

Meik

for two performers

Stephen F. Lilly

(2021)

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Written for Mike Boyd and Robin Meiksins

Program Note

Meik was written in the second spring of the 2020-21 pandemic, so it was originally conceived for virtual performance. The piece therefore revolves—quite literally—around the presence of a visual frame (as determined by the performers’ webcams). A graphic score is laid out as a circle that determines each performer’s changing relationship to the virtual frame—whether they are on- or off-camera and whether they look at or away from it—while performing. As the two performers negotiate their relationship to the virtual audience, they interact with each other by way of their simultaneous navigation of the gestural notations within the circle.

Performance Notes

- Avoid imitation.
- The score is read in portrait orientation but either one of the short sides can be the top.
 - The score can be flipped (i.e., turned upside-down) at any point.
- Each performance starts with any graphic gesture inside the circle.
 - The performers...
 - should independently choose their desired starting graphics.
 - can stagger their entrances or begin simultaneously.
 - complete their gestures independently.
 - should not synchronize anything other than the beginning.
 - snake through the gestures, each separated by any amount of silence.
 - progress only to adjacent gestures—avoid leaps across the circle.
- Frequency and time do not encompass the whole circle.
 - Frequency and time are local to each gesture.
 - i.e., they are independent of where the gesture falls within the circle.
- For each gesture, time can move either from left to right or right to left.
 - A gesture can last for any amount of time.
 - e.g., a centimeter on the page could be 1s or 60s in performance.
 - The timescale can vary from gesture to gesture.
 - There is no set speed (moving left to right or vice versa) for all gestures.
- For each gesture, frequency changes are represented vertically
 - e.g., a line that jumps up, could be a leap to a higher or lower frequency.
 - Dashed vertical lines indicate discontinuous leaps (i.e., non-glissando).
 - This does not necessarily imply that solid lines are always glissandi.
 - e.g., a solid line with vertical movement could be microtonal or scalar.
 - Like time, there is no set frequency-scale.
 - e.g., a centimeter could be a quarter tone or a whole step.
 - Frequency scale and range can vary from gesture to gesture.
- All gestures deviate from or around a focal point in frequency-space.
 - This focal point may be either...
 - an upper/lower/central frequency to which the gesture keeps returning,

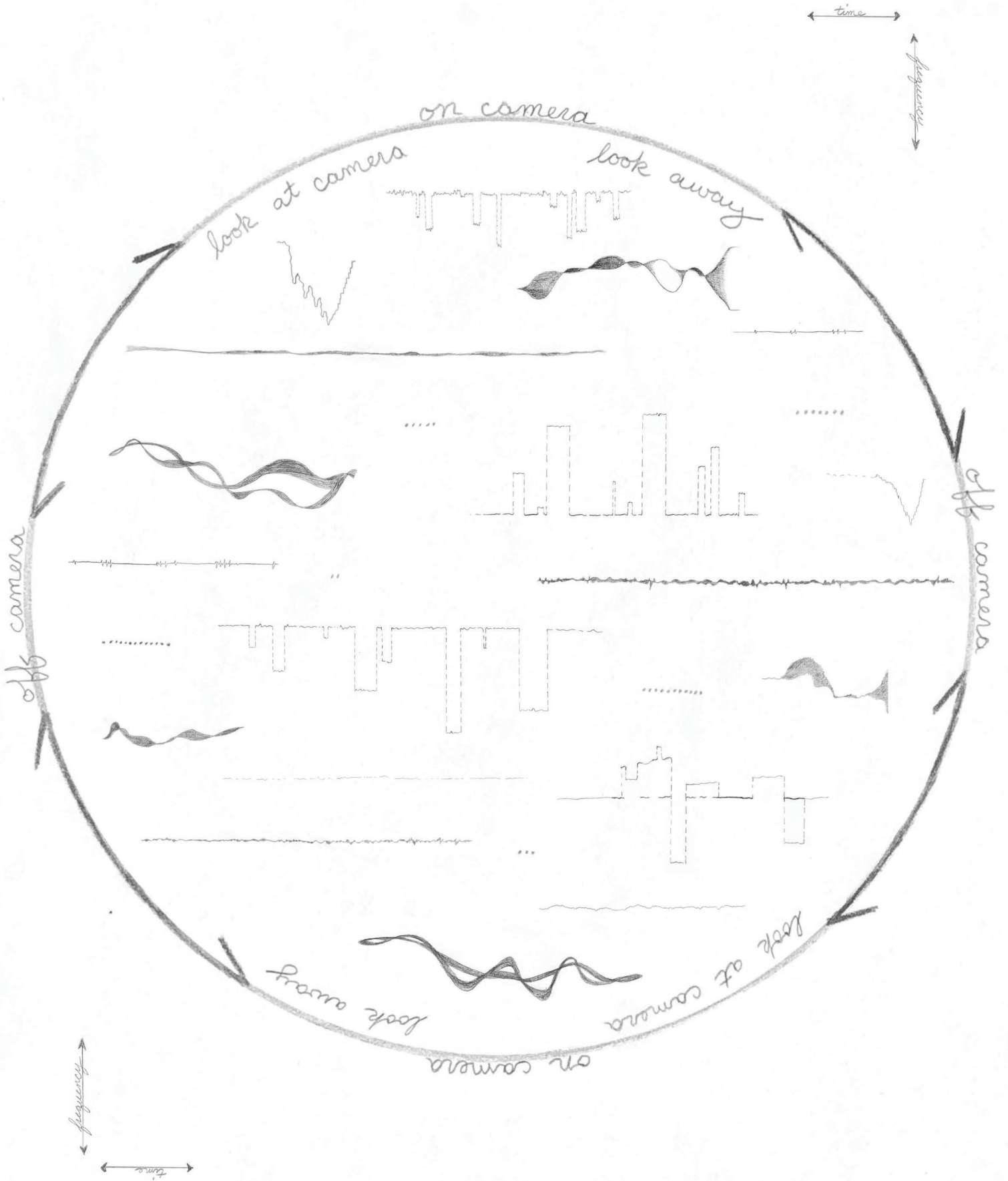
- or, in the absence of the above, the first frequency of the gesture.
- Here is an example of a possible gesture sequence with their focal points:
 - Gesture A at 444Hz, Gesture B at 444Hz, Gesture C at 444Hz, Gesture D at 444Hz, Gesture A at 700Hz, Gesture E at 444Hz, Gesture F at 444Hz, Gesture D at 700Hz, Gesture C at 700 Hz, Gesture A at 313Hz, Gesture G at 444Hz, etc.
 - *Refer to this example in the discussion below...*
- Over the course of a performance, gestures may be repeated as many times as desired.
 - Immediately repeating a gesture, with no intervening gestures, is frowned upon.
 - The first run through every gesture should have the same focal point.
 - Performers decide on the frequencies for their focal points independently.
 - The second run through every gesture should have the same focal point.
 - Each run-through should use a unique focal point.
 - Complete run-throughs are not required; Incomplete run-throughs are fine.
 - In fact, a performer can avoid one or more gestures entirely.
 - Run-throughs should intertwine.
- Shaded shapes are bands of noise or multiphonics with a great deal of distortion
 - e.g., difference tones, beating, roughness, etc.
 - Conversely, thin parallel lines imply clearer, “cleaner” multiphonics.
- The performers should react to one another, but precise coordination is not desirable.
 - Anything about the other’s performance can inform...
 - a performer’s own timbre and dynamic level and/or
 - the next gesture selected by a performer.
- Performers should vary their relationship to the camera.
 - These relationships are...
 - moving on-camera to off-camera and vice versa.
 - going from looking directly at the camera to looking away and vice versa.
 - The directions for this are found along the circumference of the circle.
 - Each performer decides how to relate the gestures to the circumference.
 - Transitions between positions should not always occur in-between gestures.
 - i.e., some transitions should occur while interpreting a gesture.
 - What one does during one run-through does not affect other run-throughs.
 - e.g., Gesture A could be on-camera the first time and off the second time.
 - When transitioning between on- and off-camera, exits/entrances should vary.
 - i.e., be done to both the left and right.
 - Ideally, exits and entrances would not necessarily be synced.
 - e.g., exiting left, the performer could re-enter on left or right.
- The piece ends after a preset duration.
 - The duration should be long enough to establish three or four run-throughs.
 - Again, run-throughs need not be complete.
 - Upon reaching the preset duration...
 - each performer finishes their current gesture.
 - lowers their gaze (if looking at camera).
 - walks off-camera (if on-camera).

Technology Notes

- Care should be taken to minimize amplitude ducking.
 - Most conferencing programs use ducking to suppress background noise.
 - e.g., in an application like Zoom...
 - Audio Settings—select the “low” option for “Suppress background noise.”
 - The use of headphones and an external microphone will also help.
- The application should also be set to capture/broadcast the best audio quality.
 - e.g., in an application like Zoom...
 - Audio Settings—“Enable Original Sound” option.
 - Setting “Enable Original Sound” to trigger “High fidelity music mode.”

Optional Variations

- Both performers perform live:
 - on-camera becomes in-front-of the audience.
 - off-camera becomes behind the audience.
 - Transitions between the two positions would be a bigger part of the performance.
 - The score could be projected rather than read from music stands.
- One performer performs their part virtually while the other performs in-person.



time

frequency

frequency

time