

Master of Music

Artistic Research Report

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music

April 2024

Student name: Agnese Valmaggia

Main subject: Jazz composition

Main subject teacher: Paul van Brugge - Friso van Wijck - S'yo Fang

Research domain: Composition - Arranging

Research coach: Hans Koolmees - Adrián Crespo Barba

Title of the research: Composing with samples

Artistic Research Question: How can I enhance my compositional practice by creating a hybrid performance of music and tapes of pre-recorded acoustic sounds?

Keywords: Samples, interaction, tapes, audio/visual, MIDI mapping, electronics, ultrascore.

Acknowledgements

I need to thank my (many!) teachers: Paul van Brugge, Friso van Wijck, S'yo Fang and René Uijlenhoet for their always open and never judging support, for their knowledge, for their love for music.

I also need to thank my (multiple!) coaches: Hans Koolmees and Adrián Crespo Barba for their valuable comments, sometimes dangerous for my self-esteem, but always to the point and actually extremely useful.

Thanks to the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds I was able to purchase expensive equipment relevant for this research.

A last 'thank you' goes to the people who contributed to this research in several ways: with their time and feedback, with their technical support 24/7, with participating in my (quite useless, in the end) survey, with taking me to the cinema to remain sane, with just showing some interest in what I (try to) do.

Plagiarism declaration

Date: April 7th, 2024

Place: Rotterdam

I Agnese Valmaggia hereby declare that this AR Report is my own work.

I further declare that:

1. I have read the Codarts plagiarism policy, which states that Codarts expects all students to write authentic and original assignments and that no form of plagiarism is acceptable.
2. I know that plagiarism means taking and using the ideas, writings, works or inventions of another as if they were one's own. I know that plagiarism not only includes verbatim copying, but also the extensive use of another person's ideas without proper acknowledgement (which includes the proper use of quotation marks). I know that plagiarism covers this sort of use of material found in textual sources and from the Internet.
3. I understand that my research must be accurately referenced. I have followed the rules and conventions concerning referencing, citation and the use of quotations as set out in the Manual AR report & Examinations.

Table of contents

1 Abstract	5
2 Introduction	5
2.1 Motivation and goal	5
2.2 Contextualization	6
2.3 Research question	7
2.4 Specific audiences and readers addressed	7
3 Research Process	8
3.1 First research cycle	8
3.1.1 Overview of first research cycle	8
3.1.2 Reference recording	8
3.1.3 Feedback and reflection	9
3.1.4 Data collection & data analysis: my findings	9
3.1.4.1 Historical background	9
3.1.4.2 JacobTV	11
3.1.4.3 Mountain top analysis	12
3.1.4.3.1 Tape	12
3.1.4.3.2 Use of the MIDI keyboard to launch the samples	17
3.1.4.3.3 Form	17
3.1.4.3.4 Repetition	18
3.1.4.3.5 Orchestration	18
3.1.4.4 Simone Sims Longo	22
3.1.4.5 Experiments	23
3.1.4.5.1 The Pasta Tape - soundscape	23
3.1.4.5.2 The Pasta Tape - loops	24
3.1.4.5.3 Compromising - time stretch	24
3.1.5 Interventions / practical application	24
3.1.5.1 JacobTV - manipulated samples	24
3.1.5.2 Simone Sims Longo - Max patches	26
3.1.5.2.1 API	27
3.1.5.2.2 Separated	28
3.1.5.2.3 Together	29
3.1.5.3 My practical applications	29
3.1.6 Outcomes	31
3.1.7 Feedback, reflection and conclusion	32
3.2 Second Research Cycle	34
3.2.1 Overview of second research cycle	34
3.2.2 Reference recording	34
3.2.3 Feedback and reflection	34
3.2.4 Data collection & data analysis: my findings	34
3.2.4.1 Chassol's Indiamore	34
	2

3.2.4.1.1 Overview	35
3.2.4.1.2 Repetition and groove	35
3.2.4.2 Experiments	36
3.2.4.2.1 Frut de mar - no tempo	36
3.2.4.2.2 Spiaggia 2 - hidden pulse	36
3.2.4.2.3 Spiaggia 3 - waves	38
3.2.4.3. Data analysis	39
3.2.5 Intervention	40
3.2.5.1 The samples	40
3.2.5.2 The process	40
3.2.5.3 The form: isorhythm	41
3.2.6 Outcomes	42
3.2.7 Feedback, reflection and conclusion	42
3.3 Third Research Cycle	44
3.3.2 Reference recording	44
3.3.3 Feedback and reflection	44
3.3.4 Data collection & data analysis: my findings	45
3.3.4.1 Sensory Percussion and Roland multipad	45
3.3.4.2 Experiments	45
3.3.4.3 The choice of the samples	46
3.3.4.4 Vaague	47
3.3.5 Intervention	48
3.3.5.1 Part 1	48
3.3.5.2 Part 2	49
3.3.5.3 Outro - the lies	50
3.3.6 Outcomes	50
3.3.7 Feedback, reflection and conclusion	50
4 Research findings and outcomes	52
4.1 Documentation and explanation of the research outcomes	52
4.1.1 Outcome No. 1 - Compromising for what?	52
4.1.2 Outcome No. 2 - Inverno	52
4.1.3 Outcome No. 3 - I never lie	53
4.2 Self-assessment of the research outcomes and expert feedback	53
4.3 Conclusion	55
5 Reference list	56
6 Network	57
7 Appendices	58
Appendix 1: List of all self-produced AV media included in report	58
Appendix 2: Critical media review	59
Appendix 3: Full feedback on reference recordings	60
Appendix 4: Transcription of interviews	62
1. Interview with Paul van Brugge, main subject teacher	62
2. Interview with Simone Bottasso, musician	65

3. Interview with JacobTV, composer	66
4. Interview with Simone Sims Longo, musician	67
5. Interview with Antoine Pierre “Vaague”	72
Appendix 5: Transcriptions, (annotated) scores, analyses	76

1 Abstract

In this research I investigated the process of composing music starting from pre-recorded samples as a source of inspiration. I explored different approaches and consulted several experts, among which JacobTV, Vaague and Chassol.

The whole work can be divided into three steps:

- In the first cycle I started trying to translate into pitches the samples I had: the result is a very rhythmic musical idea, quite connected and 'locked' with the sample but lacking some freedom.
- In the second cycle I explored the completely opposite direction: I used the pre-recorded audio material in the background of the piece, creating a sort of soundscape, a 'cloud of sounds', less central for the audience but still essential in the composition process. I also experimented with 'floating pulse' and isorhythm technique.
- In the last cycle I tried to blend the two previous approaches, searching for a balance in between the two.

In general, apart from the artistic exploration and outcomes, I also experimented a lot with technical tools and programming techniques I didn't know or didn't have before, like Max patches, Ableton midi mapping, drums triggers, multipad.

I came up with three different outcomes, each one focused on one of the three main approaches (rhythmical, 'floating' and a mix of the two), involving different kinds of samples and different line-ups (from the drums solo to the quintet). In addition to that, a lot of small experiments have been carried out.

2 Introduction

2.1 Motivation and goal

I sometimes have the feeling, when I listen to live music, that I miss a sort of message, that I cannot fully understand what the player is telling me. Of course music doesn't have to always say something, but I think it is a very powerful opportunity to connect with people and to share beauty. I would like to use my music to express something - an idea, a story - and to reach the listeners with something a little more concrete than just "the beauty of music". In order to do so, I decided to use samples of speaking voices, with a clear meaning, as a starting point for my composing process.

In the next five years I would like to improve this composing approach and to be able to use any kind of everyday sounds in my music, not only speaking voices. I want to develop this way of creating music in order to make it an extra tool for me as a musician and composer, like an extra instrument I can write for and play with.

The goal of my research is to investigate the possibilities of composing music based on pre-existing material, and to use this music to connect with my audience and share an idea or a specific mood. For pre-existing material I mean an external element that I make use of when I write music. I find this process

of composing very interesting and functional: when I take an external element and I force myself to use it in my composition process, I tend to find solutions and directions for my music that otherwise I wouldn't have reached. So I put a limit in order to find more freedom. Without that limit I would probably tend to write in the same way, the way I'm comfortable with.

In my research, I chose to use, as pre-existing material, pre-recorded sounds taken from the world around us (not electronically processed sounds). I took this decision because the sounds that we have around us have a particular power on our emotional perceptions (we tend to like a certain sound if that sound reminds us of a pleasant situation, place, or period of our lives) so I think they can be a very powerful tool to connect with the listeners.

2.2 Contextualization

There is plenty of music nowadays that makes use of samples and pre-recorded tracks of everyday sounds, both in live situations and in albums. But almost none of that was composed using the samples and taking inspiration from them. Usually they are just added to the track later, like an effect, or they play a rhythmical role like a weird percussion. Examples of this, also among very famous tunes, can be found in various genres: Pink Floyd's *Money* starts with percussive sounds of coins; Daft Punk's *Giorgio by Moroder* is all based on an interview of Giorgio Moroder himself; the whole album *Earthphonia* by Max Casacci is based on field recordings of natural elements; and in general the whole hip-hop scene can be taken into account for its use of pre-recorded rhythmic loops and beats.

On the other hand, quite some music was composed to "imitate" specific sounds that we have in nature or in the world around us (especially in classical music), but then no sample was used *with* the music and there was no interaction between acoustic instruments and pre-recorded material. I think of many movie soundtracks, especially Ennio Morricone's ones: he often took inspiration from real sounds to create his melodies, for example the idea for the main theme in *The good, the bad and the ugly* came as an attempt to imitate the coyote's howling. But we can find the same approach also with earlier composers, for example in Dvorak's 9th symphony the horns play a line that represents and imitates the boat arriving in America.

I find it interesting to research in between these two situations: to use samples as a starting point inspiration-wise to actually write the music, and to make them interact with the players like an extra instrument in my line-up.

There are a few interesting artists who compose in this way, but I feel there is big room for experimentation and development, also given the technological improvement we can have nowadays with our equipment. Moreover, I think that each of these artists has a very personal and original approach to this aspect of composing, and there's not (yet) a very clear and common way to face it; this makes things even more interesting. These artists are: Christophe Chassol, French piano player and composer who uses a specific technique that he calls "ultrascore" to harmonize sounds and voices from all over the world (*Big Sun* and *Indiamore* are my favorite works of him) and the Dutch JacobTV, who is quite renown for his works with tape. Also Steve Reich wrote some very interesting pieces with samples (like *Different trains*) and can be considered an example in this topic. "Tin men and the telephone" is a good reference too, for his approach to extemporary composing in a live setting. Last, I recently discovered a good Italian drummer called Davide Compagnoni alias "Khompa", who built a solo performance using special triggers on his drum set, that allow him to control a lot of other parameters in the performance such as video,

lights and samples as well. Even if I'm not working on a solo setting, I find his work very interesting because it is very related to my instrument and to the possibilities of it.

2.3 Research question

How can I enhance my compositional practice by creating a hybrid performance of music and tapes of pre-recorded acoustic sounds?

2.4 Specific audiences and readers addressed

I think the outcome of this research can be fascinating for an open and curious audience, who's not afraid of new perspectives in music.

The more technical aspects of the research, instead, can be interesting material for other musicians and composers from the jazz and contemporary classical music scene, particularly those who work with programming electronic devices in order to blend together different forms of art.

3 Research Process

3.1 First research cycle

3.1.1 Overview of first research cycle

In the first cycle of my research I worked in different directions: I collected information through interviews with composers and musicians from my network: my teacher Paul van Brugge, musicians Simone Bottasso and Simone Sims Longo and composer JacobTV. I also analyzed the score of a piece by JacobTV titled *Mountain Top*. The practical analysis of the composition was very interesting and relevant for my research, and brought me to develop a few experiments: very short fragments of music in which I tried to apply the composition techniques I found out with the analysis.

At the same time I carried on some other experiments with the software Max, with the goal of building a Max patch that could allow me to launch and control not only audio samples but also video fragments through my MIDI controller. This was not a central point in my research in the beginning, but the interviews I had (especially the one with Simone Sims Longo) and the references I discovered during the process made me reconsider the aspect of the visual in my performance, so in the end this part became quite substantial.

Last part of my first cycle was focused on the intervention: I tried to apply both the composition techniques taken from JacobTV's analysis and the work with visuals through the Max patches. Outcome is a composition that can still be improved but that shows and uses the elements I worked on and found out during the cycle.

3.1.2 Reference recording

[01 Reference Recording 01 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Benigni - music for speeches\)](#)

Benigni - music for speeches - Agnese Valmaggia

Line up: Jelle Willems (keyboard), César Puente (double bass), Agnese Valmaggia (drums), Martín Díaz (alto sax), Martí Mitjavila (bass clarinet), Álvaro Rey (trumpet), Pablo Castillo (trumpet), Willy Becuwe (trombone).

Recorded on June 14th, 2022.

Length: ~4'

My reference recording for this first cycle is one piece from my final exam last June, for octet + vocal samples. I chose this recording because it is based on pre-recorded material and it already shows a little development in my composing approach for such a topic, compared to the first piece I wrote in this way ([Mujica music for speeches](#)).

The sample is taken from a Benigni's monologue and, since he talks pretty fast, I had to change my way of writing melodies over the voice, in order to have more freedom and nicer melodies. I tried to explore different ways to use the voice and different approaches to the interaction between voice and music. For

example, the melodies are not the exact translation in pitches of Benigni's voice but they are more an interpretation of it. Of course my composing process always started with a translation to pitches but then it developed further. I also decided to use the voice over long notes at some point: words and music are not strictly together in rhythm and pitches but they work together to deliver a message.

3.1.3 Feedback and reflection

I decided to ask different people for feedback; since I'm particularly interested in the audience's point of view, I also included non-musicians to the list of people to question, and I created a survey for them. These are friends, people who saw the performance in a live situation or my family.

I shared with them my reference recording and I asked a few questions about their experience as listeners in relation to the presence of the samples with the music and the visuals.

The main result I got is that, when dealing with samples, a certain sound can be extremely powerful for someone in particular, depending on what that specific sound reminds them, and can be absolutely meaningless for someone else. It has to do with memory and feelings, not only sounds.

On the other hand, I knew that the presence of a video can help the audience to understand better what the music is about, what the message is and can help music and samples to glue together, so I didn't exclude the possibility of having some video material related to the pre-recorded sounds I used. I wanted to use these questions also to understand how important this aspect can be, in order to plan some time to investigate it, if necessary. I also knew that almost all the references I had consisted of performances with video material, so this is an aspect I definitely had to keep in mind too.

In the end, despite the amount of information I got from this survey, I didn't focus on it too much, because I deemed it not so relevant, and I preferred to spend more time and attention on the interviews with experts and other types of analysis and experiments.

See appendix 3 for more details about this and the complete survey I used.

3.1.4 Data collection & data analysis: my findings

3.1.4.1 Historical background

Looking at what has been done on this topic in the past, I would probably start mentioning Programmatic Music as a starting point for classical composers to try to imitate certain sounds with their music and musically render an extramusical narrative¹. There are many examples of this, such as Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* in the Baroque era (1718-1820) and Beethoven's *Symphony No. 6* (1808) in the early romantic period.

In the 20th century, an interesting imitation approach was also used by Duke Ellington, when the so-called "jungle style" was becoming very popular among jazz orchestras. Ellington's horn players (especially trumpeters) started using mutes in a very creative and innovative way and the timbre of the whole

¹ Wikipedia, [Program Music](#), accessed April 19, 2023

orchestra was getting closer and closer to the exotic sound of African music and culture. I find it interesting because the imitation is not in the melodies or harmony, but in the sound itself, that's also an important part of composition.

A little later in time, the movement of Concrete Music (~1950s) started including tapes both in the composition process and in the performance practice: it was the first time that samples were considered and used as music material. Related to this movement, I can mention a very interesting work by Walter Ruttmann, commissioned in 1928 by the Berlin Radio Hour, which can be considered the first concrete piece. Walter Ruttmann was actually a film-maker, and was asked to create a radio piece that could be “an acoustic picture of a Berlin weekend urban landscape”². The [piece](#)³, titled *Weekend*, is built like an “audio movie”, in which we go from one scene to the next just following the sounds: there's no tape manipulation yet, but we can find a clear narrative idea behind the choice and the order of the samples. We also have a fragment of his notation for a speech sequence, that shows the way he structured the piece on the basis of musical points of departures such as pitch and rhythm:



Pic 1: first notation for speech sequence.⁴

More or less in the same period, in France, we find another interesting composer for his studies on birds songs: Olivier Messiaen. In the 1950s he presented several works based on specific bird songs: he was indeed also an ornithologist and knew all the characteristics of the different birds and their way of singing, and the music he wrote in these years was heavily influenced and inspired by this. Samples were not used in this context but I found interesting the ‘imitation approach’, key element for his composing process.

Coming towards more modern music, the examples and references increase and diversify even more: on one hand, I would like to mention the use of pre-recorded material in hip-hop and rap music (1970s on): the DJs’ scratching techniques, sampled beats and bass lines and even the rhythmic beatboxing are all elements that I think can be considered part of the development of the use of samples in compositions due to their strong connection between the final product (the song) and the starting point (the tape).

On the other hand, in classical music we still find the imitation approach, especially with the development of film music (in which we can find a correlation with programmatic music). I’d like to mention Ennio Morricone and some of his works in which we can find a very clear relation between the composer’s choices (in terms of instrumentation, timbre, melodies) and specific sounds related to the narration or the atmosphere of the movie. For example in *The good, the bad and the ugly* (1966) the main motif recalls the howl of a coyote, and it’s nicely developed with a call-and-response succession.

² [Walter Ruttmann. Weekend](#), accessed April 19, 2023

³ Walter Ruttmann, [Weekend](#), published on October 18, 2021

⁴ Medien Kunst Netz, [Weekend](#), last modified April 19, 2023

In the same period another composer worked in an interesting way on the different combinations between tape and instruments: Luciano Berio. Some of his works, in fact, combine acoustic instruments and pre-recorded tape and for the first time the 'concrete music approach' (use of tapes) and the 'classical music approach' (imitation through acoustic instruments) coexist in the same piece.

In 1988 American composer Steve Reich wrote *Different trains*, a 'novel experiment' which uses recorded speeches as a source for melodies.⁵ This is one of the examples that comes closest to what I'm researching: the strings lines clearly come from the speaking voices of the tape, and, in addition to that, other sounds can be heard such as train whistles and sirens.

A very similar approach has been used by the Dutch composer JacobTV for his so-called "boombox works" (late 1990s on) and by Christophe Chassol. The latter created a composing technique called "ultrascore": he takes recordings of everyday sounds from different places in the world and reharmonises them. Among his works, *Indiamore* (2013), based on sounds from India, and *Big Sun* (2015), based on sounds from Antilles, are to me the most interesting and inspiring. His performances are also relevant for my research because of the use of video material: it's not only about sounds anymore, but the listener is brought into a complete journey made of images, music, words, cultures, colors.

In the last two decades, thanks to technology developments, the examples of samples in music are even more and broader. I'd like to mention only three projects that are to me the most significative: the American-Dutch duo "The Books" (2000-2012), which made of the use of samples the main ingredient for all their music; the Dutch band "Tin Men And The Telephone" (2010s on), whose repertoire includes many pieces based on speaking voice recordings, especially the 'automatic' ones (from electronic devices like a navigator, or pre-recorded telephonic answers). This band is also very interesting for the way they organize their performance, using technology to control different aspects of it with their playing (the samples, the lights, the visuals). Last recent example, more related to electronic music, is Max Casacci's *Earthphonia* (2020): in this album field recordings from natural events (volcanos, water, mountains) are mixed with electronic sounds in a very tasty and musical way.

3.1.4.2 JacobTV

Jacob ter Veldhuis, aka JacobTV (1951-), is a renowned Dutch composer, whose provocative and explosive works made him an 'outlaw' in new music.⁶ He received the Composition Prize of the Netherlands in 1980 and became a full time composer, who soon made a name for himself with melodious compositions, straight from the heart and with great effect. He defines himself an 'avant pop' composer and his so-called 'boombox repertoire', for live instruments and a groovy soundtrack based on speech melody, became internationally popular.⁷ In 1999 he composed *Grab it!*⁸, for tenor sax and boombox, starting point for his characteristic works with samples. He says: "the more emotional the spoken language, the more it starts to 'sing and become music'. In this context, it is difficult to draw a line between speaking and singing. In *Grab It!* I enter this no man's land. I used audio samples from an American TV documentary about youth criminality, which features offenders serving a life sentence. The vital and coarse shouting of the prisoners formed a perfect unity with the unpolished sound of the tenor

⁵ Wikipedia, [Different trains](#), accessed April 20, 2023

⁶ JacobTV.net, [Biography](#), last modified April 20, 2023

⁷ JacobTV.net, [Biography](#)

⁸ JacobTV, [Grab it!](#), accessed April 8, 2024

saxophone.”⁹ Among his most famous works we find also *Paradiso, oratorio*, based on lyrics by Dante Alighieri’s *Divina Commedia* and the most recent *The News, a reality opera*, in which samples taken from different TV shows and news are the main ingredient for the whole musical journey.

Especially regarding his boombox repertoire I contacted him with a few questions that were particularly interesting for my research, both about his approach in composing music with samples and about one specific piece of him that I decided to analyze, which is called *Mountain top* (see 3.1.4.3 for detailed analysis, and see appendix 4 for the whole interview). Even if I was expecting a little more detailed answers, I can say that I found a few interesting aspects that, together with the analysis of his piece, can give me a clearer picture of his approach and way of working. Key part in his composing process is the sample, which is often manipulated in different ways (chopped, looped, time stretched...). All the rest is “just” a natural consequence of that. I found his phrase “I do not compose, I ‘find’” especially interesting. In fact, it is very visible that all the choices he makes in the process of composing are strictly related to the sample and to its meaning. Also the choice of the line up and the decisions related to all the visual aspects are just a consequence of what the sample is about. I find this very interesting and inspiring.

3.1.4.3 *Mountain top* analysis

I decided to analyze this specific piece by JacobTV because it has an interesting use of the tape and, even if the line up he used (mixed choir and five percussion players) is not so close to what I usually write for, it is still very relevant for my research, for the way it is “shaped” on the tape. The piece can be found here: [Mountain Top – Jacob TV](#)¹⁰

Mountain top is based on a recording of the last speech Martin Luther King gave, the night before he died. It is a very powerful and profound speech, with an important message. Since the original speech is almost 50 minutes long, the composer made a selection of the fragments to use, I assume based on their meaning (to keep it understandable) and also on their musicality. Listening to the original version of the speech, I can recognise some fragments that JacobTV selected and used in a very musical way, so much that I thought that they had been manipulated by the composer, but the truth is that they were already that way. An ‘in-depth’ explanation of this can be found in the ‘3.1.4.3.1 Tape’ section of my analysis, but I just want to underline that the original material, the starting point for the composition, was already very rich and musically powerful.

For my analysis, I started with focusing on a few different aspects that are particularly relevant for my research: the use of the tape, the form of the piece, the use of repetition and orchestration.

3.1.4.3.1 Tape

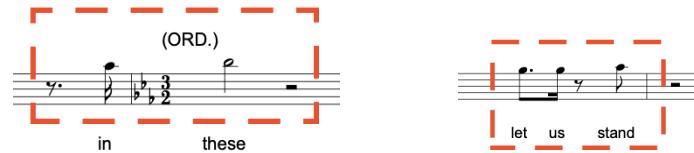
JacobTV worked a lot on the tape, cutting it, looping it and manipulating it. I notated in the score the different techniques I could identified, dividing them in this way:

- **RED** time stretching of the tape, on specific single words or very short phrases;
- **BLUE** very short fragments looped fast and very rhythmically (this is very typical of JacobTV, he used it a lot in other pieces as well, especially in *Grab it!*) or short phrases repeated to create a sort of groove;
- **YELLOW** special effects on the tape (reverb, delay, distortion or others);

⁹ JacobTV.net, [JacobTV - a portrait](#), accessed April 20, 2023

¹⁰ JacobTV, [Mountain Top](#), accessed April 20, 2023

TIME STRETCHING: when I first started analyzing this piece I thought many fragments had been time stretched. However, when I listened to the original speech by Martin Luther King, I noticed that many words and phrases had already been pronounced that way by him. Here are a couple of examples: in bar 149 the voice says “in these [powerful days]” very slowly. The word “these” is really long and almost sung, with a long s in the end; in bar 252 and 257 the voice says “let us stand” but again the words are spelled out in an extremely clear way, with a lot of space, that I thought was not natural.

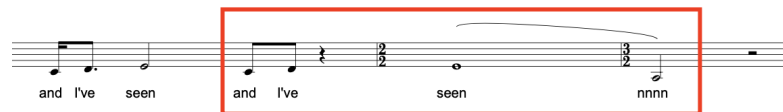


Pic 2: false time stretching excerpts

I think because Martin Luther King was a great communicator and speaker he was used to emphasizing certain words, slowing down or using dynamics a lot. I think this makes this speech a very interesting material for the composer to work with, but then the main focus of the composer was not on manipulating everything, but on choosing what to use and how (again, I think of his reply “I don’t compose, I ‘find’”). There are other fragments that sound like if they were time stretched or somehow modified but they are not, and these are:

- “mine eyes...”: very slow, bar 24;
- “we’ll get to the promised land”: very rhythmical, bar 39 on;
- “it’s non violence or non existence”: very rhythmical, bar 312 on

The only short fragment he really stretched is in the beginning (bar 15 on) where the part “and I’ve seen” is repeated twice, first time ‘natural’ and second time stretched. This happens again from bar 33 on:



Pic 3: real time stretching excerpt

I think it’s interesting to see that the time stretching works well only with very specific fragments (not super rhythmical and with a clear pitch) and it makes sense if it is a repetition of the same fragment, first time “normal” and second time stretched.

LOOPS/GROOVE: I made a distinction here, between the small phrases repeated in order to create a groove but quite naturally (f.i. “we’ll get to the promised land” in bar 39):

39

K
get to the pro- mised land will get will get to the pro- mised will get to the pro- mised land I

S
get to the pro- mised land will get WOW! will get to the pro- mised WOW! will get to the pro- mised land

A
get to the pro- mised land will get WOW! will get to the pro- mised WOW! will get to the pro- mised land

T
get to the pro- mised land will get WOW! will get to the pro- mised WOW! will get to the pro- mised land

B
get to the pro- mised land will get WOW! will get to the pro- mised WOW! will get to the pro- mised land

M1
crash

M2
crash

TM

C

GC

Pic 4: long loop

and the loops of very short fragments of words (f. i. “like any” in bar 109) where the speaking voice becomes really like a percussion instrument almost:

like a- ny like a- ny like a- ny like a- ny like

Pic 5: short loop

This second approach is very typical of JacobTV, many of his works with tape have this almost neurotic and nervous use of the sample, that actually gives a nice percussive color.

Another interesting thing I noticed about these loops is that when he uses the “percussive approach”, that also affects the parts of the rest of the players, so also the choir sings a very rhythmical and percussive pattern. Again, the tape is the starting point and central idea from which all the other parts are developed, for the whole piece. An example here:

280

K tal- kin' a- tal- kin' a- tal- kin' a- tal- kin' a- tal- kin' a- bout war and peace

S ta

A tutti tal- kin' tal- kin' tal- kin' tal- kin' a- bout war and peace

T tutti tal- kin' tal- kin' tal- kin' tal- kin' tal- kin' a- bout war and peace

B tutti tal- kin' tal- kin' tal- kin' tal- kin' tal- kin' a- bout war and peace

M1

M2

Pic 6: loop + groove

A last interesting use of the looped tape can be found from bar 266 on, where the short fragment “survival” is repeated every two bars creating a sort of groove on which all the other parts are developed:

266

K sur- vi- vall

S vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall

A vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall

T sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall

B vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall

V sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall

M1 sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall

M2 sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall

TM sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall

GC sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall sur- vi- vall

bit deeper on this topic in the 'orchestration' section, since this is not about manipulating the tape anymore.

3.1.4.3.2 Use of the MIDI keyboard to launch the samples

After talking to JacobTV and analyzing the live video recording, it can be assumed that the midi-keyboard player follows the part and launches the tape in specific spots of the piece, although there is not a specific notation for this in the score.

In bar 189 the tape starts exactly one bar in advance compared to what's in the score, then the speaking voice stays "wrong" (one bar shifted) for several bars. It goes back to the right place only in bar 202 (but there are no rehearsal marks in this spot). This could mean two things: either those 12 bars together form one fragment, and the person launching the samples through the midi keyboard had to wait for the end of it before launching the next fragment in the right spot (and in this case I can guess 12 bars is the average number of bars per fragment), or the person launching the tape was lost for about 10 bars before noticing the mistake and go back on track. I think this is quite a safe way of building a tune like this, because in between the different fragments there are always some bars of rest (in which the choir and the musicians sing/play without tape) that can be used to check and keep under control the synchronization. In this sense, the shorter the fragments, the safer the performance, especially playing without click. This makes me think the second option is the most likely.

3.1.4.3.3 Form

The whole piece is pretty long (~17 minutes) and there's not a clear structure or very recognisable repeated sections, even if there's a clear and well constructed development both in content and in music. In the score there are rehearsal marks, but I tried to write down my own "structure" just to have some reference points and not get lost in it. Since the piece is quite long I decided to write down a more general structure, without going into too much detail. I divided the whole composition into 5 sections:

1. Intro, from bar 1 to 83;
2. 2nd section, from bar 84 to 148
3. 3rd section from bar 149 to 226
4. 4th section from bar 227 to 304
5. Outro, from bar 305 till the end, bar 401.

I divided it like that based on the intensity of the piece. I noticed that in each section the composer introduces a new fragment of the speech, and that element is developed in different ways, so usually it is first presented without any manipulation and mainly over long notes, then the groove comes, or specific rhythmic ideas, the music is developed around those ideas and we get to a sort of climax, that brings to the introduction of a new element and the start of a new section. First and last sections are a bit longer because they also have the function to start and end the piece of course. Changes between sections can also be characterized by modulations or drastic changes in tempo (even if the whole piece is full of drastic changes in tempo, so this doesn't really indicate much).

I notated these sections in the score, which can be found in appendix 5. I also wrote down the timeline at the rehearsal marks, related to the [video recording](#),¹¹ to have some references and not get lost.

¹¹ JacobTV, [Mountain Top](#)

3.1.4.3.4 Repetition

A key element in the whole composition is the use of repetition. JacobTV uses it a lot when dealing with the tape, but also, as a consequence, when writing for the players and the singers. An interesting thing is that when an element is manipulated or used to create a specific effect or a rhythmic pattern/groove, the element is always first presented “natural”, so without any modification, and the repetition is used to show the development of it and its changes.

It is also interesting to notice that the longer the repeated fragments, the fewer repetitions, and vice versa. So when he wants to have a very rhythmic and repetitive pattern, he chooses a very short fragment but repeated many times (and the same fragment might not even make sense if taken alone):



Pic 10: repetition fragment

3.1.4.3.5 Orchestration

The piece is written for a mixed choir, five percussion players and tape. The composer said it was due to artistic reasons: for sharing the message in a clear way he needed a choir but he didn't want a whole orchestra, which would have sounded too bombastic and wouldn't have fit the mystical character of the speech.

About orchestration, one important thing that I noticed is that JacobTV rarely uses the melody of the speaking voice for the other instruments or choir voices, but mainly the choir interacts with the sample, filling the gaps, creating a nice and solid base for the tape to lay on. I find this interesting because it's quite different from what I did so far. The “melody” taken from the speaking voice is usually just a starting point from which the singers/players lines are then developed.

Sometimes some lines of the choir are together with the voice but with a slightly different rhythm, a bit more musical and less mechanical. This creates a nice effect, almost like a natural delay, especially when these lines are sung by male voices. A couple of examples here:

The image displays two musical score excerpts, labeled (118) and (162), illustrating a 'natural delay' effect. In both examples, the choir parts (K, S, S, A, T, B) and the voice part (K) are shown. The score is written in 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: 'but I'm not con- cerned a- bout that now' and 'and I've looked o- ver! and I've looked o- ver'. The 'natural delay' is achieved by having the choir parts enter slightly later than the voice part, creating a staggered effect. The score includes dynamic markings such as *ff* (fortissimo) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The first example (118) shows the choir parts entering with a delay, while the second example (162) shows the voice part entering with a delay. The score is written for a choir with parts K, S, S, A, T, B and a voice part K. The lyrics are: 'but I'm not con- cerned a- bout that now' and 'and I've looked o- ver! and I've looked o- ver'. The 'natural delay' is achieved by having the choir parts enter slightly later than the voice part, creating a staggered effect. The score includes dynamic markings such as *ff* (fortissimo) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The first example (118) shows the choir parts entering with a delay, while the second example (162) shows the voice part entering with a delay.

Pic 11 and 12: "natural delay"

So synchronization is not the main goal for the composer, but the use of the tape in a creative way. However, there are a few spots in which he wrote almost unisono of choir, percussions and speaking voice, with exactly same rhythm and pitches:

39

K
S
A
T
B
M1
M2
TM
C
GC

get to the pro- mised land will get will get to the pro- mised will get to the pro- mised land I

get to the pro- mised land will get WOW! will get to the pro- mised WOW! will get to the pro- mised land

get to the pro- mised land will get WOW! will get to the pro- mised WOW! will get to the pro- mised land

get to the pro- mised land will get WOW! will get to the pro- mised WOW! will get to the pro- mised land

get to the pro- mised land will get WOW! will get to the pro- mised WOW! will get to the pro- mised land

crash

crash

we have been forced to a point

ver we have been forced to a point

f we have been forced to a point

ver f we have been forced to a point

f we have been forced to a point

This doesn't happen very often but creates a nice groovy effect.

In the following example, instead, the line of the speaking voice is sung by only a smaller section of the choir + vibraphone, while the rest of the musicians keep quarter notes. The result is something in between the two previous cases, a bit 'unisono' and a bit 'natural delay':

Pic 13 and 14: unisono

(299)

K
tal- kin' a- bout war and peace But now no lon- ger can they just talk a- bout it But now no lon- ger can they just talk a- bout it

S
talk a- bout it now no lon- ger talk a- bout it now no lon- ger tal- kin' a- bout

A
a- bout war and peace now no lon- ger talk a- bout it But now no lon- ger can they just talk a- bout it

A
a- bout war and peace now no lon- ger talk a- bout it now no lon- ger tal- kin' a- bout

T
a- bout war and peace now no lon- ger talk a- bout it now no lon- ger tal- kin' a- bout

B
But now no lon- ger can they just talk a- bout it

B
talk a- bout it now no lon- ger talk a- bout it now no lon- ger tal- kin' a- bout

V
1 solo 3

M1

M2

Pic 15: "natural delay" + unisono

As a conclusion, I can see a very clear correlation between everything that's written for the singers and the players with the material coming from the tape, both in terms of rhythm and pitches, even if a big amount of creativity and development has been added. With this last example I want to underline also the correlation with the pitches: the main melody in G, sung by sopranos, is a nice interpretation of the speaking voice's line.

(304) **G**

tal- kin' a- bout war and peace it is no lon- ger the choice it is no lon- ger the choice

there is no

war and peace it's no lon- ger the choice it's no lon- ger the choice

tutti a- bout war and peace it's no lon- ger the choice it's no lon- ger the choice

a- bout war and peace it's no lon- ger the choice it's no lon- ger the choice

war and peace it's no lon- ger the choice it's no lon- ger the choice

war and peace it's no lon- ger the choice it's no lon- ger the choice

Pic 16: interpretation of the speaking voice

3.1.4.4 Simone Sims Longo

During Christmas I was in Italy and I had the opportunity to talk with Simone Sims Longo and to ask him specific questions about my research. Sims is an Italian musician and composer, who defines himself as a “sonic artist somewhere in between computer music, soundscape composition, electroacoustic and techno”¹². My musical background is quite different from his, I am pretty new to electronics but I felt I needed to explore this direction more, in order to work with my samples in a more conscious and creative way.

Here is a summary of the most relevant aspects of our talk, while the whole transcription can be found in the appendix.

1. **References:** Sims showed me a few artists that came to his mind when I explained to him the topic of my research. Among these, he mentioned the Italian drummer Khompa (Davide Compagnoni) who created an audio visual solo performance in which everything is triggered by his playing.
2. **Video:** At the beginning of my research I was in doubt about the addition of visuals to my work. My chat with Sims, however, made me change my mind and consider the visual element more as an artistic addition to the performance, instead of just a means to deliver subtitles. Thinking also about the freedom I'm searching for in the performance and in the interaction between music and

¹² simonesimslongo.com, [About](#), accessed April 20, 2023

samples, Sims showed me interesting ways to approach this aspect with softwares that can allow me to control the visual material the same way I control my samples.

3. **Technical aspects about the performance:** Since I had never worked with live electronics before, there were many things I needed to learn in this field. Sims explained to me a few possible options that could be useful for me to start writing music more in this direction. We talked mainly about softwares Ableton and Max, focusing on specific features like 'warp', 'follow action', midi mapping and Max patches for videos. We also focused on instrumentation: he suggested that I start using an SPD (multipad) instead of a midi controller, because that way I can hit it more fluidly with my sticks while I play, instead of using fingers on the controller.

After our meeting in December I contacted Sims again for some feedback with a Max patch I was working on in order to control video material through my MIDI controller. He was very happy to help me out and showed me and explained to me some interesting options; I'll go deeper on this in the 'interventions' section.

3.1.4.5 Experiments

During my first cycle I made a few short composing experiments aimed at better understanding the techniques and the approaches of the composers I've been focusing on. After my interview with JacobTV and the analysis of his *Mountain top*, I worked on different snippets of music and tape based on what I had found out, trying to focus every time on a different specific aspect of his composing process.

3.1.4.5.1 The *Pasta Tape* - soundscape

The first experiment I made was based on a short video recording I made of a pan of pasta being stirred and its delicious sound ([03 Audio/video material *Pasta*](#)). I decided to use this tape because I wanted to try to avoid the speaking voice sound. I know that JacobTV (and also the other artists I have as a reference) uses mainly tapes of speaking voices, but I wanted to try to apply the same approach to a different sample sound. So the starting point was quite different, but I tried to use as much as possible JacobTV's approach to the composition: I started first working on the tape, manipulating it in different ways and trying to find interesting fragments to use (I tried to remember his answer: "I don't compose, I 'find'").

I first started with an exploration of all the possible effects that I could use on the tape: time stretching (both slowing down and accelerating), loops, delay, reverb, transposition, reverse audio, and all the possible combinations of these ([04 Sample manipulation on *Pasta*](#)). I didn't use only the effects I found from the analysis of JacobTV's piece, but I tried to really dive into it and experiment with any form of manipulation I could find. This part was very interesting soundwise, but in the end I had a lot of different versions of the same sample and it was still very far away from being a composition.

What I did next, just to give it a shape, was to make a rough selection of the sounds I liked the most and that I thought could be more related to JacobTV's approach ([05 Soundscape on *Pasta*](#)), and then I added a few very simple horn lines ([06 Soundscape with horns on *Pasta*](#)). Again the line up I chose is different but the use I made of it was related to what I found in 'Mountain top': not looking for synchronization that much but more focusing on the interaction between instruments and tape. In my case the sample sounds quite percussive and it has not an easily recognizable melody, so I opted for a more 'soundscape' approach, that, in my opinion, is more connected to JacobTV's way of writing the parts "around" the tape. I also tried to avoid any development in harmony or melody, to focus more on the relation between the horns and the tape, seeing the horns as much as possible as a natural consequence of the sample.

I did this in Logic and I focused mainly on sounds, but I also made a rough score just to give an idea of what happens ([07 Soundscape with horns on Pasta - Transposed score](#)).

3.1.4.5.2 The *Pasta Tape* - loops

In this second experiment I still used the same sample as the previous experiment, but I tried to go a bit deeper in JacobTV's manipulation techniques and I especially focused on the 'loops and grooves'. I also tried to give pitch to the tape, and to use them for building the groove. For doing this I first had to "force" my sample into a tempo grid, so I decided a metronome value that I thought could more or less fit with it and I based my manipulation on that. The result ([08 Loops on Pasta](#)) is just a very short starting point but I think it's interesting for the percussive character of the sample and the use of repetition, based on what I saw in *Mountain top*. The addition of harmony was maybe not necessary but I thought it could give a clearer idea of the tempo ([09 Loops on Pasta - Score](#)).

3.1.4.5.3 *Compromising* - time stretch

To experiment with time stretching I decided to use a different sample, based on a speaking voice this time. From the analysis of *Mountain Top* I noticed that the fragment JacobTV decided to time stretch was very short, not too rhythmical and with a clear pitch, so I thought that the pasta tape was not a good choice this time. Instead, I took a piece I wrote a couple of months ago (which can be heard [here](#)), based on this [interview](#) of Eartha Kitt¹³, and I selected a couple of fragments of the speech that could have the right characteristics: the first one, "compromising for what reason", has an interesting melodic line in the word "reason", and the second one is a laugh, not exactly a long note but I thought it could be easy to time stretch because of the space in between the sounds.

The result ([10 Time stretch on Compromise](#)) doesn't really sound like the time stretch in *Mountain Top*: I noticed that I always tend to add too much harmony and groove, while JacobTV uses the time stretched fragments really as long notes. However, I found this experiment very funny and interesting and I think it added some useful ideas to my way of dealing with the speech material ([11 Time stretch on Compromise - Score](#)).

3.1.5 Interventions / practical application

For my interventions I decided to take, as a starting point, the *Compromising* piece I wrote a couple of months ago and that I already used for part of my experiments. I made this choice because I thought it was still fresh material that could be developed further taking inspiration from my data collection, especially sample-wise. In particular, I focused mainly on the information I got from my analysis of JacobTV's *Mountain Top*, from my talk with Simone Sims Longo and from my experiments.

3.1.5.1 JacobTV - manipulated samples

From my analysis of JacobTV's work I understood the importance of the starting material, the sample, and the many possibilities I can have to treat it and to manipulate it. For this reason, I tried to develop more deeply the fragments of tape I had, using the two manipulation techniques I took from JacobTV: the fast loop and the time stretch.

¹³ Christian Blackwood, [All by myself: the Eartha Kitt story](#), accessed April 20, 2023

However, I tried to push this a little further, exploring other manipulation approaches as well, like transposition, overlapping, pitch shift, distortion, and possible combinations of these, based also on the experiments I made on the 'pasta tape'.

I approached this part of the process more as a 'soundscape' material, thinking more of the sounds, the colors of the samples, instead of their meaning. Some fragments became a sort of textured, atmospheric material, in which the human voice cannot be recognised anymore. I found this interesting, especially in a situation where I can use this "ambiguous" material as a starting point and then slowly move to clearer and more recognisable vocal fragments. It gave me a wider and richer range of samples to work with. In this folder ([15 Reference Recording 02 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Compromising for what?\) - Manipulated samples](#)) I collected the results of these manipulation experiments: you can hear different versions of the same material, where sometimes the words are recognizable and sometimes they only work as a soundscape.

Another aspect I considered regarding the use of the samples was the possibility of changing parameters during the performance itself, through my midi controller. So I mapped my manipulated samples to the different pads of my controller, and then I also mapped some effects to the different knobs. I did this in Ableton, which is the software I used for the audio mapping, while the previous process of manipulation was made in Logic. Here is a screenshot of my DAW in which you can see how I organized the mapping:



Pic 17: MIDI mapping in Ableton

On the left you can see the window showing the MIDI mapping list. The notes (note A3, note A#1...) refer to the pads of my controller, which I mapped to the samples (the audio clips). On top of the list you can

see, instead, the mapping of the knobs (CC4 to CC8). To explain this, I need to show first how I organized my audio and midi tracks:



Pic 18: audio and midi tracks in Ableton

The first one is a MIDI track which I used for my Max patch (I'll talk about this later on). All the others are audio tracks which I used for my samples: from track 2 to track 8 I have the samples I mapped to my pads 1 to 7. The last pad (my MIDI controller has 8 pads) was used for the low synth drone (track 9 'A base 2chords') and also for one last sample (track 10), but they are on different tracks because I wanted to send the samples to a return (but not the drone). All the samples are placed in this way so that I can launch the first line with the first program of my MIDI controller, and the second line with the second program, and I could switch programs during the performance (in this way I can have 16 samples on 8 pads). I needed this many audio tracks because I wanted to have the possibility of overlapping the samples.

First I mapped volumes: my knob number 4 (CC4) is assigned to the volume of the drone (track 9) and my knob number 8 (CC8) controls the volume of the samples through the return track; since I wanted to control the samples only, and not the drone, I had to send the samples tracks to a return track.

Then I added two effects, one is a sort of distortion called 'wide and dirty' (I didn't use it that much in the end) and the second one is a pitch shifter. I sent my samples to these two effects as well, and I mapped my knobs number 5 and 6 to the volumes of these effects. Lastly, I mapped my knob number 7 (CC7) to the 'pitch coarse', which is the knob that controls the pitch of my samples, in the pitch shifter.

During the recording and performance, I tried to use these effects as well, really trying to treat the samples and my midi controller as extra instruments in my line up. Even if there were many other possibilities among effects, I decided to keep it quite simple, in order to not get lost during the performance and be able to actually use in a musical way the ones I had.

3.1.5.2 Simone Sims Longo - Max patches

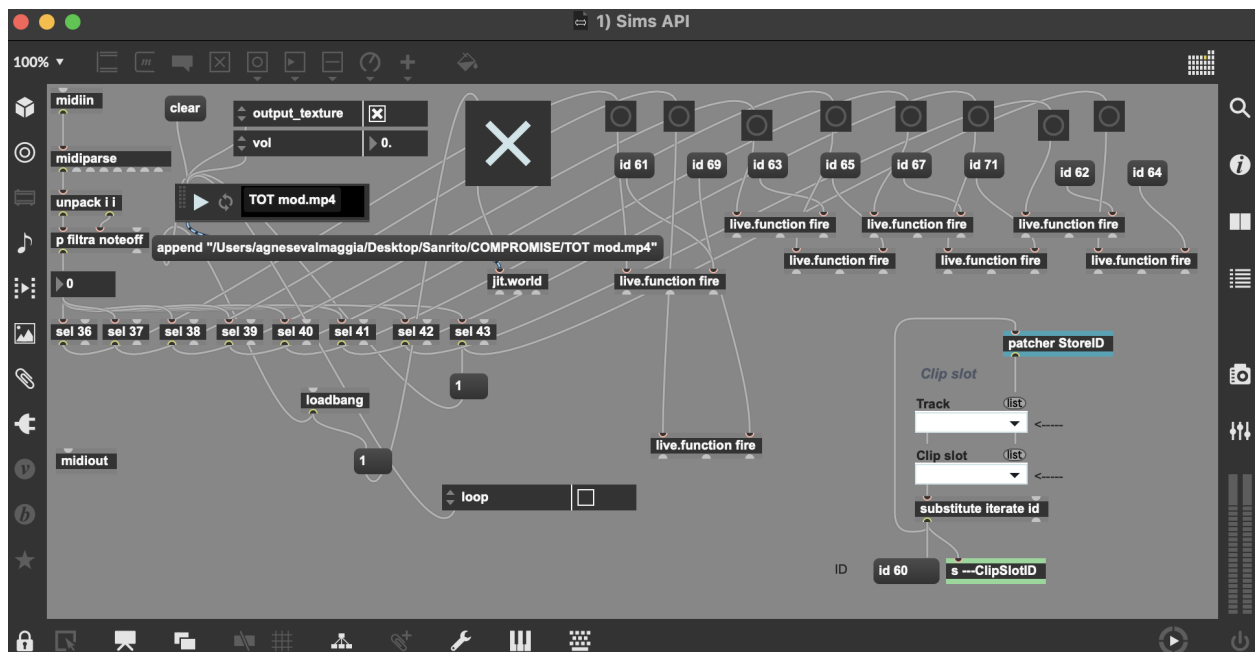
Talking with Sims a few months ago I discovered a couple of drummers who perform in a solo setting, with the addition of electronics through triggers on the drums or an SPD (multipad). I was very impressed

and fascinated by the many possibilities of programming those electronic devices to create original music: with the proper preparation many parameters of a performance can be controlled on stage, on the spot. Not only the audio samples but also video, lights, audio effects. This gives more freedom and room for interaction, as well as a little more risk.

I decided to move a bit in this direction as well, so, together with René in my composition classes, I started exploring the software Max, that could allow me to control different layers of the performance (for example, the visuals) and not only the audio samples. Because I don't have an SPD at the moment, I used my MIDI controller and I tried to map some video fragments to the pads. This took me a lot of time because, while it's very easy to map audio through Ableton, it's a bit more complicated to map video material, and it's even more complex to map a video together with its related audio. Also, I was very new to the software so many things were not clear in the beginning. For the patch I needed to launch seven audio files (audio only) and one video with its related audio. The video was a woman speaking and the audio was her voice, so synchronization was also relevant and delicate. Basically the main problem I had was that the video was in Max but the audio had to go out through Ableton, in order to reach my audio interface and from there go to the speakers.

After many attempts, many mistakes and lots of time, I managed to find a way to do this. Actually, I worked on three different Max patches that gave me the result I was looking for, two of them suggested by my teacher René and one suggested by Sims. I found three because actually there are many different ways of programming a certain event, using different tools. It's like you can take different paths to reach the same spot. I think this was a nice working method, so that I could see different options to obtain the same result, and learn more. Also, I could analyze the three patches and choose the best one, comparing pros and cons.

3.1.5.2.1 API



Pic 19: 'API' Max patch

This is the first Max patch I made with Sims' help, which uses API, a feature that allows me to control actions in Ableton from Max. I had my audio files in Ableton, but I could control them from Max, where I also had my video material, working with jit.world. The audio files are activated through ids: each clip in Ableton has a different id that I can assign to the pads on my controller. The patcher StoreID tells me which id is assigned to which clip in Ableton. Then I wrote down the ids I needed and I connected them to the pads. The last pad (midi note 43) is connected both to the video and the related audio (with the id).

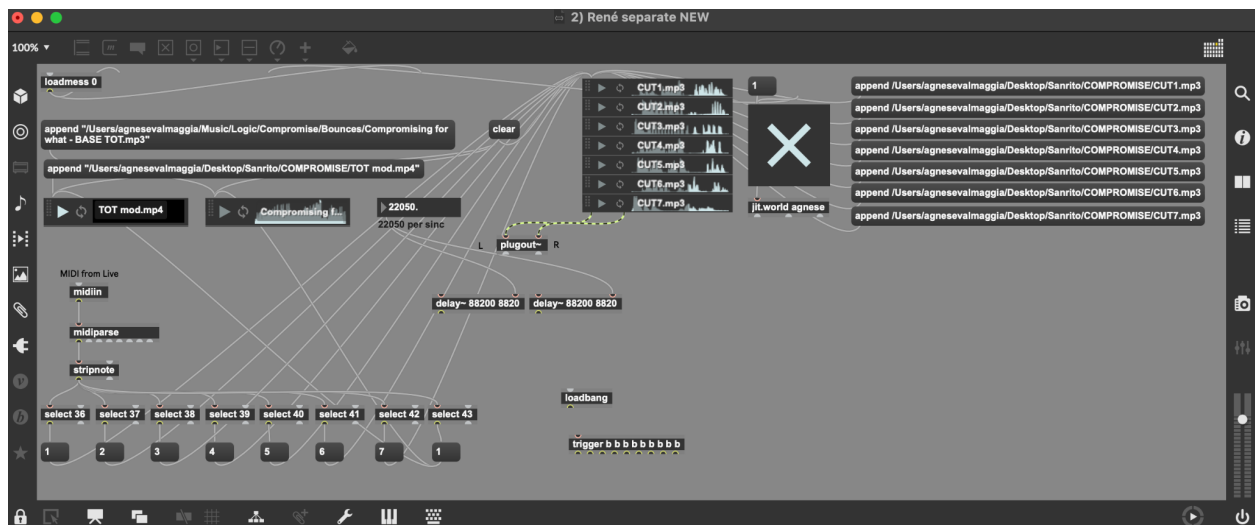
Pros:

- it works

Cons:

- there's a little delay between audio and video, I fixed it adding an opposite delay in the audio track in Ableton, trying multiple times until I found the right amount
- it's quite complicated and confusing, and also the patcher StoreID didn't work perfectly to me, but I had to try out different ids many times until I found the right ones
- it's not very light since I have half of the material in Ableton and half in Max, and both the softwares working at the same time.

3.1.5.2.2 Separated



Pic 20: 'separated' Max patch

My second attempt keeps both audio and video tracks in Max. Video works again with jit.world but for the audio we use plugout~, which sends its output to Ableton. Initially I organized my audio files in a playlist, but since I wanted to have the possibility for my samples to overlap, then I canceled it and I kept them as single files.

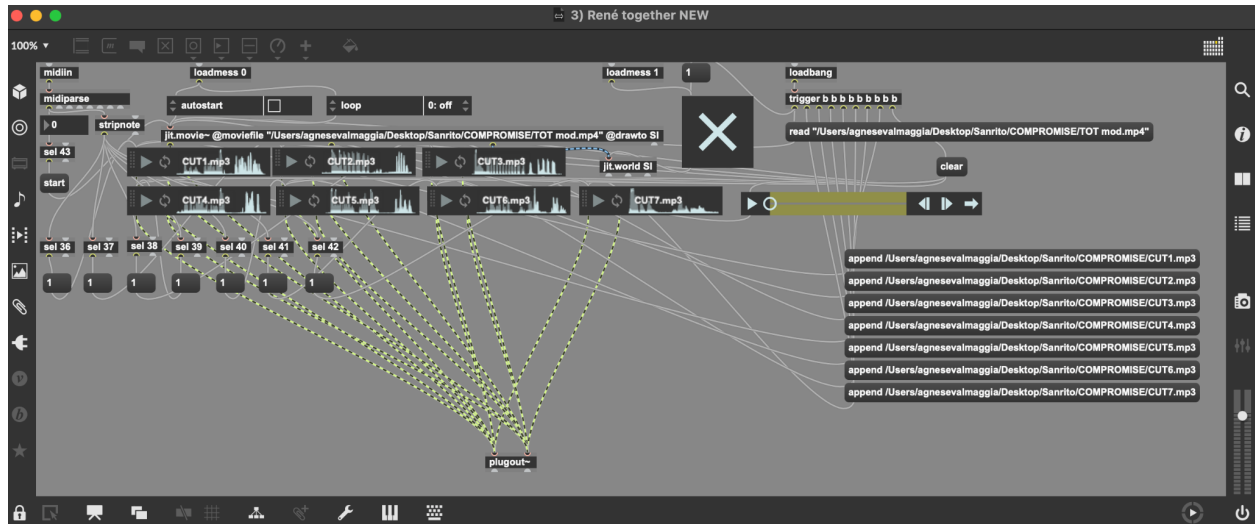
Pros:

- it works
- I have everything in Max and the Ableton project doesn't even start
- it looks lighter (with less connections and objects)

Cons:

- There's again a delay between audio and video, so I had to add a delay~ object to fix that. This works, but I had to try out multiple times before finding the right amount and - more important - every time I close the patch this amount is canceled so I have to remember to type it down when I want to use the patch.

3.1.5.2.3 Together



Pic 21: 'together' Max patch

In this case audio and video are together (one file) so I don't have to deal with delays and synchronization. The audio/video file now works with `jit.movie~`, that's connected on one side to the `plugout~` for the audio, and on the other side to the `jit.world` for the video. Audio files go directly to `plugout~` like in the previous patch (again without playlist since I want possible overlapping).

This last patch is the best one, the object `jit.movie~` was exactly what I was looking for, but I took some time to get to this solution because initially my version of Max was not updated correctly and the object `jit.movie~` was not available.

Pros:

- it works
- I have everything in Max and the Ableton project doesn't even start
- it's the lightest option
- I have no delay problems

Cons:

- none

3.1.5.3 My practical applications

I tried to use and blend this material into my *Compromise* piece. Line up is drums, trumpet, alto sax, bass clarinet and electronics, and I also tried to include video fragments controlled through Max. The piece can be divided into 5 sections:

- A:** collective improvisation, soundscape, manipulated samples;
- B:** bass clarinet solo, harmony is introduced by the trumpet with harmoniser pedal, sax plays unisono with time stretched samples;
- C:** drums solo + samples (not manipulated);
- D:** development of harmony and melody based on the samples, we follow a backing track (samples are not launched on the spot here);
- E:** drums play along with the interview + video, no manipulation and no cut.

To include the manipulation techniques, I worked on a long and slow introduction (sections A+B) in which I could focus on the sample material instead of playing drums, while the horn players joined with a collective improvisation. I structured this section really trying to use the samples as a starting point for every musical idea. Therefore, the collective improvisation is based on a few short melody lines that come from the speaking voice, even if the connection between melody and voice it's not shown yet.

COLLECTIVE IMPROVISATION USING GIVEN MATERIAL.
 HUMORISTIC. TEXTURAL. SEARCHING, MYSTERIOUS.
 COLORS
 LEAVE SPACE.

LOW SYNTH STARTS

1

2

USE EFFECTS, BREATHE/KEYS SOUNDS...

3

Pic 22: fragments for collective improvisation

The samples played in this section are the manipulated ones, in which the speaking voice is not clearly recognisable, but they work more as a soundscape, color. Also, in this part of the piece I took some freedom with the samples and I used the knobs of my controller to play with some effects in real time. An example of this can be heard at 2:09 of the recording ([12 Reference recording 02 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Compromising for what?\)](#)), where I use a pitch shifter.

A little later in the tune (around 3:25), I start launching longer fragments of manipulated samples, in which some words can be recognised. I also introduce some samples based on time stretch (around 4:00) that were supposed to be played along by the sax, but in the end that didn't really work out. These samples were manipulated in Logic, in a previous process of the preparation of the piece, and are not controlled on stage anymore (to allow the sax to play with them). This is an example of how I notated it:

♩ = 133

1

WHEN YOU HEAR A SAMPLE,
TRY TO PLAY WITH IT

FOR WHAT REA - SON FOR WHAT REA - SON FOR WHAT REA - SON FOR WHAT

4

REA - SON COM - PRO - MISE COM - PRO - MISE FOR WHAT REA - A - SON

Pic 23: notation for speech material

The video material, instead, comes only at the end of the piece. I thought it was a nice development to start from very manipulated samples, slowly introduce clearer ones and end with the complete interview together with the video. To do so, I chose to use the 'together' Max patch, that was in my opinion the best one I had.

3.1.6 Outcomes

Two different recordings of the outcome are available, one is only audio while the other has video as well.

1. *Compromising for what?:* for trumpet, alto sax, bass clarinet, drums and electronics (samples and visuals).
[12 Reference Recording 02 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Compromising for what?\):](#) performed and recorded live on April 5th, during the semifinals for the Erasmus Jazz Prize in Codarts.
 Line up: Antonio Moreno (tp), Martín Díaz (sax), Martí Mitjavila (bass clarinet), Agnese Valmaggia (dr and electronics)
 Length: ~14'
 In the score ([14 Reference Recording 02 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Compromising for what?\) - Transposed score](#)), I notated in red a few timeline indications, related to the recording, to not get lost. However, some sections blend one into another and make it difficult to clearly understand what's happening. Especially the beginning (sections A and B) turned out quite different from what I wrote, partially because of the improvisation and interaction character of it, and partially because we messed it up a little, too.
2. *Compromising for what?:* for trumpet, tenor sax, trombone, flute, drums and electronics (samples and visuals)
[13 Reference Recording 02 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Compromising for what?\) - video:](#) performed on February 11th in Cuneo (IT), within "Sanrito Festival". This version misses the soundscape introduction but the video part is visible.
 Line up: Nicolò Bottasso (tr), Riccardo Sala (sax), Elia Zortea (trb), Giaime Mannias (fl), Agnese Valmaggia (dr and electronics)

Length: ~8'

3.1.7 Feedback, reflection and conclusion

I am personally not super happy with the outcome of my first cycle (the audio version), for two reasons:

1. First, the live recording was quite problematic, we didn't have much time for soundcheck and we were not comfortable with the volumes on stage. As a consequence, the first part of the piece, which is very much based on improvisation and interaction among the musicians and also between musicians and samples, was very difficult to play. Also for this reason the section with time stretched samples played together with the sax didn't really work out. And apart from this, I had some issues with the visual, so even if during soundcheck the video was shown without any problems, during the performance it stopped working after a few minutes, and I had a black screen till the end, instead. Of course these are 'practical' problems, they don't affect my composition completely, but I think it's a quite relevant aspect, that's maybe good to keep in mind when I write music that's based so much on the "live element" (improvisation, triggering and so on). That's definitely a very interesting and rich direction to take, but there's also some risk to be aware of.
2. The second reason that makes me doubt a bit about my outcome is that I have the feeling I forced myself too much in the use of certain material, and in the end I put together too much stuff. For example, now I think it was maybe clever to develop either the manipulation techniques or the visual aspect, but not everything in the same piece. Another option could have been to focus on the manipulated samples in one piece (with no visuals) and to work a bit deeper on triggering video fragments in a separate piece (with less work on the samples). I think artistically this would maybe make more sense to me, instead of trying to fit everything I just learnt in one (very long) composition.

On the other hand, if I see this outcome as part of a longer research process (which it is) and I focus a bit less on its artistic value, I think it's a good step and can show already some progress towards a more aware use of samples in my compositional practice.

I talked about my piece with Simone Bottasso, who was also there during the live performance. He gave me a useful suggestion: to structure the first part (the collective improvisation) using time markers and a clock for each player. That way I can control the development of it and also for the players it's easier to go in the same direction.

Then I talked about it with Friso, my main subject teacher. About the first part of the piece he also suggested the possibility of using a graphic score rather than a 'standard one' with notes and rhythm. The graphic score would then show the planned development of the improvisation in terms of volume, density, timbre... and this, combined with time markers and clocks, could help the collective improvisation grow the way I want, avoiding "holes" and sudden lack of energy. This kind of improvisation is also something that needs to be practiced with the band, it's not all about notation.

Lastly, I showed the recording also to René, with whom I had worked on my Max patches for the visuals. While he knew the video part, the beginning of the piece was instead quite new to him. His main suggestion was regarding the sound of the synth: he has proposed the idea of using a richer sound, maybe a sample made from previous recordings of the same instruments I have in the live setting

(trumpet, bass clarinet, alto sax). Or, in general, to have a sound which doesn't stay the same for that long, but which can have its own development within the piece too, a progression not only in pitch but also in sound quality. Lastly, he suggested that I try to glue the different sections more, especially between the soundscape and the drum solo.

3.2 Second Research Cycle

3.2.1 Overview of second research cycle

For my second cycle I wanted to break free from a too rigid rhythmic approach which characterized the previous compositions, making them too similar to each other and thus missing out on new possibilities of interaction with the samples. To do so, I worked on a piece for a drumless ensemble, focusing more on the connection between samples and melody/harmony instead of rhythm. I also analyzed Chassol's *Indiamore* and dove a bit deeper into his way of composing with samples. The study of his approach helped me in order to achieve a more open and less rhythm-centered direction. A few experiments were carried out as a consequence of the analysis and in preparation for working on the outcome of the cycle.

3.2.2 Reference recording

[13 Reference Recording 02 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Compromising for what?\) - video](#)

Compromising for what? - Agnese Valmaggia

Line up: Nicolò Bottasso (tr), Riccardo Sala (sax), Elia Zortea (trb), Giaime Mannias (fl), Agnese Valmaggia (dr and electronics)

Performed on February 11th in Cuneo (IT), within "Sanrito Festival".

Length: ~8'

I decided to choose, as a reference recording number 2, the version of the piece with video and without soundscape introduction. I think the sample manipulation in the longer version went a little too far, becoming actually less relevant for my composition approach. Also, the presence of the video turned out to be a valuable and interesting aspect to develop further.

3.2.3 Feedback and reflection

I got quite some feedback regarding different notation possibilities, which can be very useful in order to find more freedom in my writing, rhythmic-wise. For instance, using a timer in a collective improvisation, or a graphic notation which can give important references during the piece, without the need of a stable pulse or groove. Additionally, exploring the use of samples not as a rhythmic source but as a reference for the other instruments it's a new approach for me which I plan to explore further.

Personally, I recognize some similarities between my second reference recording and my previous works, and think that writing a piece for a drumless line-up is a good challenge and an important step for me at this moment.

3.2.4 Data collection & data analysis: my findings

3.2.4.1 Chassol's *Indiamore*

My data collection for the second cycle starts with Christophe Chassol, French pianist and composer known mainly for his works of re-harmonization on video material. 'His compositions articulate voices,

music, sounds, images onto new audiovisual objects. The result has a name: “ultrascore”. His aim: harmonizing reality¹⁴.

I first discovered him a few years ago with a [video](#)¹⁵ of a live performance of his album ‘Big Sun’. I was very impressed by the type of show, pretty new to me, merging live music, visuals and samples, and I can say that my interest for this particular subject was born mainly because of him and this specific video.

Some of his best works (and most related to my research) are in the form of a movie, around one hour long, consisting of many small pieces, all related to a specific topic. I chose to take a closer look at one of them: ‘[Indiamore](#)’¹⁶ focused on India, studio version (2013). The work collects different video recordings of common people in India: some of them sing and play, some dance, some just talk, and everything is enriched by Chassol’s reharmonization and loops. I’ll call these fragments “episodes”.

I find this piece very inspiring and interesting for the way Chassol treats the sample and ‘builds’ his music around it in such a natural way: if there’s rhythm, it comes as a consequence of the audio material he already has. But when the sample is less rhythmical, he composes his music in a more ‘floating’ way, just following the audio without a specific tempo: I’ll focus on these particular episodes in order to achieve the goals of this cycle.

3.2.4.1.1 Overview

In general, I found it very interesting how he goes from one episode to the other, blending all the different recordings into a common idea of sound and color. In this, the presence of the video helps, in my opinion: having different layers (sample, music, visual) allows him to switch gradually from one situation to the next, changing one layer at a time. Black screen in between different scenes is also used, while the music makes the transition. Sometimes he also uses video material which is not connected to the sample we hear, or some small audio fragments overlap with each other, with the addition of reverb or delay, creating a nice effect of transition in between episodes. Examples of this are in [ODISSI](#) and in [Our Father](#).

Another interesting aspect in Chassol’s works is the instrumentation he uses: besides the electronic piano sounds he uses, he doesn’t add much and I think it’s wise since the audio material from the recordings is already very rich with voices, instruments and nuances. In the more groovy parts bass and drums come in, but in general it all stays quite ‘piano-centered’. One thing I really like is an extra layer he sometimes adds on the melody, with a high sound similar to a [whistle](#). I think it adds a nice color, without changing the main global sound, and it works very well in the repetition, following the golden rule of never repeating exactly the same.

3.2.4.1.2 Repetition and groove

A central point in Chassol’s music is the use of repetition: he approaches it in different ways, which can be divided into two main categories:

1. First way is to not interfere with the sample at all, just follow it with the music the way it is, and just repeat the whole fragment a few times, adding every time something new. There’s no clear tempo but a sort of ‘floating’ approach based on the audio. This happens for example in the [intro](#), where a ~45” fragment of French speaking voice is repeated and harmonized. It’s crucial this idea

¹⁴Youtube, [Chassol](#), accessed October 19, 2023

¹⁵ Chassol, *live at Ancienne Belgique*, accessed April 8, 2024

¹⁶ Chassol, [Indiamore](#), accessed April 8, 2024

of never repeating exactly the same, but adding new layers each time. In the intro, the first time the voice is alone, with a soft pedal; second time, the voice is harmonized; third time chords are introduced; fourth time extra voicings of the melody are added, and the video starts.

2. The second way Chassol uses repetition is based on a clearer rhythmic approach: he loops very short fragments and from there he derives the groove. This happens mainly with speaking voices (the fragment [Showing my friends](#)) or with konnakol samples. In this case the sample defines the structure too: so for instance he loops a four-bar phrase which becomes the “chorus”, to give importance to a specific fragment and to build a certain development in the music. One example of this is in [Ultratheka number 2](#). A similar approach, but even more extreme, I also saw in JacobTV’s works, for example in [Grab it!](#)¹⁷, which is a very rhythmical piece he composed looping and cutting angry and screaming voices of prisoners. The voice then becomes a sort of percussion instrument that blends with the acoustic ones.



Pic 24: *Ultratheka number 2* fragment transcription

Keeping in mind my goal for this cycle, I decided to focus on the first approach only, avoiding any rhythmical references and aiming for a ‘floating’ result.

3.2.4.2 Experiments

I ran my experiments in different directions, taking Chassol’s approach as a starting point, but going a little further depending on my specific needs.

3.2.4.2.1 Frut de mar - no tempo

For this experiment, I took the [intro](#) of *Indiamore* as a main reference and I chose a long and not very rhythmical sample of my grandparents speaking in dialect. I repeated it three times and I added a new layer every time, avoiding any rhythmic reference, tempo grid or sample manipulation. The result ([20 Frut de mar](#)) is more in the direction I was looking for, I think, even if it is quite problematic to notate it or to actually play it live, unless doing it by heart.

3.2.4.2.2 Spiaggia 2 - hidden pulse

Driven by the need to be able to somehow notate the music and play it in a live setting with other musicians, I made a couple more experiments: these are not directly related to the types of groove and repetition I saw in *Indiamore*, but are my own approach as a consequence of that, with the same aim of avoiding a rhythmic grid.

For this, I took a different sample, a field recording I made last summer on a beach in Italy, with the sound of the waves and the voice of a drinks vendor, and I worked on a sort of ‘hidden pulse’: with a clear tempo, I wrote avoiding downbeats or any reference of the actual tempo - trying indeed to hide it. The presence of the tempo makes it playable (with a click for instance) but, as a listener, it is not easy to perceive it and it all should sound quite free and open, floating.

¹⁷ JacobTV, [Grab it!](#), accessed April 8, 2024

In order to achieve this, I first wrote down some rhythmic hits taken from the sample, given the fixed tempo of 135 = quarter note ([21 Spiaggia 2 - first score](#)). Then I wrote a harmonic comping that could work on the rhythmic hits. After that I composed a melody which sometimes matches with the sample and with the comping. I notated the 'matching spots' in red in the pdf (whole score: [22 Spiaggia 2 - hidden pulse](#)):

SPIAGGIA 2
HIDDEN PULSE

The image displays a musical score excerpt for 'Spiaggia 2' titled 'HIDDEN PULSE'. It consists of three systems, each with a 'COMING' (Comping) staff and a 'MELODY' staff. The tempo is marked as 135 = quarter note. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The first system shows a Comping staff with chords C#6(9)5(2) and D11(add2) Em9/D, and a Melody staff. The second system shows a Comping staff with chords D9/C and Em7/D, and a Melody staff. The third system shows a Comping staff with chords Em7, C#6/E, and A11, and a Melody staff. Red markings indicate matching spots between the sample and the composed parts.

Pic 25: 'Spiaggia 2' score excerpt

The result ([23 Spiaggia 2 + sample + click](#)) follows quite clearly the sample, while keeping the pulse very ambiguous: only with the click can we really follow the right tempo.

The main disadvantage of this, I think, is that it is still not very natural to play. I had a session with two musicians (guitar and violin) and we tried to play it in different ways. With the click it is doable, but it's not so easy to be together and, if the musicians are not very precise, the synchronization with the sample is not so clear.

We also tried out a second version in which the instruments switch roles (guitar plays the melody and violin the harmony), and they both play rubato ([24 Spiaggia 2 rubato](#)). In this case there's not a clear

connection with the sample anymore, but I find it interesting how it can work as a starting point, a source of inspiration, to end with something which directly derives from that but it doesn't need the sample anymore.

3.2.4.2.3 Spiaggia 3 - waves

After my experiment of 'hidden pulse', I still felt like I tried to get rid of groove and rhythmic structure without really avoiding it, but actually just going even deeper into it. But hidden. Also, I wanted to find a way to have more freedom (no click, no tempo) but without losing the connection with the sample: so I wrote one last experiment ([25 Spiaggia 3 score](#)). This is again not directly related to Chassol's approaches to groove and repetition, but my own experiment on the topic.

SPIAGGIA 3
ONDE

The musical score is written for a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) in 4/4 time. It consists of three systems of five measures each. The first system is marked with a boxed 'A' and the second with a boxed 'B'. Chord symbols are placed above the treble staff, and the bass staff contains single notes or simple chords. The score ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Pic 26: 'Spiaggia 3' - score excerpt

In this case, I decided to use the audio material as references: the chords (A and B) should be played in correspondence with the waves in the sample. That means, the guitar player was supposed to play a

chord every time he heard a wave. The other four bars in the score are melodic ideas that should be played by the violin in correspondence with the voice in the sample:

The image shows a musical score excerpt for two staves, measures 15 and 17. Measure 15 is divided into two parts. The left part shows a treble clef staff with a melodic line: a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note B4, a half note C5, a quarter note B4, and a half note A4. Below the staff is the text 'AC-QUA CAF-FE'. Above the staff is a box containing the text 'Coca ARANCIATA BIRRA ACQUA CAFFE'. The right part of measure 15 shows a treble clef staff with a chordal line: a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note A4. Below the staff is the text 'AC-QUA CAF-FE'. Above the staff is a box containing the text 'Coca ARANCIATA BIRRA ACQUA CAFFE'. Measure 17 is also divided into two parts. The left part shows a treble clef staff with a long note: a half note G4, a half note A4, a half note B4, a half note C5, a half note B4, and a half note A4. Below the staff is the text 'EEEE - - EH'. Above the staff is a box containing the text 'EEEEH'. The right part of measure 17 shows a treble clef staff with a long note: a half note G4, a half note A4, a half note B4, a half note C5, a half note B4, and a half note A4. Below the staff is the text 'EEEE - - EH'. Above the staff is a box containing the text 'EEEEH'.

Pic 27: *Spiaggia 3* - score excerpt

In the end, using the waves as references didn't work very well because of the low quality and unclarity of the sample, and also because the guitar player preferred to play freely on the sample, interacting with it and with the other player. But it gave an idea of the general sound and density of the harmony. The result ([26 Spiaggia 3](#)) shows some connection between music and sample, but leaving space for the music to develop quite freely, and without falling into a rigid tempo grid. In general it sounds a bit repetitive but I think that's mainly because the sample is not very long.

3.2.4.3. Data analysis

One interesting thing that comes out of this data collection is that the last experiments are not directly connected with the starting material anymore (*Indiamore*): while the first *Frut de mar* is clearly inspired by Chassol's approach to (absence of) rhythm, the other experiments (*Spiaggia 2* and *Spiaggia 3*) are just the consequences of my personal interpretation of it, as well as my need to notate my music in the clearest way. This was important in order to have it played by other people (no drums) and to avoid a too strong rhythmic element (main goal for this cycle). In general, I find it effective: that the starting point is indeed only a starting point, but gives enough inspiration to develop the research the way I need it.

The same thought applies to the use of the sample: it should mainly work as a source of inspiration, a key element in the composition process; but its actual presence in the final piece sometimes it's not needed anymore, like we saw in the rubato version of *Spiaggia 2*.

One last important note related to the experiments is that I got feedback from one of the musicians suggesting to use (also) a more graphic score to give a better idea of the development of the sample (its length, density...). I find this interesting because it is also similar to some of the feedback I got on the outcome of my first cycle, about the possibility to use more graphic indication during the collective improvisation and the presence of a timer to have better references. This is definitely something I will keep in mind when working on my next outcome.

3.2.5 Intervention

Taking my experiments as a starting point, I decided to mainly focus on the 'hidden pulse' technique, because it sounded to me the most suitable for further development.

3.2.5.1 The samples

I worked in the same way with two different samples: one sample, longer, is the combination of different field recordings of walking steps on the snow ([27 Steps sample](#)); the second sample has, instead, speaking voices ([28 Voices sample](#)). I decided to use the steps sample to define my harmonic rhythm, and the voice sample to create my melody.

The choice of these samples is purely musical. I found them interesting material in relation to the approach I wanted to have in the writing process. There's not a specific reason why I combined the two, besides the fact they were both recorded during Christmas holidays, for this the title 'Inverno' which means 'winter'.

3.2.5.2 The process

The first thing I did was to choose a tempo: 97 bpm. This choice was made in order to avoid the steps in the sample from sounding like a metronome, yet still allowing them to be somehow rhythmical. With this fixed, I wrote down the rhythmic hits corresponding to the audio material of the steps sample. Then I selected a certain number of hits and I wrote chords: this became my harmonic structure.

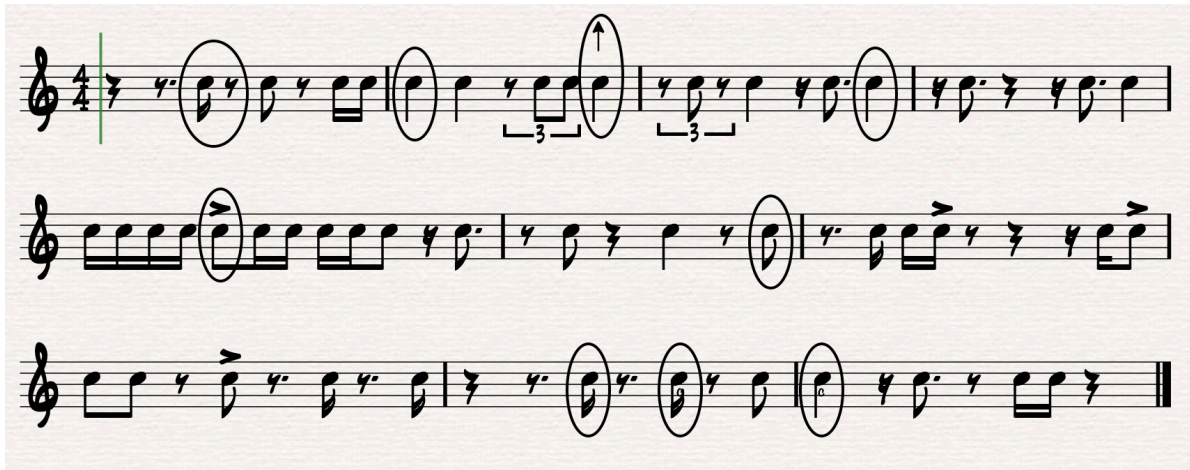
The choice of the chords and specific voicings was related to the fact that I wanted to have the violin playing the harmony, so I tried to use open strings as much as possible. I also wanted to express a feeling of calm and peace, connected to the content of the samples and the memories they raise for me, so I mainly chose consonant chords, major or sus.

The image displays two staves of musical notation, labeled A and B, representing a chord progression. Staff A contains seven measures with the following chords: G major 9 (measure 69), D major 7(sus4)/G (measure 70), B minor 7 (measure 71), D major 7(sus2)/C# (measure 72), G major 9 (measure 73), D major 7(sus4)/G (measure 74), and D(sus2) (measure 75). Staff B contains eight measures with the following chords: E minor 11 (measure 67), A7 (measure 68), G major 7(sus2) (measure 69), D(add2) (measure 70), E minor 11 (measure 71), A7 (measure 72), G major 7(sus2) (measure 73), and D(sus2) (measure 74). Each chord is represented by a cluster of notes on a five-line staff, with the measure number written in blue above the first note of each chord.

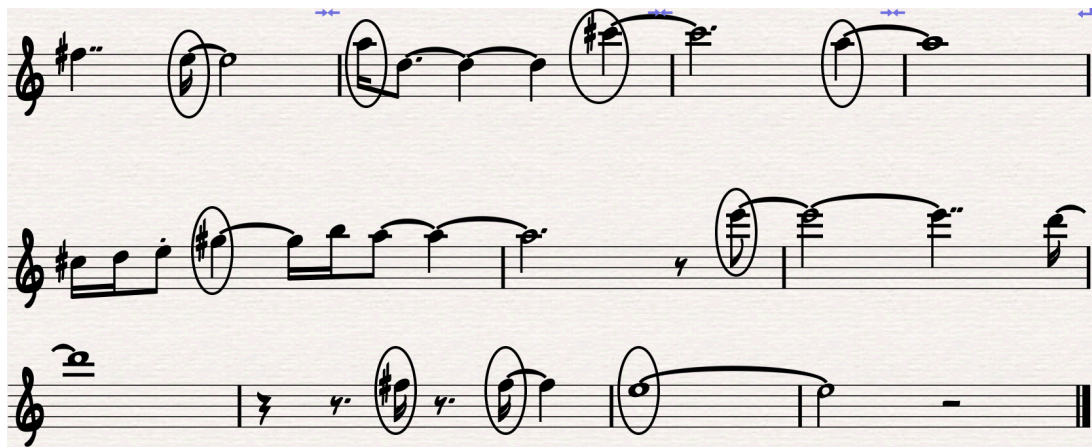
Pic 28-29: *Inverno*: chords

Then I wrote down the rhythmic hits of the voice sample, and I gave pitches to some of them: this became my melody. To choose the pitches I tried to follow the actual movement of the speaking voice, but I also adjusted them in relation to the harmony. The next images show the rhythmic hits I derived from the

samples, and the complete melody. The circled notes are the moments of connection between melody and sample.



Pic 30: *Inverno*: rhythmic transcription of the speaking voices sample



Pic 31: *Inverno*: melody

3.2.5.3 The form: isorhythm

One interesting thing is that my two samples don't have the same length: the steps sample is 24 bars and the voices one is only 10. This means that when I put them together, looping them, they overlap every time in different ways, creating new combinations of harmony and melody, and also meeting rhythmically in different spots (isorhythm). I found this interesting and ideal for the 'hidden pulse' result I wanted to achieve.

In the handwritten score ([29 Inverno - sketch](#)) you can see the "skeleton" of the piece, my starting material: the first line is the rhythmic translation of the voice sample; the second line has the rhythmic hits of the steps sample; the third line is my melody. You can see that I notated some specific notes with circles and arrows: those are the 'connection spots' so the moments in which the music is together with the samples (circles) or harmony and melody fall together (arrows).



Pic 32: 'Inverno': first sketch

Once I had this basic material I combined it in order to have a nice development: I added an intro and an outro, to be played without tempo, as well as a solo section in the middle. A clearer score can be found in the drive: [30 Reference Recording 03 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Inverno\) - score](#).

Regarding the samples, I decided to use the steps sample more as a background color, changing volumes and panning, but always present; the voices sample, instead, appears less often and the first times it's not complete, leaving space for the guitar melody alone.

One last practical note: apart from the intro and the outro, the players had to follow a click track in order to be able to play with the samples. This was not a problem for the recording, but I admit it could be a limit in a live performance.

3.2.6 Outcomes

Outcome of my second cycle is my piece *Inverno* ([31 Reference Recording 03 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Inverno\)](#)), for violin and electric guitar.

Recorded on Tuesday, November 14th.

Line up: Nicolò Bottasso - violin; Leonardo Franceschini - guitar.

Length: 5'39"

Score: [30 Reference Recording 03 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Inverno\) - score](#).

3.2.7 Feedback, reflection and conclusion

I personally found this cycle particularly challenging for the difficulties I had in avoiding a too present rhythmic structure. I had to really force myself in this direction (for example by choosing a drumless line up) and I was not very confident in what I was doing. I also found the analysis of Chassol's music not extremely helpful in relation to this specific goal but, on the other hand, it pushed me to find my own way through it and to run experiments based on my own needs, which led to shaping my outcome in a clearer way.

First feedback I asked was to the players: they both agreed on the fact that hearing the final recording, without the click, gives a very different feeling tempo-wise, compared to when they played it. It doesn't sound too rhythmically clear (apart from the solo section) but it doesn't sound completely rubato either: they defined it as a sort of 'elastic pulse'. Sound-wise, instead, the guitar player suggested experimenting also with drier sounds, not only in the interpretation of the piece but also in the composing process.

Then I showed my recording to my teacher René, who described the piece as 'meditative music', which gives a precise image thanks to the use of the footsteps sample as an atmospheric layer and the effect on the guitar sound. Moreover, he suggested writing the whole piece with the D major key signature, to avoid too many sharps in the score and therefore make it easier to read for the players.

My main subject teacher S'yo noticed a difference in the use of the sample compared to my previous compositions: before it was used mainly to generate my melody, rhythm and harmony; now I used the sample more as a cloud of sound, a texture. As a consequence, my sample was in the foreground in my previous works, while it is part of the background now. Regarding this aspect, he suggested that I consider 'Gestalt psychology' and Ligeti's chamber concerto in order to be more aware of my choices of what I want the audience to perceive.

He also talked about my melody: even if it fits well with the rest, he would not consider it a 'melody' because the notes are too long, it's difficult to perceive them as a whole, and it easily becomes part of the background, because it's repeated many times.

Lastly, he suggested removing the violin solo and focusing only on the atmosphere I created with the sounds of the samples and the music.

3.3 Third Research Cycle

3.3.1 Overview of third research cycle

In this last cycle I tried on one hand to include new technical tools such as the Sensory Percussion triggers and the Roland multipad, and on the other hand I searched for something in between the previous two cycles in terms of rhythmic approach. I wanted to go back to drums (the outcome of this cycle is indeed a solo drums piece) but I wanted to find a new approach to it, both in the composition process and in the playing, in which the samples could be both central (driving my rhythmic and melodic choices) and in the background (creating soundscapes).

My choice about the triggers and the multipad was dictated by my need to 'transform' my instrument into a more versatile companion, giving me more freedom with improvisation and creation, and more possibilities in controlling my sample setups. I spent a lot of time experimenting with Max in order to find my balance in controlling the triggers, and I collected audio material from different sources: field recordings, movie samples, electronic clips from Ableton.

I had a very interesting interview with belgian drummer Antoine Pierre, who has a solo project ("Vaague") in which explores and composes sample-based grooves. One thing, among the many he told me, was particularly relevant for me: we need constraints to be more creative, more free, and this is true both when talking about technical tools and when dealing with samples (I wrote something very similar in the introduction of this research).

The outcome of this cycle is a first attempt of putting together these different elements: it works, but it sounds to me just like a start of an even deeper exploration.

3.3.2 Reference recording

[31 Reference Recording 03 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Inverno\)](#)

Inverno - Agnese Valmaggia

Line up: Nicolò Bottasso (violin), Leonardo Franceschini (electric guitar)

Recorded on Tuesday, November 14th.

Length: 5'39"

Score: [30 Reference Recording 03 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Inverno\) - score](#).

3.3.3 Feedback and reflection

General idea for the third cycle is to blend the two different approaches I had in the first two cycles: the more rhythmical one and the 'floating pulse' one. This can be explored focusing on the role I want to give to the samples in terms of *background* or *foreground* element: switching between these two layers could be the key to reach a half-way result.

Regarding my choice to test electronic tools like the Sensory Percussion triggers and the Roland multipad, even though there is a huge amount of interesting things I can explore and technicalities I can get lost into, it is wise to stick to a very precise artistic idea and try to get to that, instead of the opposite path.

3.3.4 Data collection & data analysis: my findings

3.3.4.1 Sensory Percussion and Roland multipad

With the aim of using my drumset in a more melodic way, and to have more flexibility in the process of including my samples in my playing, I decided to test these two electronic devices: the [Sensory Percussion](#)¹⁸ set of triggers and the [Roland multipad](#)¹⁹ (SPD).

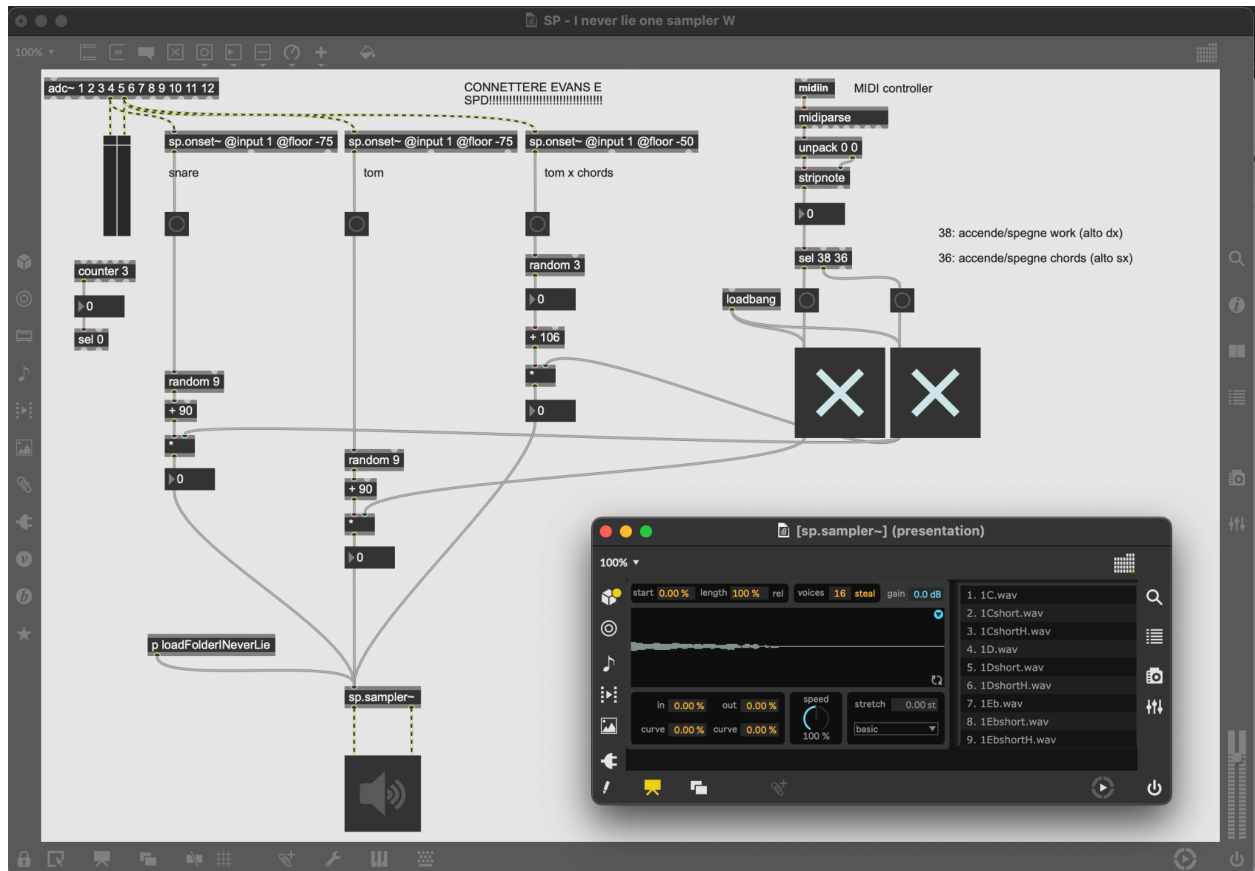
Depending on their characteristics, they can be very useful for me in different ways: the multipad, which is pretty easy to program and very handy to hit while I play, is the ideal solution to launch fixed samples or, in combination with Ableton Live, allows me to deal with longer musical ideas; on the other hand, the SP triggers give me the freedom to change different parameters of the samples through my playing, interesting features both for 'field recordings' samples ([32 Experiment SP software - Work samples](#): here the timbre and the velocity in my playing control a cutoff filter and a phaser on the samples) and for any electronic sound I can map to it. My drumset can therefore become and sound like an electronic melodic instrument, where for example the pitch of my sounds is determined by where on the drums I place my hits (in the center or to the edge): [33 Experiment SP software - chords](#).

3.3.4.2 Experiments

The SP set of triggers comes with its own software, that works pretty good but is completely different from any other softwares I worked with before. This made me wonder if it was worth my time to learn from zero a completely new software, or if it was better to look for alternatives which could include programming tools I already know a bit. Searching on the web I found a package of Max patches built especially for these specific triggers to be controlled through Max, avoiding completely the Sensory Percussion software. I made some attempts on this, trying to get a similar effect to what I partially experienced in my previous two experiments with the SP software. The triggers are basically little microphones, whose signal can be elaborated in many ways, depending on the effect you want to reach.

¹⁸ Sunhouse, "[Homepage](#)", accessed April 8, 2024

¹⁹ Roland, "[Roland - SPD-SX PRO](#)", accessed April 8, 2024



Pic 33: Max patch for Sensory Percussion triggers

Here is the screenshot of it: the signal comes from the soundcard on channel 5 and 6 (I have two triggers, one on the snare and one on the tom). Then the “sp.onset~” object keeps track of it and triggers the output of specific samples that are stored in the “sp.sampler~” object. In short, I put all the samples I wanted to use in the same folder and then, depending on what and how I play, certain samples within that folder are recalled through their number and launched. The attribute “@floor” in the “sp.onset~” object allows me to have a sort of gate, so that I can trigger different sounds if I play louder or softer. On the top-right corner I also added two toggles that allow me to switch on and off the triggers, and these are connected to my multipad. On the bottom-right corner the folder with the samples is shown.

Because I wanted to keep it simple, the only parameter that I use now to control the samples is the amplitude, but I plan to investigate this approach further in the future, so that I can actually explore all the potential of it.

3.3.4.3 The choice of the samples

Once I understood more or less *how* to program and launch my samples, I had to choose *what* I wanted to share with my outcome. Starting point for this was again a speaking voice fragment that I took from a movie and that was to me quite significant. In this sample there is a short dialogue between two people, in which one asks the other about his work, and ends with a little uncomfortable question: “If you’re not excited about it, why do you do it?”. This question made me think of the choices we make in life and why, and made me also think of the part-time job I have in the kitchen of a hotel. So I had the idea of making

some (unauthorized) field recordings during my work and then using them as samples in my composition, together with the sample from the movie.

To do so, I cut the field recording very short in order to obtain some sort of percussive sounds, and I assigned them (more or less randomly) to the triggers using the Max patch previously presented. In this way my drumset became really like a new instrument, with unexpected sounds that change randomly, but short enough to allow me to still play some sort of groove, if I want.

For the movie samples, instead, I used a little different approach: to not reveal the meaning of it too soon, I cut and manipulated shorter fragments of it, and I mapped them to my multipad.

Then I tried to combine these two sounds and improvise a sort of intro for my piece, but it sounded to me too empty and unbalanced. So I created three samples with chords that I could use to 'fill the gaps' in between the other sounds, and that also helped me increase the tension using harmonic rhythm. For the choice of the chords, I had to make several attempts before finding the "right" ones because I always tend to write very consonant voicings which give 'happy' feelings. This was not coherent with the idea behind the piece and didn't work well with the samples I had, so I had to force myself a bit to find something that could be suitable.

Here is an example in which I combine all these aspects ([34 Experiment Max patch](#)): if I play soft I launch the "work" samples while if I play louder I trigger the chords; in both cases the sounds are chosen randomly by Max. On top of this I launch the manipulated speaking voice samples through my multipad.

3.3.4.4 Vaague

'Vaague' is the solo project of Belgian drummer and composer Antoine Pierre, who "has created a collection of samples that he organically mixes in real time with his own drum grooves".²⁰

Because of the nature of his music (focused on drums but with an interesting use of samples) and the fact that he also works with the Sensory Percussion triggers, I decided to contact him to ask a few questions about his composing process and the role of the samples in the creation of his music. He replied with a lot of useful information, of which two aspects in particular were to me specifically relevant: the use of repetition and the process of experimentation.

- Vaague's music is pretty repetitive and that's a precise choice he made, not connected to the possible limitations of being a 'one-man-band' but mainly as a specific artistic direction he took. I find this aspect very interesting: in my composition lessons I heard many times the golden rule 'if you repeat something, never repeat it exactly the same'. I trust and agree with this rule, but I also understand and appreciate the use of repetition in certain styles of music and in Vaague's works. This was therefore an intriguing aspect for me, also considering the powerful role of repetition when we treat samples.
- On the other hand, instead, a big part of his composing process is based on experimentation or, let's say, 'jamming with yourself' and he mentioned the fact that he always needs constraint, in that phase, in order to be creative. In his case the use of triggers and pads doesn't necessarily make him (feel) more free, but it is actually a 'limit' needed in order to boost his creative process. I find this relevant because it links to what I wrote at the beginning of this research, in the

²⁰ Antoine Pierre, "[Vaague](#)", last modified April 8, 2024

'motivation and goal' section: samples are a limit that I give to myself in order to find more freedom.

3.3.5 Intervention

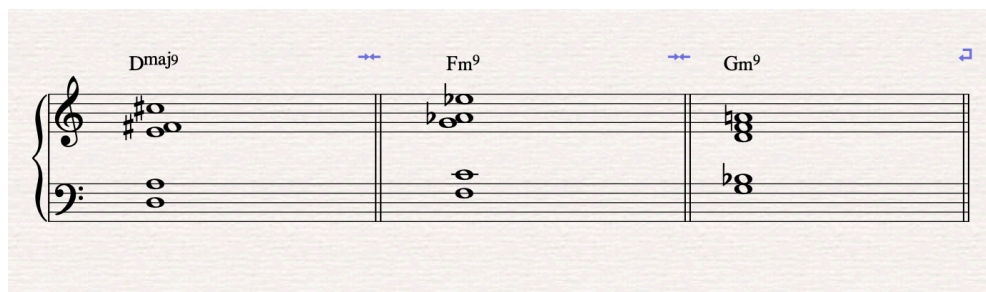
I shaped my outcome with two different parts, the first one more open, improvised and with a certain degree of randomness, and the second one fixed and based on a longer tape. The two parts are connected to each other by a "call", which in my case is a fragment of the movie sample which sounds understandable for the first time.

3.3.5.1 Part 1

For the first part I used the 'ingredients' I had in my last experiment: the samples from my job, the manipulated and incomprehensible samples from the movie, and the three random chords. I built this section as a developed improvisation, with some rules: starting with spare sounds and a lot of space and adding new material slowly and with a precise order: the 'work samples' first, then the chords, and lastly the 'movie samples'. Density of the sounds should increase and lead to the call for part 2.

I listed here the three main elements of this first part:

- The 'work samples' and the original field recordings ([35 Reference Recording 04 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(I never lie\) - Work samples](#)): it's interesting to note how the chopped samples can sound very musical and percussive when removed from the 'kitchen context', but have a completely different meaning when heard within the context of the entire recordings.
- The five samples with the speaking voices taken from the movie ([36 Reference Recording 04 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(I never lie\) - Movie samples](#)): I tried to manipulate them enough to 'hide' the meaning of the dialogue in order to use them primarily as musical elements rather than conveying a message.
- The three samples with the chords ([37 Reference Recording 04 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(I never lie\) - Chords samples](#)): for these, I chose long sounds with a delay and a lot of reverb because I wanted to fill in the space in between the other samples, which are all very short, and to create a contrast with them. About the voicings: I opted for something quite harmonically ambiguous (each sound belongs to a different tonality), which is also enhanced by the fact that the chords are chosen randomly by my Max patch. I thought this could fit well with the openness and vagueness of this first part of the piece.



Pic 34: *I never lie* - chords part 1

3.3.5.2 Part 2

The second part is based on a prerecorded track in which the repetitive melody is developed as a consequence of the speaking voice in the movie sample:

D w/ sample

so this new job do you like it? yeah, I like it I like it a lot it's exc - i - ting

what? I'm just con - fused is all if you're not exc - i - ting by it, why do you do it?

Pic 35: *I never lie* - score excerpt

This excerpt of the [score](#) shows how the melody fits with the speaking voices: it's not a precise translation in pitches of the voice's movement, but more a musical interpretation of it, in which only specific accents are underlined. This fragment can be heard at 3'23" in the recording ([38 Reference Recording 04 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(I never lie\)](#)), more or less in the middle of part 2, and it is the first and only time in which the whole movie sample is presented.

The whole melodic development of this section is just a consequence of this fragment, and in particular of the last bar:

Pic 36: last bar



Pic 37: melodic ideas developed from the last bar

Comparing these two images you can see how the simple melodic material of that specific bar became the central idea for the rest of the piece, developed mainly using repetition and both harmonic and rhythmic modulations.

During this section the playing slowly goes from the free approach with the random 'work samples' towards a more stable drum groove. In the end, the same samples from part one come back for the climax of the piece, but now they are part of the tape and not launched on the spot.

3.3.5.3 Outro - the lies

After the big crescendo at the end of part 2, I suddenly go back to the same sounds of the very beginning. In this case, though, everything is prerecorded and I only pretend to launch the work samples. In this way I can at some point stop playing while the outro is still going on, revealing that my playing, in that moment, is a lie and hypothetically casting doubt on everything that was played before.

3.3.6 Outcomes

Outcome of my third cycle is my piece *I never lie* ([38 Reference Recording 04 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(I never lie\)](#)), for drums and electronics.

Recorded on Tuesday, March 26th.

Line up: Agnese Valmaggia (drums & electronics).

Length: ~5'

Score: [39 Reference Recording 04 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(I never lie\) - score](#)

3.3.7 Feedback, reflection and conclusion

My main subject teacher S'yo mainly commented about the first part of the piece, in which according to him there could be much more space in between the samples, and I could wait more before introducing a new sound. He says that adding material is not the solution to keep something interesting, but the use I make of the samples should be prepared in advance, like a 'written improvisation'. This way I can develop any rhythmic idea more deeply. In this case the two parts would not be equally long, but the proportion would be about two thirds and one third.

My teacher René pointed out that my attempt to avoid the need of changing parameters and pressing knobs with my fingers (which brought me to purchase the multipad) was actually not completely fulfilled since in the video I still use my hand a couple of times to adjust some values on my pad. Of course this is not a relevant aspect for the audio only, but in a live situation (especially if I'm the only player on stage) it can be a bit distracting.

I also shared with him my concerns about launching the fixed tape in part 2, which sounds logical to me when I play it, but disturbs me a bit when re-watching the performance. I wonder where is the line (if there is) between using fixed media in a live setting with an artistic meaning and just launching backing tracks to be more independent on stage (almost like an aebersold play-along). With this doubt in mind, Rene's comment makes more sense: the way I integrate the launch of the samples in my playing can change the audience perspective, at least in a live setting.

A last feedback was about the outro of the piece: the way I played it in the video doesn't show very clearly the 'deception' idea I had in mind. I totally agree with this, and this part is not yet definitive: I'm planning to add visual material in this last section, which can help with the meaning of it. A version without visuals is also possible, but in that case the outro would be way shorter.

I personally consider this outcome still a work in progress. Technically, I feel I just dove into an ocean of possibilities with these triggers and pads and I think I'll need a lot of time to be able to use them properly. Artistically, I'm still not entirely sure if what I wanted to say with this piece is clear to the listeners. I also struggled a bit trying to make these technical tools serve my artistic ideas and keep those ideas as the central focus in all my decisions.

4 Research findings and outcomes

4.1 Documentation and explanation of the research outcomes

4.1.1 Outcome No. 1 - *Compromising for what?*

Outcome of my first cycle is the piece *Compromising for what?*: for trumpet, tenor sax, trombone, flute, drums and electronics (samples and visuals)

[13 Reference Recording 02 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Compromising for what?\) - video](#): performed on February 11th, 2023 in Cuneo (IT), within “Sanrito Festival”.

Line up: Nicolò Bottasso (tr), Riccardo Sala (sax), Elia Zortea (trb), Giaime Mannias (fl), Agnese Valmaggia (dr and electronics)

Length: ~8’

In the first cycle of my research I worked in different directions: I collected information through interviews with composers and musicians from my network: my teacher Paul van Brugge, musicians Simone Bottasso and Simone Sims Longo and composer JacobTV. I also analyzed the score of a piece by JacobTV titled *Mountain Top*. The practical analysis of the composition was very interesting and relevant for my research, and brought me to develop a few experiments: very short fragments of music in which I tried to apply the composition techniques I found out with the analysis.

At the same time I carried on some other experiments with the software Max, with the goal of building a Max patch that could allow me to launch and control not only audio samples but also video fragments through my MIDI controller. This was not a central point in my research in the beginning, but the interviews I had (especially the one with Simone Sims Longo) and the references I discovered during the process made me reconsider the aspect of the visual in my performance, so in the end this part became quite substantial.

Last part of my first cycle was focused on the intervention: I tried to apply both the composition techniques taken from JacobTV’s analysis and the work with visuals through the Max patches. The outcome is a composition that shows and uses the elements I worked on and found out during the cycle.

4.1.2 Outcome No. 2 - *Inverno*

Outcome of my second cycle is my piece *Inverno* ([31 Reference Recording 03 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Inverno\)](#)), for violin and electric guitar.

Recorded on Tuesday, November 14th, 2023.

Line up: Nicolò Bottasso - violin; Leonardo Franceschini - guitar.

Length: 5’39”

Score: [30 Reference Recording 03 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Inverno\) - score](#).

For my second cycle I wanted to break free from a too-rigid rhythmic approach which characterized the previous compositions, making them too similar to each other and thus missing out on new possibilities of interaction with the samples. To do so, I worked on a piece for a drumless ensemble, focusing more on

the connection between samples and melody/harmony instead of rhythm. I also analyzed Chassol's *Indiamore* and dove a bit deeper into his way of composing with samples, focusing especially on his use of repetition and groove and on the connection between samples and rhythm: the study of his approach helped me in order to achieve a more open and less rhythm-centered direction. A few experiments were carried out as a consequence of the analysis and in preparation for working on the outcome of the cycle.

4.1.3 Outcome No. 3 - *I never lie*

Outcome of my third cycle is my piece *I never lie* ([38 Reference Recording 04 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(I never lie\)](#)), for drums and electronics.

Recorded on Tuesday, March 26th, 2024.

Line up: Agnese Valmaggia (drums & electronics).

Length: ~5'

Score: [39 Reference Recording 04 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(I never lie\) - score](#)

In this last cycle I tried on one hand to include new technical tools such as the Sensory Percussion triggers and the Roland multipad, and on the other hand I searched for something in between the previous two cycles in terms of rhythmic approach. I wanted to go back to drums (the outcome of this cycle is indeed a solo drums piece) but I wanted to find a new approach to it, both in the composition process and in the playing, in which the samples could be both central (driving my rhythmic and melodic choices) and in the background (creating soundscapes).

My choice about the triggers and the multipad was dictated by my need to 'transform' my instrument into a more versatile companion, giving me more freedom with improvisation and creation, and more possibilities in controlling my samples setups.

I spent a lot of time experimenting with Max in order to find my balance in controlling the triggers, and I collected audio material from different sources: field recordings, movie samples, electronic clips from Ableton.

I had a very interesting interview with Belgian drummer Antoine Pierre, whose solo project "Vaague" explores sample-based grooves. One thing, among the many he told me, was particularly relevant for me: we need constraints to be more creative, more free, and this is true both when talking about technical tools and when dealing with samples (I wrote something very similar in the introduction of this research).

Outcome of this cycle is a first attempt of putting together these different elements: it works, but it sounds to me just like a start of an even deeper exploration.

4.2 Self-assessment of the research outcomes and expert feedback

During the research process I had many feedbacks, which guided me and somehow shaped the path of my exploration in a very relevant way.

From the first cycle, I got some interesting feedback from my teacher Friso about manipulating samples (how and especially how much), and on the different options available to make a score, especially when there's improvisation involved: the possible use of a timer and the use of graphic notation.

With the second cycle I started thinking more on the 'role' I wanted to give to the samples: if I wanted them to be in the background or in the foreground, if I wanted the audience to understand them or if I just want to use them as sounds I have in my line-up, as a cloud of sound. I talked about this with my teacher S'yo: the interesting thing is that all these aspects can coexist in the same piece, and I can learn how to organize my material in order to play with these different roles.

The third cycle gave me some interesting inputs on how to properly develop the musical ideas I have: just adding stuff is usually not the solution. Also, my teacher René gave me some useful feedback about the technical aspects: dealing with new technical tools made me change my way of thinking and organizing my material, but that should not be the main reason regarding artistic choices (just because I *can* do something it doesn't mean that I have to, or that it makes sense). And thinking of a live setting, it's important to keep in mind that the way I integrate the launch of the samples in my playing can change the audience perspective.

Personally, I'm very happy with the results I got from this research even (and *especially*) for the things that didn't work or that didn't turn out to be as good as expected. From a research perspective, those were the moments in which I learnt more and that I can always refer to, in the future, when I'll have to deal with similar issues.

4.3 Conclusion

At the end of this research I have the feeling that the more I discover, the less I know. Sometimes it is frustrating, but most of the time it is actually very motivating to just go even deeper, searching more. The whole research process taught me how to explore and investigate the topic from all angles, with the goal of creating an entire performance of music and samples. I think I still have to work on the final content, but it's been overall an enlightening journey on how to work towards that.

I plan to continue in this direction, focusing even deeper on those technical ('nerdy') aspects that I didn't have time to focus on during the research, and combining these aspects with a more mature artistic vision. In general, I'd like to find my own personal way of sharing my musical ideas, featuring some of the tools and pieces I worked on over the past two years to create a definitive repertoire.

Lastly, I have to confess that, despite the whole research process being extremely useful (other than demanding), I'm also very tired of writing every little detail of it here. I just want to make music, mainly.

5 Reference list

AV Media

- Blackwood, Christian. *All by myself: the Eartha Kitt story*. With Eartha Kitt. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vyN3eBRYcDo>, accessed on April 20, 2023
- JacobTV. *Mountain Top*. <https://www.jacobtv.net/product/mountain-top/>, accessed on April 20, 2023
- Ruttman, Walter. *Weekend*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3cEAMh3eng>, accessed on April 19, 2023
- Chassol. *Live at Ancienne Belgique*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92JjUqtcYPI&t=2s>, accessed on April 8, 2024
- Chassol. *Indiamore*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0euvHENSw8>, accessed on April 8, 2024
- JacobTV. *Grab it!* https://youtu.be/_vG64yleOts?si=D9iFCQksM1HPEDrV&t=101, accessed on April 8, 2024

Website

- Google. "Walter Ruttman. Weekend". Last modified April 19, 2023. <https://asmir.info/lib/weekend.htm>
- JacobTV.net. Biography. Last modified April 20, 2023. <https://www.jacobtv.net/composer/#biography>
- JacobTV.net. JacobTV - a portrait. Last modified April 20, 2023. <https://www.jacobtv.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/JacobTV-brochure-ENG.pdf>
- Medien Kunst Netz. "Weekend". Last modified April 19, 2023. <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/weekend/images/1/>
- Simonesimslongo.com. About. Last modified April 20, 2023. <https://www.simonesimslongo.com/about/>
- Wikipedia. "Different Trains". Last modified April 20, 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Different_Trains
- Wikipedia. "Program Music". Last modified April 19, 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Program_music
- Youtube. "Chassol". Last modified April 8, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/@Chassol/about>
- Sounhouse. "Homepage". Last modified April 8, 2024. <https://sunhou.se/>
- Roland. "Roland - SPD-SX PRO". Last modified April 8, 2024. https://www.roland.com/nl/products/spd-sx_pro/
- Antoine Pierre. "Vaague". Last modified April 8, 2024. <https://www.antoinepierreemusic.com/vaague>

Score

- JacobTV. *Mountain Top*. Amsterdam: JacobTV, 2008.

6 Network

Inner cycle:

- Paul van Brugge, main subject teacher;
- René Uijlenhoet, new media teacher;
- Friso van Wijck, main subject teacher;
- Hans Koolmees, research coach;
- Simone Bottasso, curious musician and composer, as well as good friend;
- Simone Sims Longo, musician and composer in the electronic field;
- Friso van Wijck, main subject teacher;
- S'yo Fang, main subject teacher.

Bigger circle:

- JacobTV: Dutch composer, for his use of samples in the composition process;
- Christophe Chassol: French composer, for his composing technique called 'ultrascore';
- 'Vaague' alias Antoine Pierre: Belgian drummer and composer, for his use of samples added to the drums through triggers.

7 Appendices

Appendix 1: List of all self-produced AV media included in report

- [01 Reference Recording 01 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Benigni - music for speeches\)](#)
- [02 Mountain Top \(JacobTV\) Notated score](#)
- [03 Audio/video material *Pasta*](#)
- [04 Sample manipulation on *Pasta*](#)
- [05 Soundscape on *Pasta*](#)
- [06 Soundscape with horns on *Pasta*](#)
- [07 Soundscape with horns on *Pasta* - Transposed score](#)
- [08 Loops on *Pasta*](#)
- [09 Loops on *Pasta* - Score](#)
- [10 Time stretch on *Compromise*](#)
- [11 Time stretch on *Compromise* - Score](#)
- [12 Reference Recording 02 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Compromising for what?\)](#)
- [13 Reference Recording 02 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Compromising for what?\) - video](#)
- [14 Reference Recording 02 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Compromising for what?\) - Transposed score](#)
- [15 Reference Recording 02 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Compromising for what?\) - Manipulated samples](#)
- [16 Interview with Paul van Brugge](#)
- [17 Interview with Simone Bottasso](#)
- [18 Interview with Simone Sims Longo](#)
- [19 Survey results](#)
- [20 Frut de mar](#)
- [21 Spiaggia 2 - first score](#)
- [22 Spiaggia 2 - hidden pulse](#)
- [23 Spiaggia 2 + sample + click](#)
- [24 Spiaggia 2 rubato](#)
- [25 Spiaggia 3 score](#)
- [26 Spiaggia 3](#)
- [27 Steps sample](#)
- [28 Voices sample](#)
- [29 Inverno - sketch](#)
- [30 Reference Recording 03 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Inverno\) - score](#)
- [31 Reference Recording 03 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Inverno\)](#)
- [32 Experiment SP software - Work samples](#)
- [33 Experiment SP software - chords](#)
- [34 Experiment Max patch](#)
- [35 Reference Recording 04 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(I never lie\) - Work samples](#)
- [36 Reference Recording 04 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(I never lie\) - Movie samples](#)
- [37 Reference Recording 04 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(I never lie\) - Chords samples](#)
- [38 Reference Recording 04 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(I never lie\)](#)
- [39 Reference Recording 04 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(I never lie\) - score](#)

Appendix 2: Critical media review

1. Literature

- Book: *Lateral Thinking*, by Edward De Bono, 1967. Interesting book on creativity, helpful to get used to seeing things from a different point of view, and to explore different ways of working with sounds.
- Book: "The Art Spirit", by Robert Henri, 1923. I heard about this book last year during a masterclass with Maria Schneider: she mentioned that as a very interesting book on art in general. I think it might be useful to focus on the artistic quality of my research, to not get lost in the technical aspects but always keep in mind the "art" that should be the primary aspect.
- [Article](#): *Steve Reich's 'Different Trains'*, by Christopher Fox, published by Cambridge University Press for "Tempo", 1990. About how Reich dealt with the samples, how he recorded the voices and the sounds and his approach to composition based on samples. The music is adapted on the samples and follows them, not the opposite.
- Book: *Noise, Water, Meat - a history of sounds in the arts* by Douglas Kahn, 1999. My second coach Adrián Crespo suggested to me this book that collects detailed studies of artists, and can be useful to expand my idea of sound. The book is very long and also quite complex, but I can just focus on one chapter that I think can be more useful for me (for example the one about water music).

2. CD's and DVD's

- Performance of Chassol's *Big Sun*, 2015. This was the first video I saw of music built on voices and sounds from nature combined with video, a few years ago. I was very impressed and I got inspired to do something similar.
- Performance of Steve Reich's *Different Trains*, with the addition of visual elements. I find it interesting for how it blends voices, sounds, music and images in order to tell a story.
- *The lemon of pink*, by The Books, 2011. Interesting use of vocal samples mixed with the music.
- *World domination part one: Furie*, by Tin Men And The Telephone, 2018. Great collection of pieces written on speeches, mainly from politicians.

3. Internet

- <https://citiesandmemory.com> collection of field recordings from all over the world. Starting from the original recording, alternative versions with music interpretation are added.
- <https://www.conservethesound.de> collection of sounds that are slowly disappearing.

Appendix 3: Full feedback on reference recordings

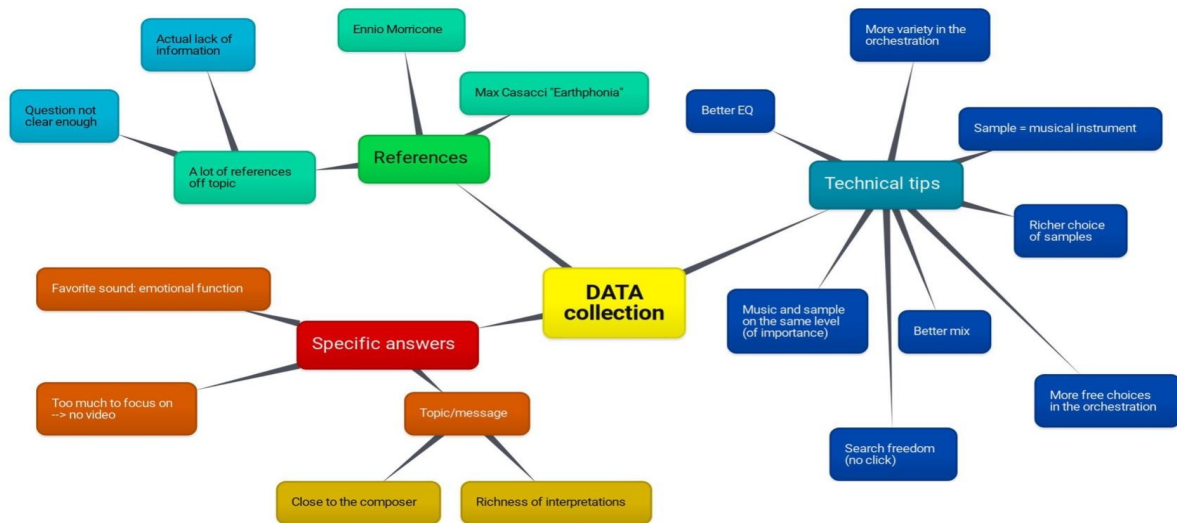
SURVEY

In order to get more specific and helpful feedback, I've prepared some guidelines on how to approach these people:

- First I shared with them my artistic question: "How can I enhance my compositional practice creating a hybrid performance of music and tapes of pre-recorded acoustic sounds?", in order to introduce the topic, explaining a bit what I mean with "hybrid" and "tapes" (especially for non-musicians people).
- I asked them what comes to their mind related to this topic and which artists they know who used something similar for an artistic project in the past. This is a way for me to find some new references and be more aware of what has been done already over this topic.
- Then I asked some more specific questions:
 1. What is your favorite sound/noise? Why?
 2. What do you think an audience usually expects from a musical performance and what doesn't expect?
 3. As a listener/audience, which topics/messages would you like to be addressed in a musical performance?
- I shared my reference recording (video) and asked the following questions:
 1. Do you think the message was clear?
 2. What did you focus on more, between music, words and video (in percentage)? Do you think it was a good balance?
 3. Can you think of a way to improve the interaction of my music with the samples (and video)? (Do you think it needs to improve?)
 4. Other general thoughts?

I know that the presence of a video can help the audience to understand better what the music is about, what the message is and can help music and samples to glue together, so I don't exclude the possibility of having some video material related to the pre-recorded sounds I'll use. I wanted to use these questions also to understand how important this aspect can be, in order to plan some time to investigate it, if necessary. I also know that almost all the references I'm collecting consist of performances with video material, so this is an aspect I should definitely keep in mind too.

I decided to send my reference recording and the related survey (whole transcription follows) to many different people, more or less musically educated. I got a lot of feedback from this, and I organized all the information in a tidy excel file ([19 Survey results](#): blue lines are musicians), dividing them into different categories: **references**, **answers** to specific questions, **technical** tips, and other possible topics. This mind map can give an overview of the results:



Pic 24: Mind map survey

- Among the **references**, to be honest I got a lot of non relevant information, that I decided not to focus on, to avoid the snowball effect. I guess this happened for two possible reasons: either my question and the topic of my research was not explained clearly enough, or the people I contacted really didn't have more related information. However, I got a couple of interesting references.
- **Specific questions** I asked were about the clarity of the topic within the performance (in my reference recording), the use of a video (it is helping or just distracting), general sounds that you like, topics you would like to be addressed in a performance.
- I also asked for **technical tips** to improve my reference recording, but I didn't get very detailed answers because many people to whom I asked were not sufficiently prepared on the topic.

This is the document I've used to contact the people and ask their feedback about my first reference recording:

For my master research I'm working on a way to compose music based on pre-recorded samples, taken from every-day acoustic situations. That means: to use fragments of recordings of "normal" sounds that we have around us every day (like traffic sounds, speaking voices, machines around us, steps, nature... all those sounds we usually don't classify as "music" but as "background" in our lives) and create some music from the interpretation of them, as an interaction (more or less controlled) of music and samples. And more: how can I use this in order to share a specific message (ideas or thoughts on a specific topic) with my audience?

In short, my artistic research will try to answer the following question: how can I enhance my compositional practice creating a "hybrid" performance of music and tapes of pre-recorded acoustic sounds?

In order to develop my research in a thorough and complete way, I need to collect some feedback: for this reason I ask you to answer some questions that I hereby list.

Important: if you can, try to be as specific as possible; vague answers don't help me that much. Be also honest: if I asked especially to you it means that especially your opinion is relevant for my research. If you

don't know what to answer, don't do it; answer what you can and, if possible, send me your feedback before November 5th (but the sooner the better for me). You can do it the way you prefer: vocal message, text message, phone call, write me a letter, do what you want (but do it).

- 1. What comes up in your mind (if something comes up) related to this topic? Which artists do you know (if you know) who used something similar for an artistic project in the past?*
- 2. What is your favorite sound or noise? Why? (Any sound works).*
- 3. What do you think an audience usually expects from a musical performance and what doesn't expect?*
- 4. As a listener/audience, which topics or messages would you like to be addressed in a musical performance? (Or no topic at all?)*

Now watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDj5IFmiCl4>

- 5. Do you think the message was clear?*
- 6. What did you focus on more, between music, words and video (in percentage)? Do you think it was a good balance?*
- 7. Can you think of a way to improve the interaction of my music with the samples (and video)? (Do you think it needs to improve?)*
- 8. Other thoughts?*

Thank you for your time and your attention, you'll probably be mentioned among the people to thank when I'll be presenting the results of my research in one year and a half. I mean, only if you answer good of course eh eh.

Ciao!

In the end, despite the amount of information I got from this survey, I didn't focus on it too much, because I deemed it not so relevant, and I preferred to spend more time and attention on the interviews with experts and other types of analysis and experiments.

But it was quite fun.

Appendix 4: Transcription of interviews

1. Interview with Paul van Brugge, main subject teacher

My interview with Paul gave me a lot of interesting inputs to focus on and think about.

First I asked him for references, names of artists who can be related to the topic of my research and that could be interesting and useful for me to explore: "You already mentioned a very important one, JacobTV, but there are more of course. One is Yannis Kyriakidis. I think that you would also find a lot of examples of that in contemporary opera, for instance Richard Adams, or Bertold Brecht together with Kurt Weil. Maybe you could also talk with Robin de Raaff, he is really into writing musical theater where he combines pre-recorded tape material with acoustics."

Then I asked him a more specific question related to the aspect of the "message" that I want to include in my research. We had already talked about this in a previous lesson, in which we focused on the difference between 'message' and 'meaning' and about writing music according to an artistic concept. I find this aspect very important to me as a composer, but (also because of the feedback I got so far)

sometimes I start wondering if the message is really *that* necessary. Maybe I can just write music that I like because I want to share the beauty of it?

This is what Paul said: "To write music to share the beauty of it is also a concept. Take care with the word 'message'. I think 'idea' is a much better word. But the pursuit of beauty, for you as a composer, to share with the audience, is not at all contradictory with what you hated in the music that you were listening to [when you're at a concert and they play one tune after another and you don't even know what they are about]. Because the only thing that is happening there, why they do what they do, is to fulfill their aesthetic needs, and that's not enough! So if you say 'Do I need a message or an idea behind it other than just fulfilling aesthetic needs?' Then I would say 'Yes of course you do!' Because, as a composer, you use music to express something which is an outside musical element. Or not, if that's the case. But then you shouldn't complain about all the concerts that you were at and that you didn't understand what was happening.

Stravinsky said 'Music has no meaning other than the music itself' but you could argue about it and you could agree with him. I would say music can trigger a meaning that is already present in the head of the audience, and the composer can deliberately try to trigger, in many heads of the audience, the same already existing elements. That's an interesting thing. So it means that you're not God in exactly producing the same thoughts or feelings in everybody's heads, but you can do an attempt to make something clear, other than what the music is (which is just an organization of sounds).

So how does the meaning that you want to be included in the music resonate in the brain of the audience? And this resonance you can steer by various aspects. Maybe in your case you can steer that resonance with something that is already present in the brain by using samples from pre-recorded sound sources."

I personally think that it's very nice that everyone in the audience can have their own interpretation of what I play. And that's ok, the thing is that there should be *something* that they can interpret.

"There is one thing that is different, that is your intention and the result of that intention in an audience's brain. So, if you would be able to influence the perception of the audience in the direction of what you think it's important to share, I think you have a powerful tool there. But for some people that is a dangerous thought. Because it can be used to, for instance, indoctrinate the audience with certain ideas. Like they did in totalitarian regimes with their music. Yet every composer would like to share an emotion with an audience. So if you write based on a certain event or emotion, something that is really fulfilling and significantly important for you, it is clear that you want to share that with an audience. But the risk is of course that they do not understand at all what you mean. Specifically if you use musical gestures, that are abstract in the listeners' mind. They do not relate to certain gestures that they already know as connected to that emotion or that idea. And the question is 'How far prerecorded music samples - whatever - can help you define that direction?' But I think it's a very valid question for any composer, to say 'do you really want that?' Suppose that you would have the power to really influence the perception of the audience into a one possibility only. So let's say: I make a composition with piano music about the grief that I feel with the death of my mother, and I know exactly, by doing some things, that you will perceive the same emotion. It's too much! It's scary. So what you want is to give a direction to something in the audience's mind. But not to per sé have the audience perceive it in the same way that you meant it. Now, every composer will have a different opinion about it. And I'm sure that JacobTV doesn't use these things to give only one interpretation by the audience. And that's good.

Connect it to the rhythm of a poem, connect it to looking at a film, connect it to watching a dance performance, connect it to reading a book. There is the anecdote of what the writer shares with you, but the connection to your deeper aspect of soul is very private. Everybody understands probably all the details of the novel, and what everybody experiences in that novel, but the mirror, the reflection in the brain of the listener or in the brain of the reader is a completely private one. So this writer can be really ambiguous in the meaning of what he writes. His intention can be underneath a layer of anecdotic things, and that is the same with music. On top, it expresses this and that, but if you go two layers deeper it is connecting to something completely different in an audience's mind. If you drink wine, you can use it to quench your thirst, but under it there's a world that you can experience. That's the same with music. You can enjoy listening to it, but underneath the meaning is perceived as completely private. And that's the beauty, of course, of art.

So I think the way to deal with this is to ask yourself the sub-question: 'what is art?' - not to give an answer to it, but to understand what is the artistic value of music that is not entertaining, not putting an exclamation mark, not programmatic but raising a question mark. Make a distinction between music which has a meaning that should lead to a common meaning in all the heads of the audience - and that's very interesting, go to Shostakovich, go to political music from the 30's in Italy: the fascist music, where not only the lyrics were politically meaningful but also the music had a certain tendency of conveying a one-sided meaning, that is 'Italia, grande Italia'. We had the same here in Holland, and in Germany, and in Russia, and in China: I think it would be good to relate it to something where the music actually intended to have only one meaning. And what it meant for the composers, technically, how to compose that. As opposite to a more democratic and free approach, where it is just the authentic exclamation of the individual composer, not interested in any resonance in any audience's mind. But just doing it for himself. So you have complete freedom, complete openness, then you go in to be able to communicate with your audience, and then you go in putting one message to your audience. That's the whole round. And that's an interesting array to be in.

By the way, most jazz music had only one purpose to put in the mind of the audience, and that was 'start dancing!', nothing else. It became political in a later state, it became literature in an even later state, it became protest even in a later state, with all the guys from the free jazz. Eric Dolphy: his music is a protest against white power. But now we listen to it as 'wow man, listen to him playing!'. We don't have that connection, that connotation anymore. So be very specific about what you need and what you want. But I agree with you, it's really interesting. And I think it's really worthwhile to investigate that with different points of view.

Kurt Weil with Bertolt Brecht: they made musical theater in the 30s in Germany; when Hitler was rising they made musical theater that was only for one thing: it was breathing liberation. So a very clear message in everything that they did. I don't know if it's to you interesting for musical reasons, but maybe you should not take that into consideration, maybe you should just take the intention of the composer. Third symphony of Beethoven: it was an ode to Napoleon. Now, if we listen to the music, there is no way that we think of that, but it was. And it was really really powerful. Messiaen: he made music in praise of God. Bach didn't do anything else.

Meaning in relation to music is from centuries here."

2. Interview with Simone Bottasso, musician

For the second interview I talked with Simone Bottasso, an Italian composer based in Rotterdam. Codarts alumnus, he's a very curious and experimental musician, as well as a good friend of mine. I asked him for references and tips on the topic of my research and this is what he said:

"The first thing that comes to my mind [related to this topic] are the *liscio* performances that we can see at *Legion Straniera* [patronal festival in the town he comes from, in Italy], in which maybe only the singer is playing while all the other instruments are in the tape, they are pre-recorded. That is also one of the practical uses that has been made in order to answer the question: "How do I give the effect of an orchestra if I have a lack of musicians?". This happened because these orchestras at some point could not survive anymore. Liscio orchestras were born in the '20s, while in other parts of the world there were for example tango ensembles or big bands in the jazz scene. In Italy we had this music that was very cool at that time, and very well executed, but later, instead of reducing the orchestras to smaller ensembles [that could survive more easily], they started playing with a tape of pre-recorded instruments. This didn't happen to jazz or tango.

I find this very interesting because I've always thought that if you can produce a sound with an acoustic instrument, you should have players doing that live, instead of "faking" it with a tape. But actually there are many examples of this, also in different music scenes, where your reasons are not musical but are more due to - for example - the need to spin a project maybe, or the fact of movement limitations so one has to rethink his project in a different way and therefore he does things like this. And of course the whole hip-hop scene uses tapes a lot, and I think it's also for practical reasons, if you have to produce tracks quickly and with little money. Maybe you don't find musicians to play your music because it's new, so you can decide to use samples.

Then, about other references, more contemporary, I think you already mentioned 'Chassol', who created something really cool and quite popular but not too contemporary. Otherwise 'Bang on a can' put on a beautiful show, no actually an album that they also performed live, that is called 'Field recordings', that is a nice album in which different composers were asked to write music using rediscovered sound fragments. For example I remember very well the one about the old man singing traditional Irish music (ddldldldl), but there are also other tracks with concrete music and they often show a video together. I saw this live years ago in Den Bosch and I was quite impressed by it."

Then I asked Simone: as a listener/audience, which topics or messages would you like to be addressed in a musical performance? (Or no topic at all?)

"I kind of like the variety of the fact that sometimes there is a topic and sometimes there's not, music can also exist "just" as sound, and I like that I don't have to find a reason why that thing has been done, but the reason is simply the search for sounds, being comfortable with those sounds, having a clear aesthetic for which what you do is coherent, at least for you."

In the end I asked him what his favorite sound is, and why.

"Yes, the sound I like the most is the *fujot* [specific little pan to eat *bagna cauda*, traditional food]. When you put the candle in it and the *fujot* becomes hot, then you put *bagna cauda* in it, that is a bit colder, and it all sounds 'schhscscsch' like that. White noise of *bagna cauda*."

3. Interview with JacobTV, composer

Q. Talking about your works with samples, what is the importance of the video in the performance? And what about subtitles? Are they just “functional” so they help people understand the message? And in this case, is the video a consequence of the need of showing subtitles? Or are they part of the performance as well? How?

A. The video adds to the understanding of the piece, for instance, the body language, or simply the combination and music + visual arts + lyrics. It’s like a poetic documentary. Subtitles were added because English is not understood in some countries.

Q. Using a sample track in a performance could, in certain situations, limit the freedom of the players and the possibilities of improvisation. Did you ever feel this?

A. Yes, I know this, a limitation, and it is part of the process, although there is now software in development where audio follows the performer.

Q. In your compositions for boombox you often “manipulate” the original track, for example with time stretching or chopping and looping very small fragments. How big and important is this part in the whole composition process?

A. The audio is just as important as the live instrument.

Q. And what comes first: the manipulated sample (to which you add instruments to “imitate” and interact with) or the music (so the track is manipulated in order to make it fit in a certain structure or to make it more musical)? Or do you develop both music and sample at the same time?

A. Yes, in the composition process the speech grooves are the leitmotifs for the music. I do not compose, I ‘find’.

Q. How’s (in general) your composing process for a piece with samples? (Main steps that you always follow, or no rules at all, what comes first and what comes later...)

A. First I find footage that is moving, exciting, then I decide to listen over and again to it, and decide if the audio footage:

1. has a semantic quality
 2. has a musical quality
 3. has an emotional quality
- (in any order)

Q. Which program do you use to work on the sample track?

A. Logic Pro

About the piece *Mountain Top*:

Q. Does the midi keyboard player read a melody (so with pitches and rhythm), or does he have a different kind of reference?

A. Yes, it contains both the ‘speech melody’ written out + the key to press.

Q. In addition, you decided to use one person for launching the samples through the midi keyboard. With the technology we have today, would you do the same? Or would you look for a solution more “technology oriented”? Why?

A. We still use Ableton Live, it is the only application to my knowledge which has this feature.

Q. Were there specific reasons for the choice of the line up?

A. Artistic reasons: I wanted the ‘message’ to come across. I needed a choir but not a whole orchestra, which would be bombastic. A percussion group would support the voices and the speech samples.

Q. During the composition process, how important is the chosen sample, inspiration-wise?

A. Very, very important, the only reason I write this music. I don't like fiction, (therefore I do not like opera for instance) I am only interested in non-fiction, in layers of reality. Therefore I composed *The News*, a reality opera.

4. Interview with Simone Sims Longo, musician

I'll show you a couple of things that came to my mind [about my topic]:

Fabio Cifariello Ciardi: Roman composer part of Edison Studio, a collective of composers created by RAI [Italian television] in the years between '80 and '90. This is a process a bit similar to what you're doing with the interviews, it reminded me that. He's a super cool composer who writes parts for acoustic instruments but he also made some more weird things for example using stock market data and real time changes... For me his works with video like this, where the video is all cut, I like them very much. Fausto Romitelli: he's another composer I like a lot for the way he analyzes the sound to transform it into music and vice versa, like a dialogue, it reminds me of spectralism. He's considered among the Italians spectralists but he actually made a lot of other stuff as well.

Who are spectralists?

They're part of a French movement whose main exponent is Gerard Grisey for contemporary music, that uses the spectrum to compose. The idea is: I record a sound environment that I like, or some sound in nature or in general I start from the recording. Then there's a translation process made with FFT so basically you can identify which are the frequencies inside the spectrum. You make a sort of radiography of the sound (frequencies-wise) and you can understand the components of that sound. So they recorded something, then "took out" the frequencies of that recording and assigned notes to them. So instead of creating, "thinking" the composition, they just used the frequencies that were already there. This thing is then converted into written music. This is the generic process behind this movement but everyone developed it in a different way. So "spectralism" because it is based on the analysis of the spectrum.

Fausto Romitelli was an important Italian composer, he worked a lot with videos as well; this is his last work before he died, it is quite dense [...] It is quite abstract but the tape is actually fixed. About your works with video, I would go on in the same direction: in my opinion it's way more effective a simple video like the one you use, with a lot of cuts, instead of an attempt to create a more complex audio-visual performance based on more elaborated video techniques without having the experience and knowledge for that.

So, since I'm trying to work without click and launching the audio material through for example a midi controller while I play, do you think also the video can be treated the same way?

Yes I think so, that way you're more free.

And this I do it with Ableton?

Yes, you can do it with Ableton, but you also need Max. [we watch part of my video at the Work In Progress concert in Codarts on November 23rd, 2022. I play a solo piece with electronics and I launch vocal samples through a midi controller.] Yes the best would be if you could launch the fragments with your sticks. There are two drummers that come to my mind, which have very nice solo projects. One is "Khompa", he has an audio/visual project in which video and lights are all triggered by his playing. In this case I think he doesn't use a midi trigger but he uses microphones, and with a Max patch he controls the amplitude so when he reaches a certain level in amplitude the scene changes, I think. Basically he uses

the amplitude as a trigger. He made several videos, but all in this direction. In my opinion this system he build is very cool because that way he can interact directly with his instrument.

So here each note is different and it depends on the intensity he hits the drums?

Yes, well, that triggers something, then the software generates a sequence of notes, but he makes that start. Obviously it's everything a bit "pre-composed" but it works, it's similar to the way I work too.

The other drummer is Andrea Belfi, he's also Italian but he lives in Berlin, there are many videos of him [we watch something]. He also has a solo project, I like him very much, and also his albums are very nice and built the same way as his live performances.

He has no triggers though. It's all in the SPD.

No, indeed. He always works with this - let's say - "iper-instrument" that I think it's very cool, and you can hear it also in his albums, even if it may sound like it was made by layering. Of course there's some pre-composition here as well, but that's the approach.

Are there ways for Ableton to follow my tempo?

Yes, it's a new feature in Ableton 11

Have you already tried it?

It's this function called "follow"; but I've never explored that. You have to assign an audio input from your audio interface.

So I have to use a microphone only for that? But that can also be a bad microphone from a shitty brand, right?

Yes, of course, connected to your audio interface. I just don't know how precise Ableton is, following you. [we make some attempts with hand clapping and the laptop microphone] I think he makes an analysis... he probably has to capture a certain amount of hits. But it's an interesting option. I don't work with click so I usually don't need this kind of feature.

About volumes [in a live situation]

Unfortunately when you have your sounds coming out of speakers it's difficult to manage it... unless you have a person who knows your music and follows you. In general, 80% of it is the sound engineer's work.

I could also control the volumes of the different samples with the knobs on my controller, but I didn't, because I was already launching them and playing...

No, indeed, I think it's better to have ONE volume similar more or less for all the samples, so the sound guy can make his balance during the soundcheck, and you can check if you like to or not. Because if you start changing volumes, then he has to follow you somehow, and that can be problematic. Otherwise, you can control the dynamics directly with your pads, using the velocity.

Yes I know this, but I thought it was more convenient to have all the fragments with a fixed volume.

Yes it probably makes more sense if you use an instrument that you can control in the same way you play (a drum pad instead of a controller). Also, for the click, it's more convenient for you to use the click inside Ableton [instead of creating a click track with midi sounds], because in this way you can map scenes with different tempos.

So this can also be one of the parameters I can map to my controller...

Exactly. That way you can use a different output that goes to your earphones and only you will hear it, while on the main output you send the whole session. The only thing is that to change tempo you have to launch the whole line; if you launch one single clip then tempo stays the same. So you have to find a way to launch it from here [...] If you want fragments to follow your playing you need to activate the 'warp' function. For that you need a marker. You usually have more than one because Ableton tries to identify the tempo with them. But you can also add a marker and change that. Also because when you import a sample Ableton sets a default tempo of 120, if you know the tempo and it's different, you have to specify that. If you put the right tempo and give it a marker, then it follows you.

Another nice thing that could be useful for you is to use random possibilities for the launch of certain clips. So: you can program it in a way that after one bar Ableton goes to the following scene. You give the tempo and it will do that for sure. Or, you can say: there's 50% possibilities that after this you go to the next scene, or you don't go. Then it's random, and it's nice for a musician to be surprised by the machine. In this case you can also create a session where you can improvise with the machine, almost like if it's a musician as well. And this goes to each single clip (not to the track): each clip has this option 'follow/action' and when it's on you see you have these options: either it stops or it goes to the next clip, or the previous one, or the last one etc etc and you set the probability, for example 100% means it goes for sure to the next clip. And here you set the number of bars.

I also wanted to ask you about sounds: I have this idea of using natural, or let's say acoustic sounds without modifying them because I want to preserve their meaning. Do you think it makes sense to search for certain sounds? And what advice would you give in terms of what microphones to use, how to approach the recording, and how to treat my recordings in Ableton?

Well, I think it's a nice idea to use the original sound and incorporate it into a musical context. It's actually the opposite of concrete music, which aims to destroy the source and make it unrecognizable. Instead, I think it's really cool to show the source. As for the equipment to use, you could start with a digital recorder that has a stereo recording technique, so you can capture a soundscape around you, also in terms of space. There are many on the market that use various techniques, such as mid-side or XY, like the classic zoom, or also the tascam... I think you can start with a first study phase on the sources you're interested in, using a recorder like the one you already have [a tascam]. If you record in windy areas, you may need a windscreen. The main problem with this kind of recorder is that when you record sounds with very low amplitude and volume, you have to turn up the gain a lot, which brings out the background noise, and that's the problem you might have. You can fix it in post-production, but that's a step later on.

What about binaural microphones?

Binaural microphones are a good option if you then listen with headphones; if you have speakers it's not the best because they try to recreate the human experience in listening. With speakers you can create a similar situation but since you never know exactly the distance between them, there's the risk that you'll have holes in the space. There are also techniques called 'trans-aural' which allow you to have a binaural mix inside the speakers but it's already quite a complex step. On the other hand, if you're interested in moving the sound inside the speakers you can use a classic 'panpot' in Ableton, and you also have some tools to make it random, like 'autopan'. Then there are also several softwares, also for free, one is developed by ZKM and it moves the sound within the space: it works quite good. Obviously in a live setting it becomes a bit heavy, but you can record the movement of the sound, and then send it stereo. In general, working with space is super cool, but it's an extra layer.

My suggestion for your tascam is to have: high sample rate (88000 or 96000), resolution 32 bit (float) or 24. That means that if you want to time stretch your tape, the sound is more detailed, you have more info.

The float allows you to keep peaks under control, it can save your recording if for example there's an unexpected sound event which brings a peak. Then there are many specific microphones for recording specific sound sources (for example water sound), but those need to be connected to a Zoom H4 (or similar). Many sound sources have very interesting timbres that you can capture with these microphones, but the audience usually doesn't recognise them anymore.

I think I first need to understand which sound I want to record, and later I would start thinking about equipment.

Exactly. And what I suggest is also to stop in one place. So that you have your soundscape, and that gives meaning to what you're doing, it's like you take a picture or re-create a sound environment. While if you walk around it gives a sense of movement. I think it's useful to set rules for yourself. Because often, you may not find interesting sounds. For example, you go to the mountains and you hear a marmot, but when you stop to record it, the marmot does nothing. So I think it's interesting to set rules like ok first I find a place I like, with interesting sounds, and then I decide a position, a set the gain and I give myself 10 minutes. For 10 minutes I don't do anything, I just listen. Maybe you end up with nothing, but then when you store the recordings you have coherence in what you did. While if you all kinds of different stuff, like 3 seconds here, then over there for longer, you won't be able to work with it. And it can be 10 minutes but also 5 or something else. And above all, I think it makes sense to give markers like saying: I recorded it with this technique (when you have more than one of course), in the location, at that time, So when you need the sound of a marmot in three years or five years, you can easily find it. You could also add the characteristics of that recording, because you may have a hard drive full of recordings and can remember the different things you did. Alternatively, another thing that can be useful and much quicker than a whole description is to take a photo of the place when you make the recording and attach it to the recording. That way when you open it, you remember it immediately.

Last question: once I have my sounds, how should I treat them in Ableton (or any other DAW) to have them clean and understandable?

Well, I think it really depends on the characteristics of the recording itself, and also on the sources you used. If it's a specific source close to you or if it's a complex soundscape, if there's wind, if the gain is low...There are many aspects which can affect the use of a recording. For sure the main tool to use is equalization, to fix some frequencies you don't like, to find a better balance in the spectrum.

One thing you could do, if you want to characterize the whole recording, is to use a common equalization or to use a common space, like a common reverb, very light. In Ableton you also have this convolution reverb, that could be interesting for you: you can choose a sample with specific characteristics of a room or a space. Then you can create a convolution of this space that is significant for your whole storytelling, and apply that same reverb to all the other recordings. You choose a "reference" sample, let's say.

So I can use a specific sample not in my performance but just to create this common soundscape for all the other samples?

Exactly, let's say for example if you want to talk about 'resistance' [that was my first idea of topic to develop], and you find something that could be characteristic regarding history like let's say the partisans' cabin. If you can enter that cabin and do some tests, if you can make the convolution it could be interesting. However, if you then mix external and internal sounds it might not work that well.

Talking about videos instead, since I don't know much in that field, do you think it would be better for me to cooperate with a video maker or visual artist?

Well, in my opinion yes, but you should find someone with whom you can build a good working relationship, and that's not easy at all. First of all, you have to find someone whose aesthetics you like, because it will be very defining for the work, so you really have to embrace their aesthetic, which is not easy at all, in fact, it's one of the biggest problems with collaboration. So on one hand yes, and absolutely no on the other hand. I mean, I haven't found anyone I like and who has ideas to develop things together for example, so at a certain point I thought ok I'm going to learn a few things on visuals and I gradually started working on it... But that doesn't mean you have to be independent on everything. Maybe you could start with a collaboration and then gradually try to understand how to move aesthetically on what you like or don't like to do. But I often appreciate simplicity instead of trying to layer too much. Sometimes that's not necessary, for example in your composition [my reference recording] there's an important related dialogue and a synchronicity is created, that really allows you to have a higher level. Nowadays we're bombarded with videos all the time, but it's not telling anything, if there's not a dialogue between image and music. And that's the hardest thing to find, because then a lot of audio/video stuff becomes the classic DJ thing, you know...I don't know if that's still necessary, maybe sometimes it's better to simply remove something. So having a strong dialogue or nothing.

If I control my video through an SPD or triggers, or in general through my playing: in that case do I need a video maker when I work on the video?

Yes and maybe also during the live performance, because you can trigger it but he/she can control other parameters. Because maybe you trigger the signal in order to have synchronicity but he can manage other things live. But it's not so easy to find visual artists or directors with a vision for live performance. Because often you either find a director who does really cool things and puts them together, or you find the techno DJ who launches stuff behind you and that's it... Then, there are others, for sure, which can prove me wrong, but I think in the last few years there has been a little general upgrade, but the video was always very behind the audio for many aspects of the performance. But still when you combine them, the visual always becomes the most important thing.

In order to control any external element besides samples (like videos but also lights), in that case I need Max, right? Ableton is not enough?

No, indeed. You need extensions or other softwares.

Everything that's not audio needs Max?

Yes, Max or other softwares. Max works nicely because it is well integrated within Ableton and it's simple, working with videos is easy. There are also developers who sell patches for very little, with videos but not only. But actually there are other softwares that you can connect to each other, for example I also use this one called 'MadvMapper' for the visual, and it works very well with Ableton too. So I use both Max and MadvMapper, to spread the actions and keep the whole setting lighter.

And you don't need to learn the whole Max programming language, in my opinion. Once you know the graphical interface of Ableton and you know what you need, you can just look for what interests you. And then, you can rely on someone else to develop what you need, and you become the user of the instrument, not the luthier, the instrument maker, otherwise you'll go crazy. Programming with Max is not difficult, but if you start from zero and you have no idea how to do things, you'll waste a lot of time trying to understand the language, and you'll have less time for your research. It's a bit like starting to build your own percussion instruments: you play them, you don't have to build them. So I think when you've figured out what you need, you can text me and we'll find the right tool to interact with the video.

Programming in Max is simple because it's based on objects. You already have audio effects or instruments already built and available in Ableton. But the cool thing is that you can open every effect and see how it has been programmed and you can also modify that to your specific needs. If you open it and unlock it, that becomes your programming space. Then you can save it with a different name and it's yours.

So Max works mainly to 'personalize' effects, right?

Exactly. You can personalize effects or other things you need in Ableton, that maybe Ableton doesn't do, but basically nowadays with Ableton and Max you already have everything. For example if you need to trigger videos, I never did that but for sure if you search online you find that is possible.

So you never create an effect from zero...? You just modify?

I create something from zero if there's not, if I need something that really doesn't exist (yet) then I create that. But really, there's a huge amount of possibilities already. For sure someone developed Max patches for triggering videos. In general, I think it's easier to create a patch when you have an aesthetic idea of what you want, because in itself you can do anything. Sometimes it's better to make mistakes, proceed maybe in a rough way, but then achieve your artistic goal rather than getting lost in the software and possibilities.

5. Interview with Antoine Pierre "Vaague"

Q. The use of electronic tools (sensory percussion triggers in particular) can affect not only the playing but the composition process as well. How did you experience this? How was your creativity affected?

A. It was mainly a positive thing as it broke with everything I knew before. Since I was used to writing down music on paper and having it played by other people as well, the position you take is much different. In a way, I've always seen composition as another instrument that you have to practice. In my opinion, when you write something, that composition is yours until you play it for the first time and then that song belongs to everybody in the band, then to the audience that listens to it and so forth.

When I started making Vaague, that world was shaken up as it felt that my music was mine to make up until it was heard by an audience. That's been (and still is!) hard for me: you're only one person to have an inside opinion of the material.

That would be for the artistic point of view. From a technical aspect though, it's just another way of practicing the instrumentS (drums and composition). I see it as jamming with myself first, trying out some samples and messing around with them, essentially building a new drum kit with let's say chords, bass notes, perc sounds etc. Then I'm able to come up with dozens of possibilities for that kit. Then it's a matter of making choices, which I'm honestly not really good at haha!

Q. You mainly create your samples from zero, instead of using the existing presets. What guides you in this process? Do you 'just' work on sounds, and create a sort of sample library you can use later on, or you already have in mind how to use a sample when you create it?

A. That kind of decision comes from the fact that I can get really obsessional when it comes to artistic endeavors. I wanted to create a project that was reflecting myself 100%, so I thought making the

samples myself made sense. I never was a huge nerd on the computer or trying to find THE perfect oscillation for a bass note for example; but I had so much time on my hands during Covid that I started engaging in this sampling process of sampling 1h every morning. Could be from records, audio files from my phone, field recordings etc. I have about 10Go of self-made samples. The funny thing is I probably used up to 10% of it so far and I keep on sampling things! Haha.

When I sample, I usually try to look at it from different ways: the longer the sample, the more possibilities later on in the process (using slicers, LFO's, pitch variations etc). But sometimes, I like to have really short samples to use as a percussive sound, then adding them up to stack or to make cycles for instance. I try to re-use samples throughout songs to have somewhat of a resonance in the repertoire. It's such an interesting process!

Q. How is the music you write connected to the samples you choose? The bpm, the harmonic structure, the drums sounds or let's say instrumentation, the 'mood': are these consequences of the samples you have? Or, are the choices of the samples dictated by the acoustic possibilities you already have? What comes first?

A. I don't really know to be honest! Like I said, it's more of a « jam » oriented process. Sometimes a sample will inspire me to play a specific BPM. However, it sometimes happens that BPM slips to something faster or slower depending on how I feel about it. That's also the beauty (and the difficulty!) of this way of using samples: you don't have a click track that you have to refer to. My main modus operandi I would say, is to drag and drop samples onto different zones of the drums (ex. center snare, kick, rim tip etc) and see what comes out of it. Sometimes, if I like it, I copy-paste that kit and switch everything around, to see if it's even better! Sometimes, you get nice surprises.

Q. There are a few vocal samples in your piece *Shaades*: where do they come from? How much of the music in that specific track came as a consequence of those samples? Do you consider those samples as part of the background of the piece, like an effect, or as the 'lead' part?

A. Those samples come from an interview from Toni Morrison. At the beginning of the process, I was really into chopping speeches from people I look up to. You have to remember it was in the midst of Covid, everybody was completely disoriented with what was happening and I felt a desperate need to find answers to my many questions about society in those speeches (Morrison, Albert Camus, James Baldwin,...). I've always been drawn to politics and always found it super important as an artist to get knowledge about what's going on. *Shaades* was one of the first songs that stood out in my eyes and I needed something deeply emotional to me to be part of this music.

So to me, these samples are not considered « lead » per se but more as central samples upon which the topic of the song is based. Looking back at it though, I don't think I would use it the same way today! But that's also the beauty of time, it goes forward <3

Q. In your music you use a lot of repetition, both in the groove and in the harmony. How much of this is an artistic choice related to your specific style and how much is a consequence of technical issues you can have being a one-man-band?

A. Really interesting question! Actually, this comes more from a lot of discussion I had with a group of people that I call «the Jury» ;) = this group of people consists of both musicians or non-musicians friends that I trust 100% when I send them my stuff. They are the most brutally honest

people I know and they will not make any compromise in their opinions (by the way this can be a very tough process!).

Anyways, at the beginning, I was kind of going everywhere with this project: because of the technological challenge and my jazz DNA, I wanted to export my ways of composing into that field. It kind of interfered with the vision I wanted to pursue to be more « to the point » as I was listening to more and more electronic music and couldn't really see why my music was hardly going to be in that same pot. What came out of these discussions was a better (I think!) understanding of what drums meant to me. How rhythm can be used to level up a trance or how can I make something so interesting in its simplest way that you'd want to listen to it for 4 minutes straight.

I believe I haven't achieved that goal and that might be a lifetime's work but at least, what's been released so far is my attempt to reach that point, and that's fun to listen to (at least to me :D). But, to actually answer your question in a more pragmatic way: it was easier for me to make music with barely any repetitions and a lot of stuff in it than the other way! Go figure!

Q. Do you feel comfortable working with the sensory percussion software, or did you find your own way to program your set through other softwares (like Max)? What do you think of that? And why? Or do you use a 'hybrid' setup with multiple programs communicating with each other (Ableton + Max or Ableton + sensory percussion, other combinations...)? How does the software you use affect your composition process? (Does it?)

A. Well, actually, I should answer the other way around: I suck so much with computers that Sunhouse is the only software I somewhat «master». I do work my way around Logic (just like your average teenager in his room) but I haven't figured out Ableton and God Forbid Max! Truth is computers frighten me so much that I felt the need to get closer to them. I guess it's Stockholm Syndrome right there! For years I wanted to find a way to play a drum solo that wasn't only about drums. I tried analog systems such as pedals and keyboards, but I wasn't feeling that excited. Sunhouse and a lot of time during Corona seemed to be the perfect mix to start that process.

I don't know if I can offer any insight about what to do, but I guess what I will say is exactly the same as I tell students when they ask me what grip they should use for their stick: you gotta find what works for you ;)

Q. Do you think having the possibility of mapping and triggering samples on the spot gives us (drummers) more freedom in our playing or the opposite? Why? How does this affect your playing?

A. Answer is «yes, IF». Yes, if that's what you want to do. Personally, I need constraints to be creative. If too big a world opens up before my eyes, I'm gonna stay right there and wait for the night so I can't see everything and I can go a little more blindsided. I guess, in other words, I mean that I need to be able to go really slowly about such a research and find ways to go step by step.

As for the playing, I think it's a different question in my opinion. My playing in VAAGUE differs a lot from not playing in VAAGUE. The reason for it is that I'm not only a drummer but also « a computer tamer ». It's like this nasty 01010101010-beast with a screen is sitting next to me trying to drive me crazy. But when I know how to use it, she's the best companion ever. You have to play like a programmer: know that you can always try something new and that something might be a bug, but that bug can also be a blessing. Sorry to be that philosophical with it! But it really is to me. I've had many situations where I

wanted to quit this project because of all these bugs or fuck-ups I had while playing live, removing all the fun from it... Yet, there's this thing that pushes me to keep on going further and explore. That's the blind-sided thing I was mentioning.

Q. Have you ever tried to trigger visuals or lights other than samples, with your playing? What do you think of that?

A. I did, in the very beginning and that timeframe was a mistake. I think those possibilities are enormous and I wish I could do that soon, but I wasn't ready to face the tremendous amount of programming and preparation you need for that.

What I can tell is that, if you find the right person to help you towards that quest, that's amazing. We've had moments in the beginning where lights would move according to what I played but in order to make it properly working, I'd need 5 more years as well as 30.000 \$.

Q. Which artists do you find inspiring for the way they combine samples with acoustic and electronic sounds and why?

A. Ian Chang is a great example, really tasty and pushed Sensory Percussion to another level. I love Adam Betts, who drummed for SquarePusher, not using SP but really pushed things as well!

Appendix 5: Transcriptions, (annotated) scores, analyses

Mountain top full annotated score: [02 Mountain Top \(JacobTV\) Notated score](#).

Pasta - soundscape with horns: [07 Soundscape with horns on Pasta - Transposed score](#)

Pasta - loops: [09 Loops on Pasta - Score](#)

Compromise - time stretch: [11 Time stretch on Compromise - Score](#)

Compromising for what?: [14 Reference recording 02 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Compromising for what?\) - Transposed score](#)

Spiaggia 2: [21 Spiaggia 2 - first score](#)

Spiaggia 2 - hidden pulse: [22 Spiaggia 2 - hidden pulse](#)

Spiaggia 3: [25 Spiaggia 3 score](#)

Inverno - sketch: [29 Inverno - sketch](#)

Inverno: [30 Reference Recording 03 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(Inverno\) - score](#)

I never lie: [39 Reference Recording 04 \(Agnese Valmaggia\) \(I never lie\) - score](#)