, 5 or more minutes

Water canon
after Conlon Nancarrow and the Sirens of Capri

one player introduces a sexy bluesy theme

the next player takes it up at a different tempo, as do subsequent players:
transposition by beginning on a different note is encouraged

no more than three players should make sounds at a time, at least for very long,
so a new entry should silence a previous one once their phrase is done

make the entries surprising, but also evocative and bluesy

at a cue at the end, all players play together as quickly and loud as possible, at
different speeds, repeating as necessary,

cue a unison stop

#49 as appropriate

Suite

for Jason Hwang and Alex Chilton

choose any three etudes and perform them as a suite without break

#50

one more for Pauline Oliveros

Compose your own etude using the ground rules

Dave Soldier, New York City and Spoleto, Umbria, Italia June – September, 2015