evan johnson

Apostrophe 2 (pressing down on my sternum)

for quarter-tone flugelhorn and alto trombone

© 2009 evan johnson

Apostrophe 2 (pressing down on my sternum) for quarter-tone flugelhorn and alto trombone (2009)
Duration: 6 minutes

Program Note:

This is an abbreviated, stunted, stifled, altogether more effortful sequel to the sixteen-minute Apostrophe I (All communication is a form of complaint) for two bass clarinets (2008). Apostrophe 2 scavenges most of its pitch, durational, and structural material from its predecessor, but the three smoothly connected sections of Apostrophe I are recast as floating islands of forced-out ornament, its prevailing air of lyricism and gentleness replaced by feebleness and strain. This is an athletic piece, a physical piece, whose discomfort and urgency are evoked by the subtitle; but there is still a kernel of lyricism, of a recognizable relation between ornament and melody, and of a welter of hinted-at canons, near-canons, and repetitions that attempts to manage the unmanageable whole.

Apostrophe 2 (pressing down on my sternum) was commissioned by the ELISION Ensemble and is dedicated to Daryl Buckley, Tristram Williams and Ben Marks, whose willingness to do anything is, I hope, not too severely tested herein.

Performance Notes

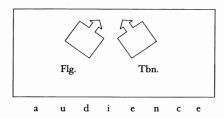
Both instruments use practice (whispa) mutes throughout, and all vocal as well as instrumental material should be performed through them. Ideally they should of noticeably different timbres (being made of different materials, for example).

The flugelhorn part was written for an instrument with a fourth valve that lowers the pitch by a quarter-tone. It can, in theory, be played on an unmodified instrument, but the rapidly moving quarter-tone pitches, whose relatively easy accessibility is exploited in the gestural shape of the part, must be delivered as fluently and flexibly as the "standard" pitches.

The trombone part is written for an alto instrument with no attachments.

Staging

If acoustically and logistically feasible, the two performers should be seated with their backs to the audience, toward the back of the stage, facing slightly towards each other, approximately thus:



This arrangement should result in a significantly more attenuated sound picture for the audience than the standard layout, about which see *Dynamics* below. It is also intended to further blur the boundary, from the audience's perspective, between vocal and instrumental material; to increase the sense of uncertainty about where in the collected musculature of the duo a particular melodic strand originates.

The intent of this disposition is thus primarily acoustical, and only incidentally "theatrical"; absolutely no gesture towards a "dramatic" situation should be inferred, nor should the (entirely secondary) visual dimension of this seating arrangement be unduly emphasized, exaggerated, or even remarked upon.

If this arrangement is not feasible for a given performance space or situation (as it may not be, for instance, if the performance is to be recorded), then a normal seating arrangement may be used.

Notation

Each instrumental part is notated on three staves: from top to bottom, throat and other "articulatory" material (**thr**), vocal material (**vox**), and material to be produced through the instrument in the traditional manner (**inst**).

N.B.: In the flugelhorn part, both vocal and instrumental lines are written in B flat – i.e. sounding two semitones lower than written.

Vocal Notation

The notation on the vocal staff requires explanation. In general, the vocal notation presents an *ideal* state of its material, the accurate representation of which by the performer is quite obviously impossible.

In particular, the vocal material as notated is *structural* information. Accuracy in performance is neither expected nor particularly desired, although it should be striven for to the degree possible. Rhythms and gestural shapes, specifically, should be as precise as possible, but the main function of the vocal material is to reflect, repeat, and transmute the instrumental material in a highly unstable, contingent, and above all *inaccurate* manner, while also creating a physical "filter" problematizing instrumental technique and tone. In other words, the overarching goal in the performance of vocal materials should be to maintain a sense of *gestural* give and-take, to set up, however futilely, an echo chamber and a semi-opaque filter simultaneously. Everything that appears in the vocal staff should be treated as a reflection of, if not a literal representation of, instrumental material that has been or will be presented, and the priorities for performing it should be based on that approach.

The pitch notation is notated unnaturally high to emphasize the following stipulation: all biocalizations are to be performed absolutely as high as possible, with "possible" taken in the broadest sense. The given pitches should be sung so high that whatever accuracy they may have had is severely compromised and unpredictably unstable, their timbre is essentially a whine, and the musculature of the throat is markedly distorted relative to the demands of the instrumental part. All vocalizations should be made through the instrument, even when there is no simultaneous instrumental activity, and hey should always be quiet and distanced enough that the audience might be unsure what it is they are a learing, if they are hearing anything at all, and, if so, where it is coming from.

The octave placement of the pitch classes in the vocal line is essentially arbitrary, although the contour of the line should be maintained as much as possible, especially where it forms a prominent part of a gesture (glissandi, for example, should not be taken in the direction opposite that notated). Lower bitches (those near the treble staff) should be taken with somewhat less tension and distortion of the musculature.

Pitches in the vocal line are notated to the quarter tone—in other words, with the same specificity is those in the instrumental line. They are given this way to emphasize correspondences with other pitch strata as an aid to interpretation, but of course complete accuracy in performance is not expected. Held vocal pitches should be as accurate as possible, but the pitch content of faster moving figures should be regarded as an ideal to be grasped for. Ideally they will come across, insofar as they are clearly audible at all, as vaguely tossed-out "sketches" of material more fully worked out elsewhere. The effect will only come across as intended, however, if accuracy is stringently striven for.

furthermore, if the spirit of (ι) above is adhered to, even the slower, held pitches will be subject to a harked uncertainty and unsteadiness of intonation. This is absolutely desirable.

Throat Notation

Most of the throat material is rhythmically dependent on either instrumental or vocal material. When this is the case, the articulation (or other related event: e.g., a cutoff) is connected to the (simultaneous) event in one of the other two staves by an interrupted dotted line extending upwards from the event in the other staff and downwards from the throat indication. (In other words, a dotted line extending upwards from a notehead in the vocal or instrumental staff is a "cue" that a matching, simultaneous event appears in the throat staff.) On occasion, however, throat notations will be independently rhythmicized.

Throat material (which may be more accurately called "throat and mouth material") takes two forms. One stratum concerns the throat growl and the fluttertongue, which are treated as variants of one another and as smoothly mutually transformable, although roughness and imprecision in that transformation are welcomed. The other involves noise (and instrumental "filtration") based on manipulations of the tongue and airflow, and is given with a small vocabulary of symbols borrowed from the International Phonetic Alphabet. These instructions are meant both to problematize the instrumental embouchure and, often, to produce an audible airstream noise.

Symbols

(See "General Notation" below for further symbols.)

The following symbols are used only on the lower portion of the throat-material staff.

Throat "growl" – intrusive, somewhat uncontrollable, noisy. (Appears only on the lowest line of the staff.)

Fluttertongue. (Appears only on the second-lowest line of the staff.)

(Circled versions of the above symbols indicate unusual intensity and volume; here, as elsewhere, parentheses indicate relative weakness.)

The following symbols are used in the upper portion of the staff, for phonetic or respiratory activity involving the oral cavity.

These symbols are IPA-derived:

[t] A forceful, audibly aspirated attack. An accent is implied.

Unvoiced velar fricative: press the middle of the tongue (behind the tip) against the palate (quite forcefully!) and force air past it to create a hiss.

Unvoiced alveolar lateral fricative: as above, except with the tip of the tongue pressed against the front of the palate. The resulting hiss should be noticeably lower in "pitch" than the velar version.

These two fricatives may be connected by an arrow, implying motion (as smooth as possible!) between them.

[tx], [ti] Either unvoiced fricative may also appear preceded by an aspirated attack; the transition should be as quick and smooth as possible.

These symbols have to do explicitly with audible respiration. All such respirations are symbolized by a diamond notehead with one of the following symbols attached:

N Exhale audibly through the nose.

Inhale audibly through the nose. (Interrupt simultaneous activity in other staves as little as possible; in particular, vocal material should be performed while inhaling!)

The following symbol may appear on a notestem alongside any other indication on the top part of the throat staff, respiratory or phonetic:

Perform the given action while inhaling.

Instrument Notation

As mentioned above, both pitch staves in the flugelhorn part are notated two semitones above sounding pitch.

Trombone "Tablature"

Sometimes figures (in brackets) will be given below the trombone pitch staff specifying slide position (I-VII) and partial (①-⑩). These figures are always connected by horizontal lines and both (including the partials!) are to be transitioned between as smoothly as possible, perhaps asynchronously (as indicated graphically and by dotted-line connections to rhythmicized events in the pitch staff proper).

In general, where "tablature" information contradicts the linked pitch information on the staff, every attempt should be made to keep as close to the notated pitches as possible. (This is particularly important in the common situation where the pitch remains constant while the slide position and partial number change.)

Symbols

(See "General Notation" below for further symbols.)

The following symbols are used only on the instrumental staves.

- (Flugelhorn only): half-valve. Create a "strangled," imprecise tone by partially depressing a valve of the player's choice.
- (Trombone only): around a stem: an "unfocused" tone, with loose embouchure (perhaps with lips encroaching into the mouthpiece).

General Notation

The following remarks involve notational conventions that are not specific to any particular staff.

Dynamics

The prevailing dynamic level, as noted at the beginning of the score, is *ppppp*. By *ppppp* is meant: extremely quiet to the point of *constant potential inaudibility*, and of potential distortion and insecurity of tone, embouchure, and breath, especially in the uppermost registers (where virtually the entire piece exists). The use of whispa mutes will make this effect easier to achieve, but they should not be relied on *entirely* for the quietness required.

(If the performers are seated with their backs to the audience, depending on the performance space, the concomitant reduction in overall dynamic level may allow for *slightly* more flexibility in terms of dynamic inflection while still remaining within the general parameters defined above. It will be necessary to experiment in a given performance space, whichever seating arrangement is chosen, to find a prevailing dynamic level that satisfies the above knife-edge conditions of permanent potential inaudibility.)

Occasionally in the score, in fine ink and parenthesized, are given momentary indications for small *crescendi* and *decrescendi*. These are to be taken as suggestive, at least as much "metaphorical" as literal, and by no means exaggerated so as to create, even momentarily, a significantly louder dynamic level.

"mf", "f" and "ff" are also used as an occasional indication as an accent, particularly on the vocal staves; this is a *forte* not of resultant dynamic but of effort, air production, and perhaps secondary noise (see below, under "General Notation").

The structural and gestural rhetoric of the piece, in other words, exists in a state of distortion in part precisely because of the extremely restricted dynamic range, and thus it is fundamentally important that performative license not be taken to create a more diverse and more flexible approach to loudness in this piece. Small, momentary shapings of the sort indicated in parentheses in the score (and not necessarily only there) are permissible and encouraged so long as they are subtle.

The whole piece, without even a momentary exception, should verge on inaudibility.

Slurs

Slurs in the score are impressionistic and vague, and their importance is as much in their suggestiveness as any specific information about phrasing or tonguing. (The import of the slurs is essentially that of the *prelude non mesuré* of the French Baroque.) The information about tonguing and articulation that slurs usually encode should be inferred by the performer based on the general impression given by the constellations of slurs, although more specific indications are occasionally given.

Bars and Meter

The time signatures in the score have absolutely no metrical significance. They are measures of structure and duration only; for instance, "downbeats" of new measures often correspond with the interruptive beginning of a repetition of just-heard material. Measures of identical duration—especially when they follow each other directly—are particularly transparent indicators of structural activity.

Most of the score involves asynchronous bar lengths between the two parts; moments (as occur towards the end of each of the three large sections) at which the instruments come together with a common barline are of particular structural significance and may be treated as such.

Bars are *numbered* with encircled figures between the instrumental systems, with a new number marking a barline in *either* of the parts. Thus the "measure number" count far exceeds the actual number of measures in either part taken individually, but they may be useful for purposes of rehearsal and coordination.

Rhythm

Throughout the score, there is a strict correlation between graphical space and absolute temporal duration (one eighth note = 28 mm). A preliminary sense of pacing, density and correspondence between and within the parts may thus be read directly off the score.

The rhythmic language of Apostrophe 2 (pressing down on my sternum) is extremely complex and detailed, but it is treated in a flexible, almost "improvisatory" manner, in which the tuplets that are in constant use throughout are not necessarily tied to a notion of referential pulse or overall duration but may be interrupted, overlapped, and otherwise compromised in their traditional integrity.

Rhythm: Tuplets

Accordingly, several specific notations are used to indicate tuplet-based rhythmic structures:

3f:2	A standard tuplet. Often, these and other derived tuplet forms will have a fractional duration (e.g. 5 eighths in the time of 5 2/3 eighths).

"Nested" tuplets, in which a tuplet of shorter overall duration exists in reference to a pulse already modified by an "outer" tuplet, are always connected in the score by an arrow, from "inner" to "outer" tuplet. Tuplets that are stacked vertically but not so connected always refer to different simultaneous rhythmic layers in a manner made clear by context.

(5:54s) <u></u> -/	"Incomplete" tuplets are always given with a double hash mark at the beginning
,	or end (depending on where the duration covered by the tuplet is, structurally
	speaking, "interrupted") and the ratio governing the tuplet in parentheses.
	If the actual duration governed by the incomplete tuplet is not
(4½T)	immediately clear from context, it is given parenthetically at the beginning of the

immediately clear from context, it is given parenthetically at the beginning of the tuplet bracket.

The common special case of an incomplete tuplet that only covers one event is shown by a bracketless ratio.

(General Notation - Rhythm: Tuplets, cont'd.)



Overlapping tuplets involve a total duration that is itself irrational (that is, fractional); the overall duration of these tuplets is given in terms of a common, if distorted, unit in a way that is clear from context (e.g., 3:"3", as seen here, means three sixteenths in the space of three "sixteenths," where some of the latter have a fractional absolute duration due to the tuplet that is overlapped.)

Because of the constellations of incomplete and overlapping tuplets that often have no particular relation to the barlines, there are often durations at the beginning or end of measures that are not straightforwardly notatable.



Pitches that are held for less than their notated duration due to a "premature" barline are given horizontal extensions ending in a vertical hash mark.



Occasionally a note will last slightly *longer* than its stated duration; these are given a horizontal extension adorned with a small fermata sign.



Rests that have less than their notated duration for a similar reason are parenthesized.

(•)----

Pitches that are to be held at the beginning of measures for "undetermined" durations are given in parentheses.

Superabundance of Material

Throughout much of the work, multiple rhythmic-melodic layers are in force simultaneously, so that multiple pitches must, ostensibly, be played at the same time.

Two distinct approaches to this pervasive situation are used in the score. Sometimes, a path through the multiple lines is explicitly given, via the following symbols:



Alternate between two or more "active" pitches loosely according to the graphical pattern and/or verbal indication (i.e. lento, irreg., etc.) given; a sort of wide, loose, quasi-improvisatory tremolo.



For two-pitch simultaneities: arpeggiate upwards or downwards, with relative leisure (like a slowish grace note).

More often, however, absolutely no guidance is given about how to negotiate this superabundance of material.

In these cases, every possible attempt should be made to convey all the material on the page, even though it is of course impossible to succeed in doing so. Suggesting multiple lines, subtly and almost inaudibly, with the voice, where it is not otherwise engaged (or in audible conflict with its other simultaneous allegiances); using parametric information from one line to inflect the pitches and rhythms of other(s); and a gentle, momentary, "ornamental" alternation or traversal of multiple simultaneous paths are all encouraged. In absolutely no case should the performer ignore the presence of material on the page even if it is not literally playable – it must be "communicated." "Improvisation" on the given materials is not permissible.

It is also the job of the performer in these passages to *project* (not in any overtly theatrical or satirical manner, but through the choice of playing techniques and through the force of the *attempt* to succeed) the situation, i.e. that there is material not being played, that there is *too much* for the performer to deal with in these passages.

Where material is repeated in the course of these passages (in particular at the end of each of the three large sections of the piece) it is not necessary that the performer treat the recurrences identically each time, though the performer may deem it desirable to a greater or lesser degree.

N.B.: The presence in the score of these impossible situations, and the approximation and accommodation required and expected in performance of these situations, does not imply that a similar approximative approach is expected with regard to aspects of the score that are merely very difficult. In these situations accuracy should always be striven for.

Symbols

The following symbols may appear on the vocal or instrumental staves.

A smooth trans

A smooth transition between states.

Pitch

Q Q

Quartertones. Only quarter-tone (as opposed to three-quarter-tone) accidentals are used, for the sake of convenience; as a result, no enharmonic significance should be attached to the spelling of quartertones.

}

Other pitch variations, in the trombone part, are given using arrowheads affixed to accidentals; these may refer either to "out-of-tune" natural harmonics or merely a more vaguely defined deviation from tempered pitch.

Ornament



Grace notes should, unless explicitly marked otherwise, be played in a relatively relaxed, flexible manner, without undue sharpness or "energy."

Grace notes are to be played before the beat unless otherwise specified.



If a trill note is not given with this indication: a more-or-less regular "shake" with the embouchure, perhaps with a slight (no more than a quarter-tone) variation in tone with the main pitch readily identifiable.

If a trill note is given: a normal trill.



An extremely subtle, ornamental rearticulation of the main pitch or glissando, perhaps perceptible more as a "fluttering" than as a full-fledged rearticulation. As little additional breath as possible should be involved; by no means equivalent to *smorzato*.



Improvise a brief, diatonic or quasi-diatonic ornament based on and ending with the given pitch. The little ornament does not need to be related to a traditional "mordent," but it should be relatively (relatively!) quick and energetic, as if "thoughtlessly."

Without a slash: a more leisurely, less "sharp" or energetic version of the above.

(n)

Parentheses applied to ornament, accent, or any other symbols (including noteheads) represent a more modest, more incidental, subtler version of that event. Double parentheses: more modest still.

Articulation and Timbre

^	A noisy, "airy" tone; if in the vocal or instrumental staves as a fully specific notehead: with somewhat recognizable pitch content.
	Dotted ties represent a midpoint between tielessness and solid ties in terms of the prominence and definitiveness of rearticulation of the second note, perhaps through an untongued, very gently breath-based reattack. (These are all, of course, further inflected by the presence or absence of slurs.) Since a good deal of the music's rhetoric depends on strings of irregularly rearticulated pitches, it is important to maintain a distinction between these various states of rearticulation.
< >	Around a stem: a relatively broad "digging into" the pitch; similar to <i>tenuto</i> but almost as if possessed of a small <i>crescendo</i> and <i>decrescendo</i> .
Other	
ļ	Vertical dashed (as opposed to dotted) lines are used to indicate simultaneity between events in two different staves, within one part or between parts. Not <i>all</i> simultaneities are thus marked, only those that are both particularly significant and not immediately obvious.
	(Dotted lines are used specifically for synchronization between vocal or instrumenta and throat events within a single part, as described above.)

Apostrophe 2 (pressing down on my sternum)

Guide to Study and Rehearsal

Due to the extreme notational conventions, particularly of rhythm, used in the score and the potential distraction they pose from the underlying formal shape of the work, the following suggestions may be helpful in guiding the rehearsal process.

First of all, note the large-scale repetitions of the form. Between each pair of lengthy pauses (20" and 12" in each case) is a literal restatement of the passage just heard, and the pages are laid out to emphasize these recurrences. As a result, the following large-scale correspondences hold:

- page 7 is identical to the end of page 4
- pages 8-9 are identical to pages 5-6
- page 17 is identical to the end of page 14
- pages 18-19 are identical to pages 15-16.

In the last large section of the piece, which begins with the flugelhorn solo on p. 20, the repetition of the end of the section occurs without pause; bars 105-109 (the last five measures of the piece) are identical to the passage beginning partway through bar 100 and ending at the double bar between bars 104 and 105. (N.B.: As described above, "bar numbers" increment with a change of barline in either instrumental part; refer to the circled figures between the instrumental staff systems, or above the staff in the solo passages towards the end of the score.)

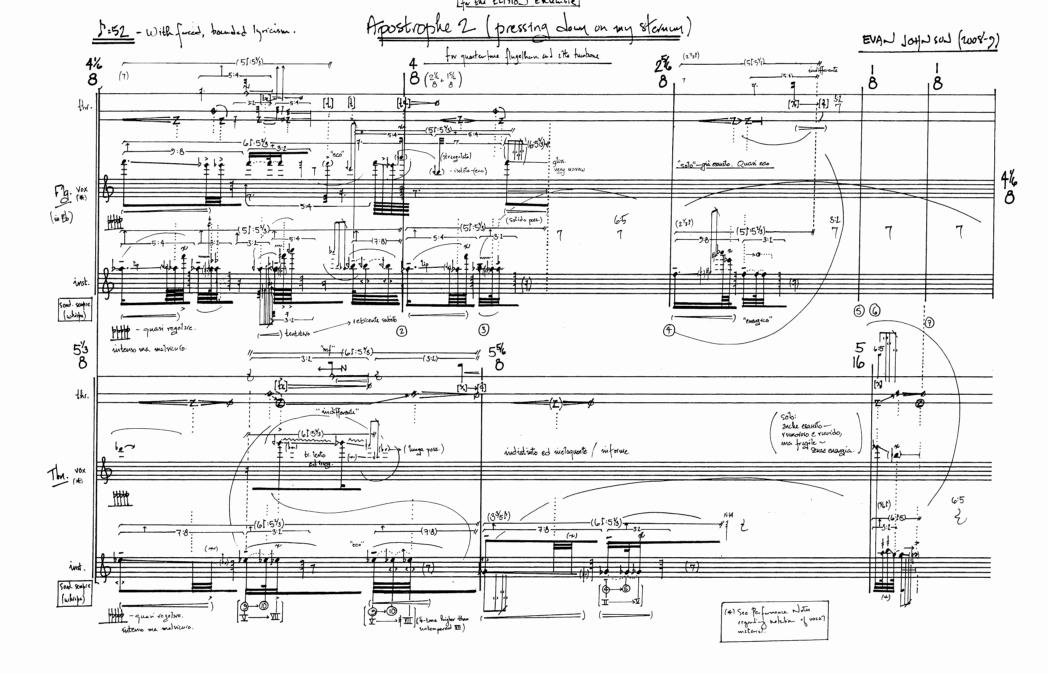
In general, although the local materials and rhythmic superpositions of *Apostrophe 2* are quite complex, the larger relations governing their distribution are reasonably transparent and straightforward. The first step in studying the score, accordingly, even before the rhythmic shapes have been mastered precisely, should be to make a note of repetitions and canons, on the small and large scale, both within the individual parts and between the two. The players as a pair may find it useful to rehearse moments of quasi-canonic correspondence (bars 1-3, for example) or simultaneity (e.g. bars 69-75 on pp. 14-15, and that passage's reoccurrence in bars 81-86 on pp. 17-18) to internalize those passages.

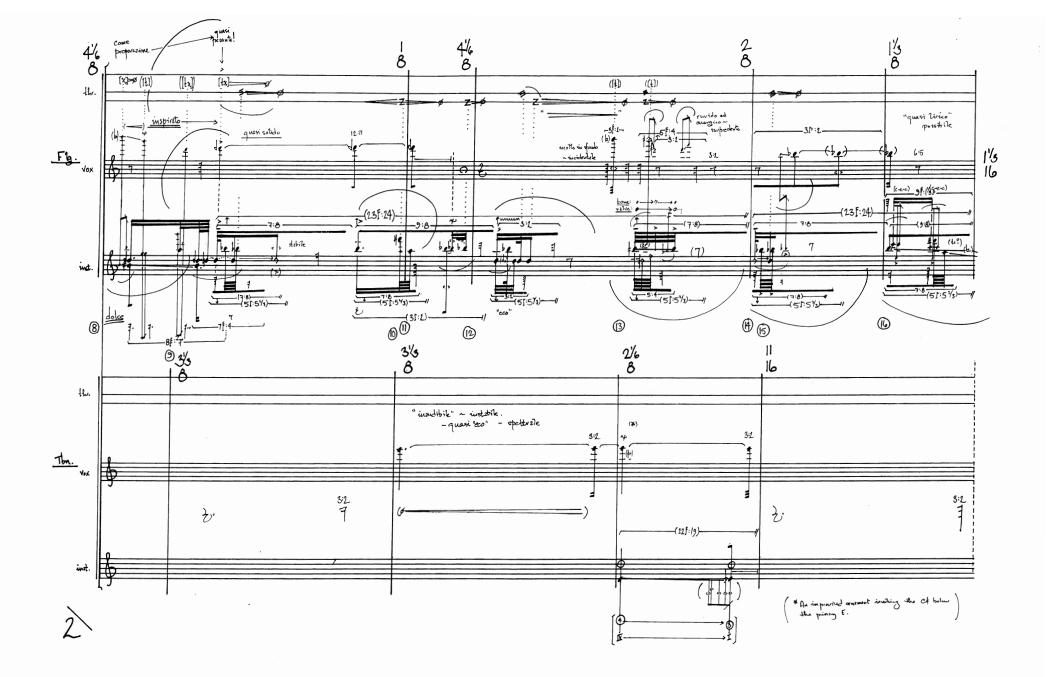
Each performer should also take particular note of those passages where the vocal and instrumental lines are more or less immediately related within their own part (flugelhorn bar 33-34 and 42-43, e.g.; trombone bars 76 and 87) in terms of gesture or material shape.

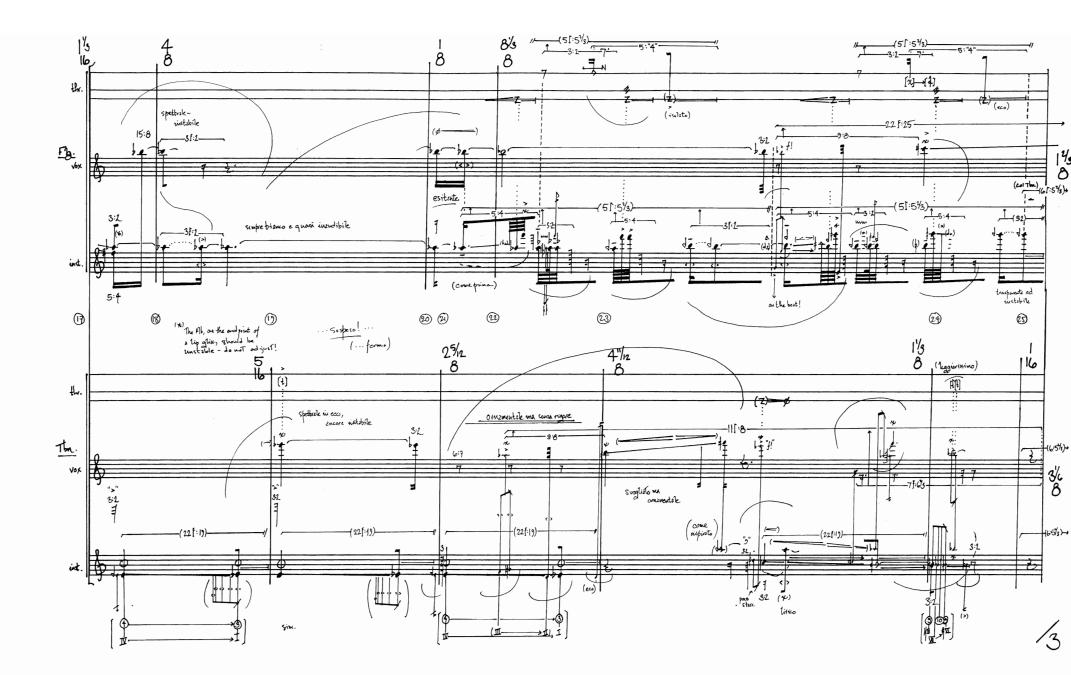
These correspondences, on all three "levels" (within the instrumental or vocal line of one part; between different lines of the same part; between parts) are the lifeblood of the piece, and should be internalized and felt in the midst of all other activity.

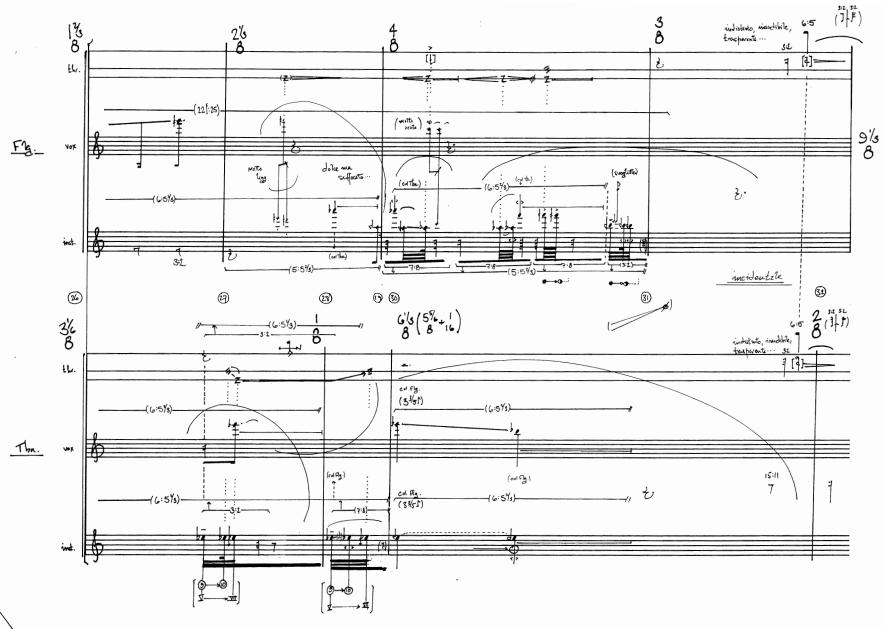
Furthermore, many of the complex local rhythmic and gestural shapes are "ornaments" of a basic steady frame: the opening lines in each part, for example, are based on a steady pulse of an eighth or quarter note under a tuplet (note that the vocal line of the flugelhorn part and the instrumental line of the trombone part are each elaborating the same pulse in rhythmic unison: a quarter note under a 6:5 2/3 tuplet!). These basic rhythmic frames, however they are elaborated, superimposed, or interrupted, should be isolated and internalized before the local detail that they govern, and perhaps rehearsed between the players in the form of simultaneous pulse layers. Notes that occur "on the beat" in these configurations in the instrumental parts are usually accompanied by tenuto marks for this very reason.

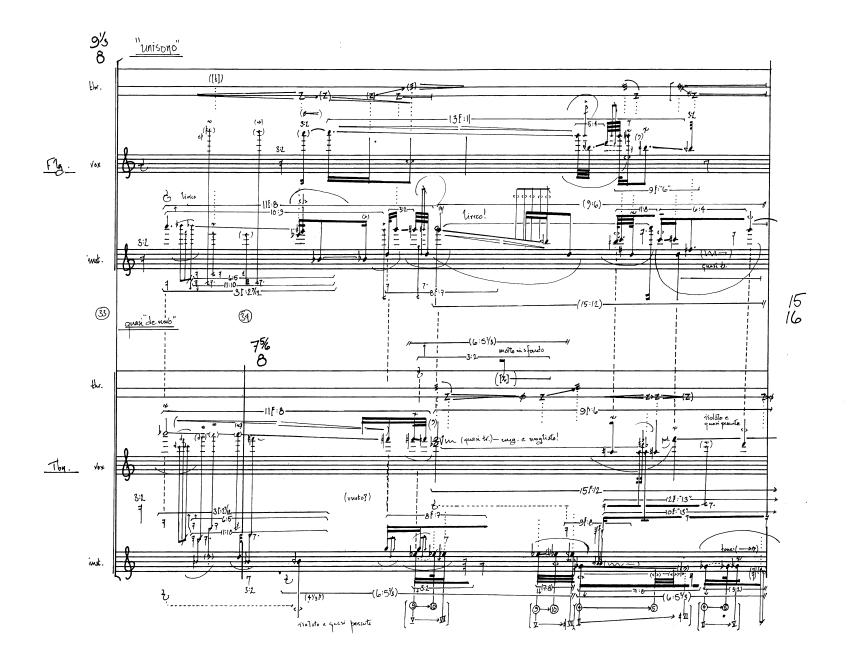
Only after these two approaches have been taken—the isolation and internalization of repetitive structures and of simple rhythmic "frames"—should the bulk of the detail of the piece be worked on individually and as a pair.

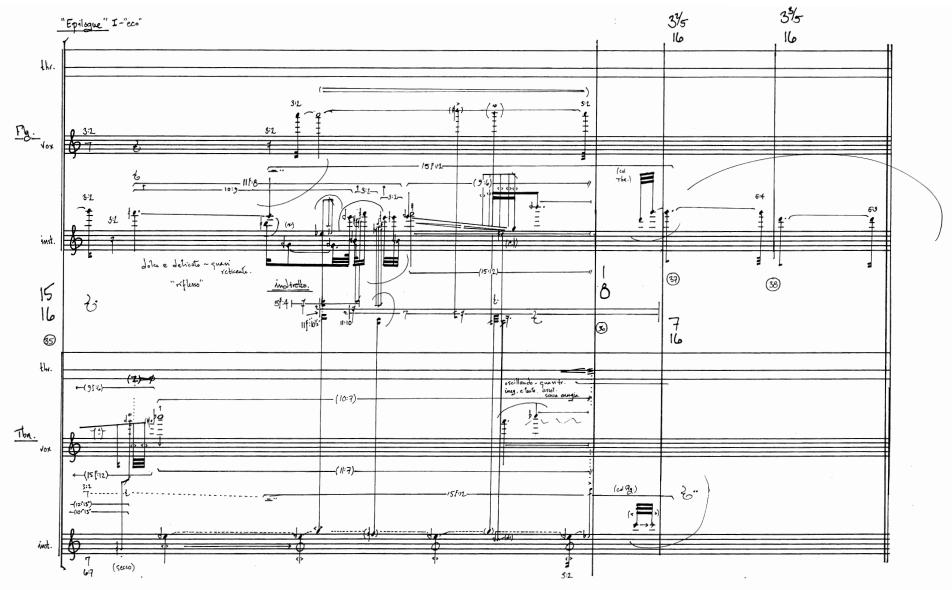


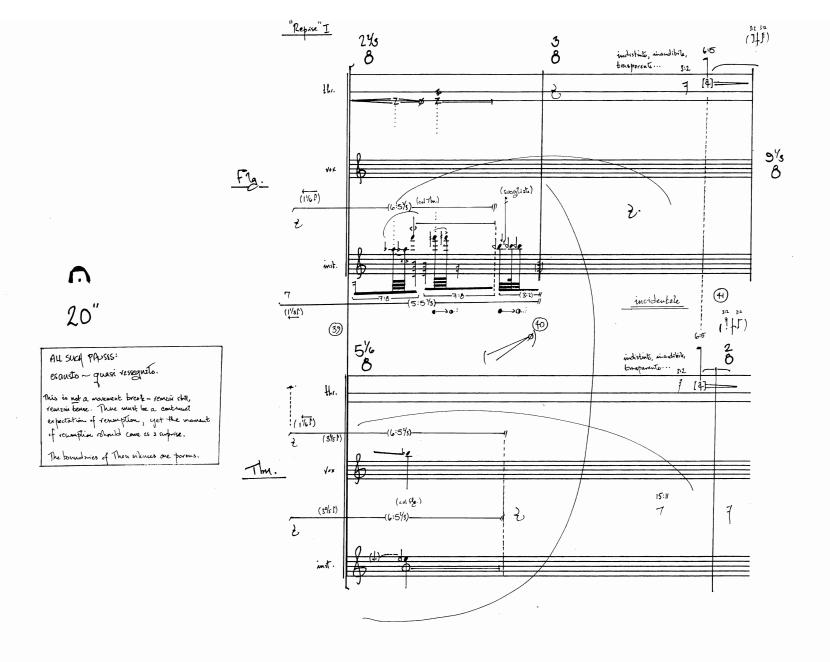


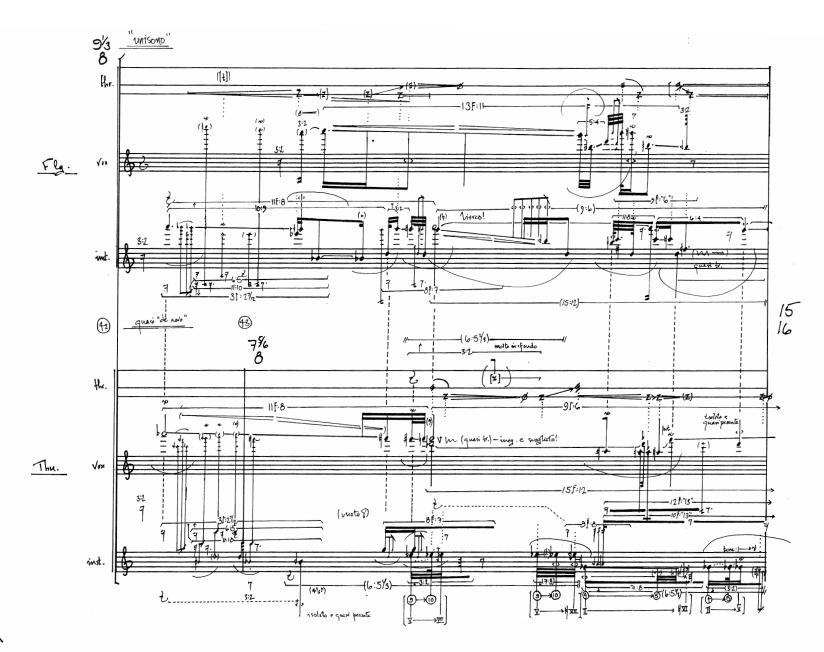


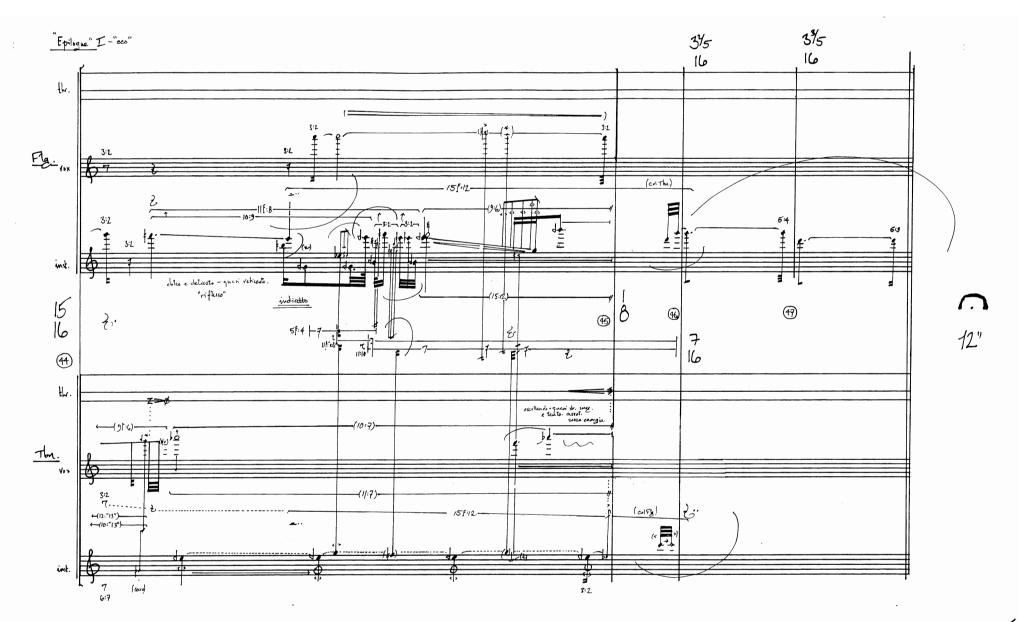


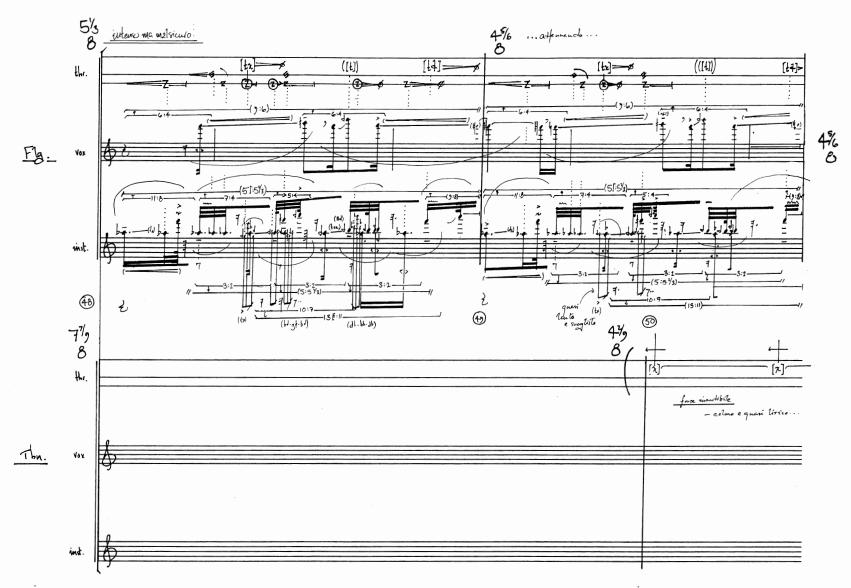


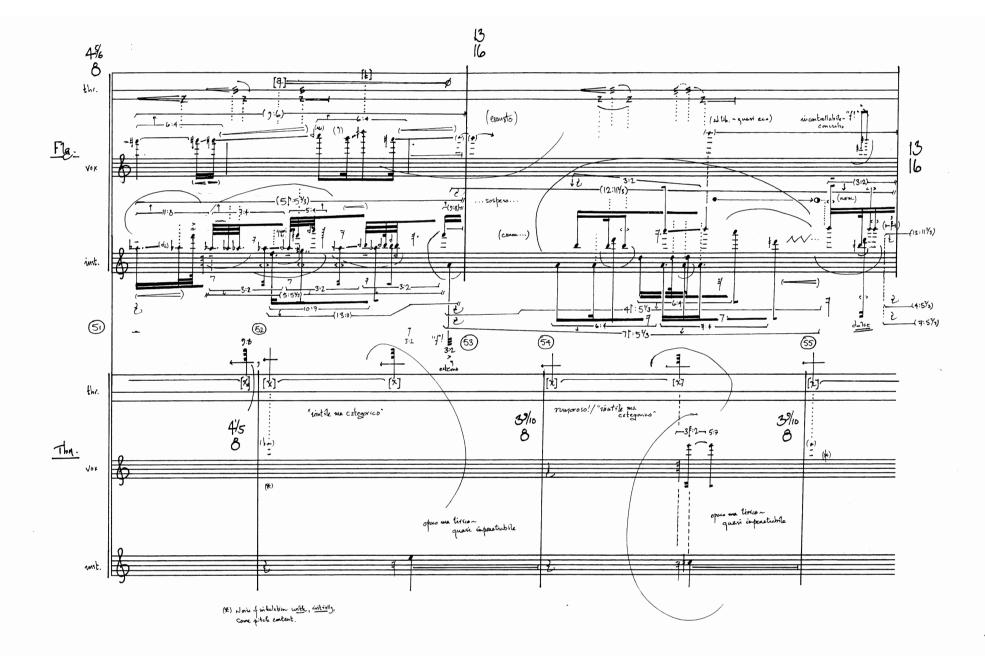


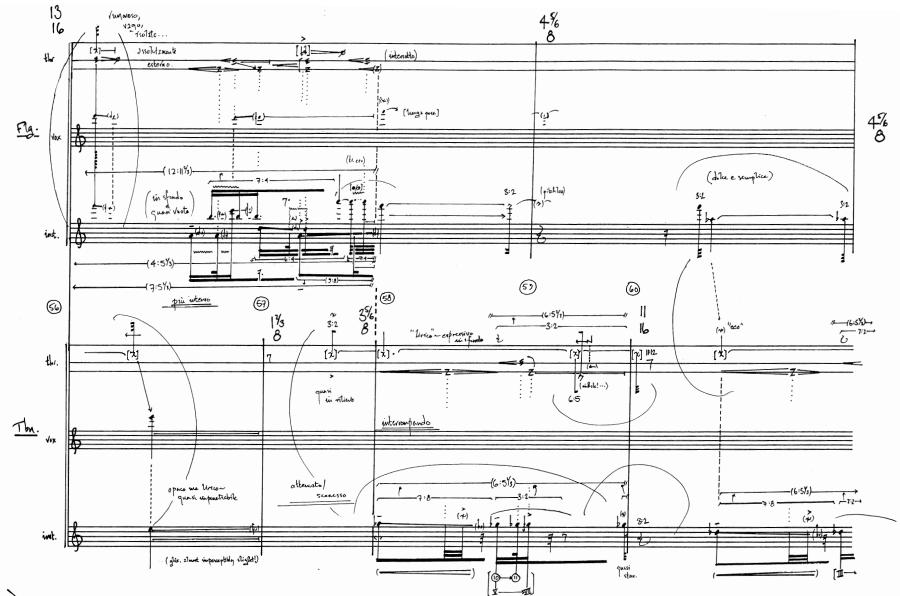


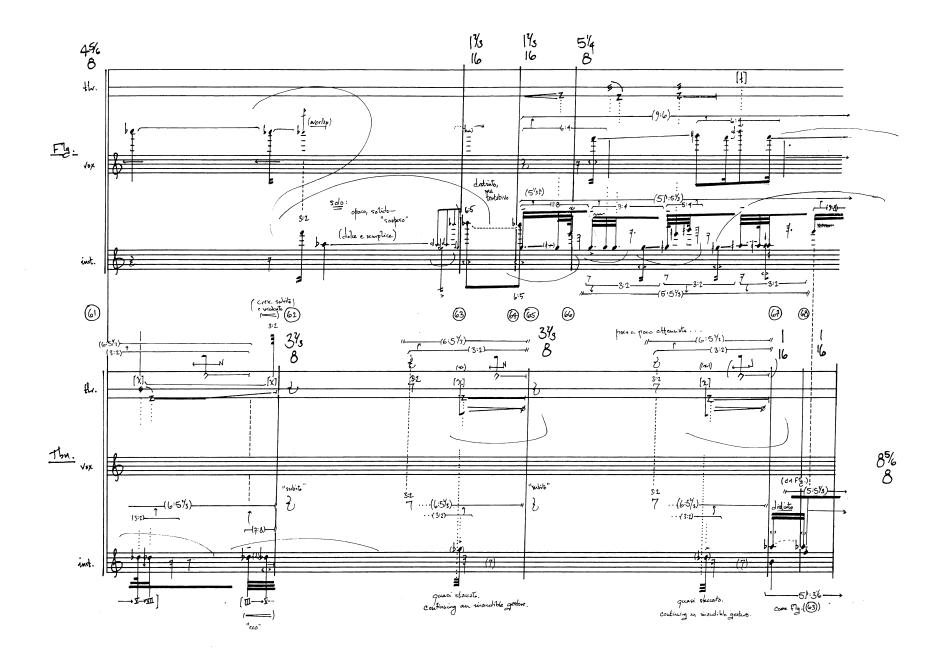


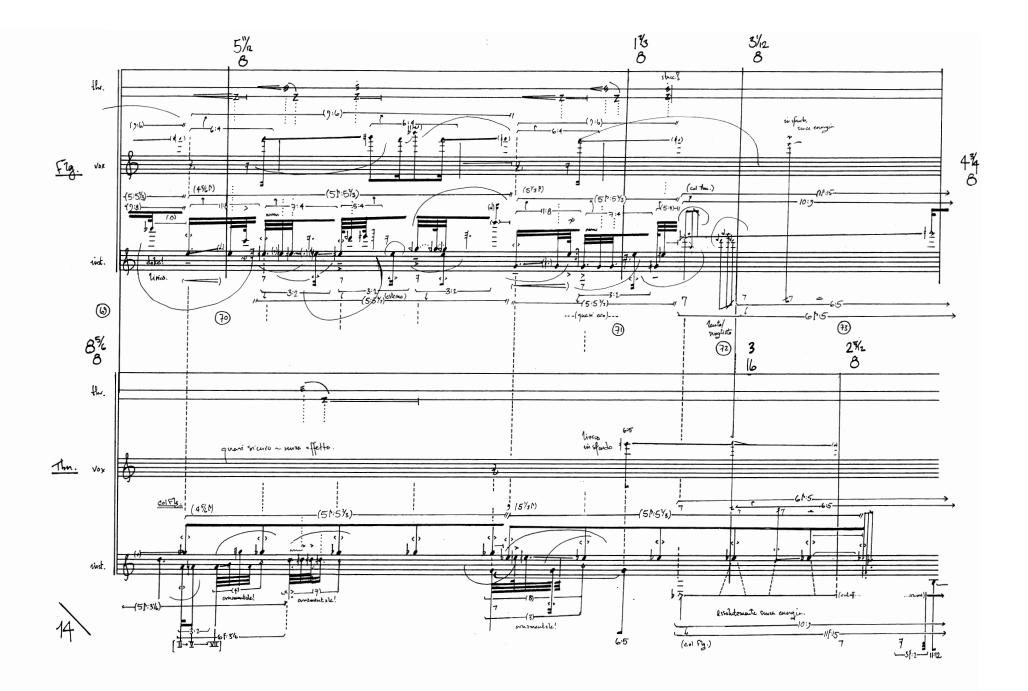


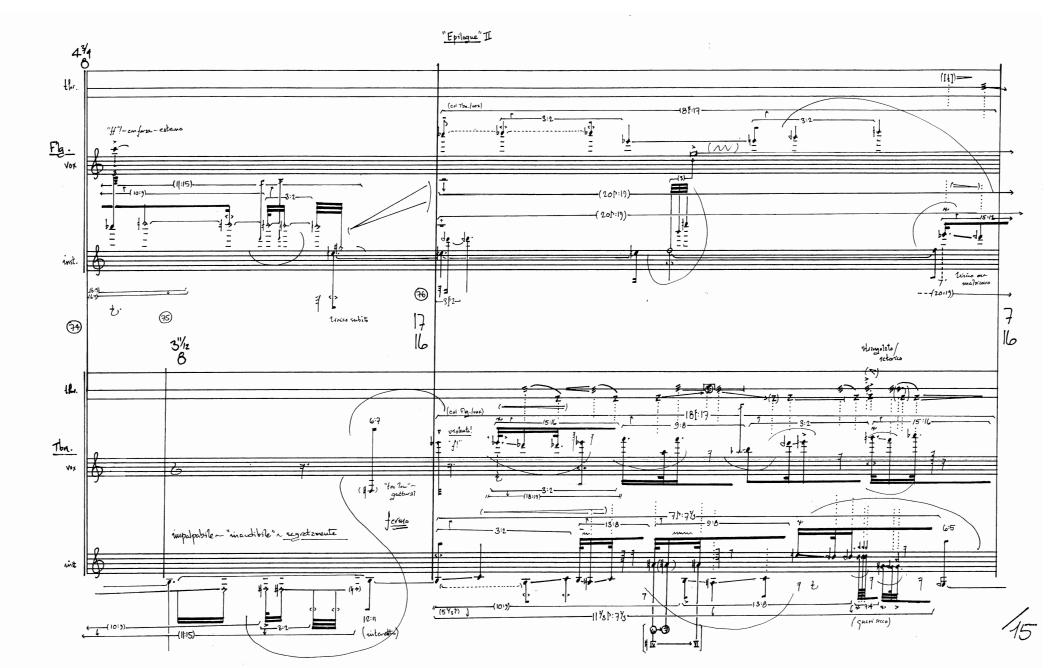


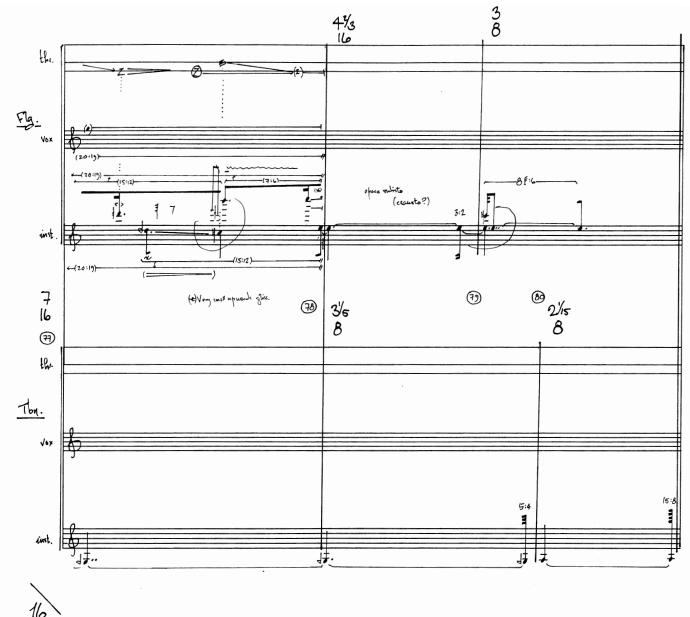




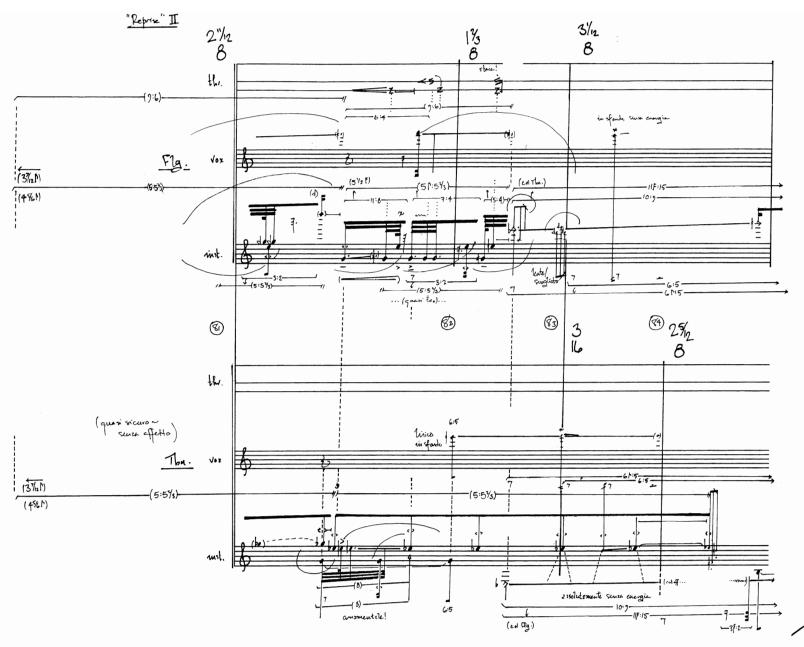


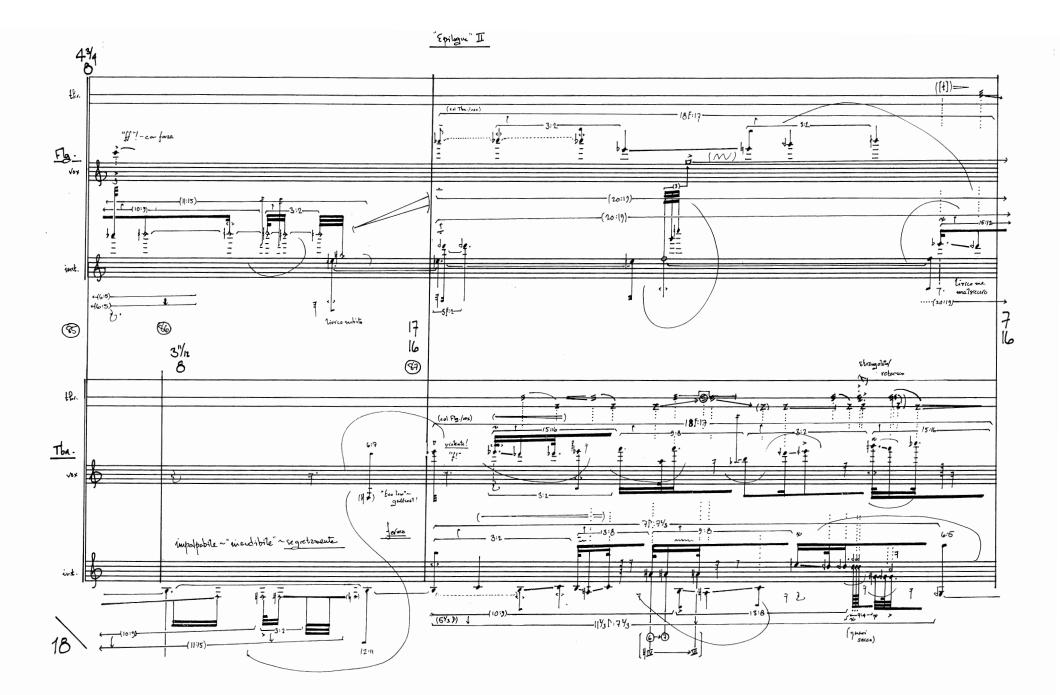


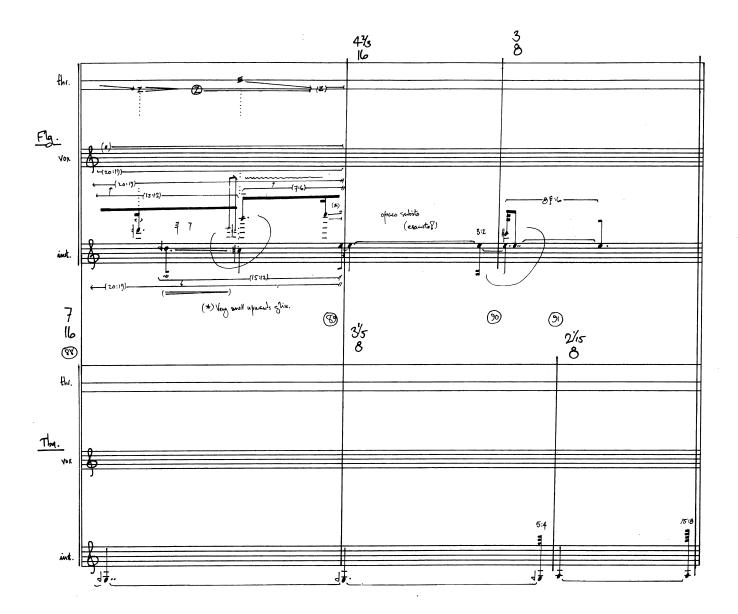




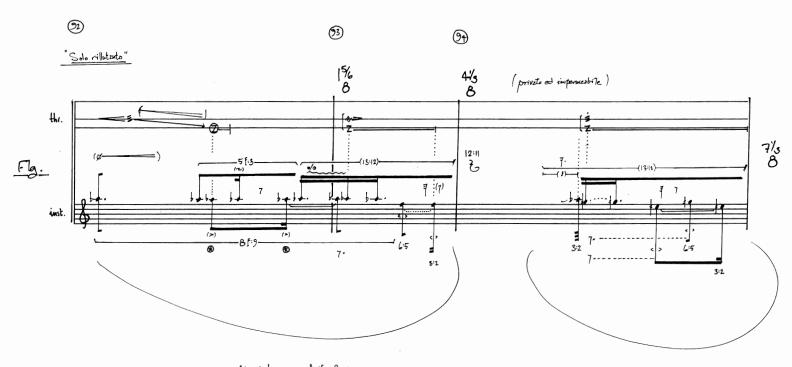
20"







12"



8 : Alternate fingering or half-value: a len secure, bimbrelly destinut tome.

