it is difficult to find the right way to proceed

/ James Saunders / 2023

When faced with choices to make regarding an appropriate course of action, there is often a negotiation between a preferred option and the constraints the situation imposes. Sometimes such compromises produce unforeseen results. In *it is difficult to find the right way to proceed* a labyrinthine collection of material is presented which the pianist must navigate, finding a route between a set of specified points. There are many loops and blockages that disrupt the possible paths, forcing the pianist to split their attention between playing the music and working out how to get to the next point, between thinking and doing.

solo piano

duration: variable

Written for Dante Boon and first performed by him at [info here]

PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS

The piece involves both hands proceeding independently through the material, trying to find a route so that they both arrive at the same circled target numbers (which have the same pitch(es)) together in a predetermined sequence.

NAVIGATING

1. TARGET NUMBERS

Each realisation should use a different sequence of the 12 circled target numbers.

For shorter versions, fewer than 12 target numbers may be used.

A sequence should be determined in advance using any means (e.g. randomly generated, carefully planned, using a process, asking someone else etc.)

A route through the predetermined sequence can be worked out during the realisation or, if needed, partially in advance.

The hands may arrive at the same target number at the same time, or in a more staggered arrangement, but there should be enough overlap to hear that the same pitches are being sounded. This may necessitate one hand repeating a loop bracket while the other arrives at the target.

When both hands have arrived at the same number, wait a moment (sustaining the pitches), and then continue on to the next number in the sequence in the same manner.

2. MOVING BETWEEN SYSTEMS

The target numbers are spread across the six systems (I-VI).

The dotted lines indicate points where a move to a different system can be made.

When one hand moves to a new system, the other hand should move to the same system soon afterwards. Do not play the linked note on the new system, but start from that point when proceeding after arrival.

> *For example, when playing system III, the right hand might move to system V from the* b*, and so the left hand should move to system V from the final* a *shortly afterwards.*

This process requires a constantly shifting focus between the two parts, and between playing and planning a route.

> *For example, the sequence* 7-4-9-2-11-10 *would involve moving between systems* III-II-IV-VI-IV-V *to reach these points in order. However, the limits on the available routes would mean that some systems need to be moved through in between, so to cover this sequence the route could be* III-II-[VI-I]-IV-[I]-VI-[I]-IV-*V.*

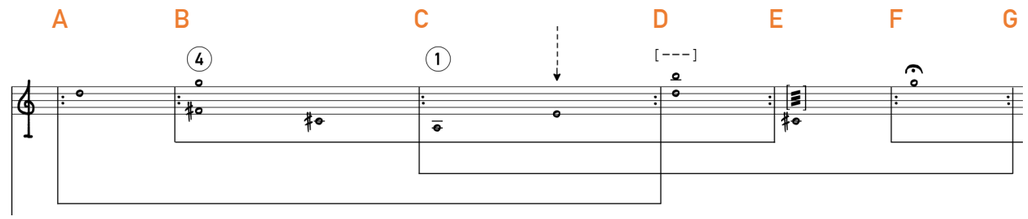
3. LOOP BRACKETS

The loop brackets constrain the paths through the material, making it more of a puzzle to find a way to reach the next numbered point.

Repeats may happen any number of times, or be ignored and played through to the next pitch.

The brackets interlock, providing ways to move forwards or jump backwards through the material. For example, in the excerpt below, the following repeats are possible:

A-D
B-D
B-E
C-D
C-G
F-G etc.



For example, to move from the g *at the end of the excerpt to the* f#/g *at target number 4, the route could be* F-G-C-D-A-[4]*, or other more circuitous routes.*

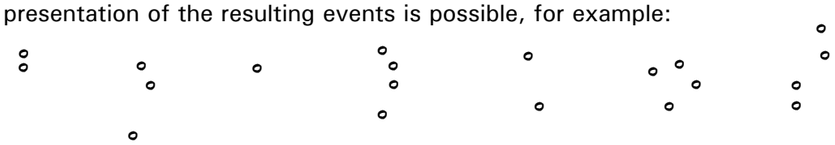
PLAYING

Parts may move together or independently.

Progressing through the material generates a series of events comprising between 1-4 pitches. Events are generally chordal or arpeggiated, but may also be more linear.

Movement may be regular or irregular, for example with longer or shorter pauses between events, or with even or uneven spacing of pitches within events.

Any presentation of the resulting events is possible, for example:



Dynamics are free, but generally quiet or barely sounding.

Movement is generally relatively slow and spacious.

Use pedal freely as needed, but generally aim for a spacious, resonant texture.

A optional very rapid uneven tremolo with one finger only (not a conventionally articulated tremolo). The pace should be as fast as possible, to the point where it is hard to control the regularity of the attack, and the pitch may sound unpredictably.

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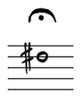
An optional very slow pulsed repetition of the pitch(es). If both hands are playing a pulsed event, this may be at the same tempo (in unison, or a locked pattern), or at different tempi (phasing).



Pause on the pitch(es) for a short time before continuing. The other hand may still be moving.

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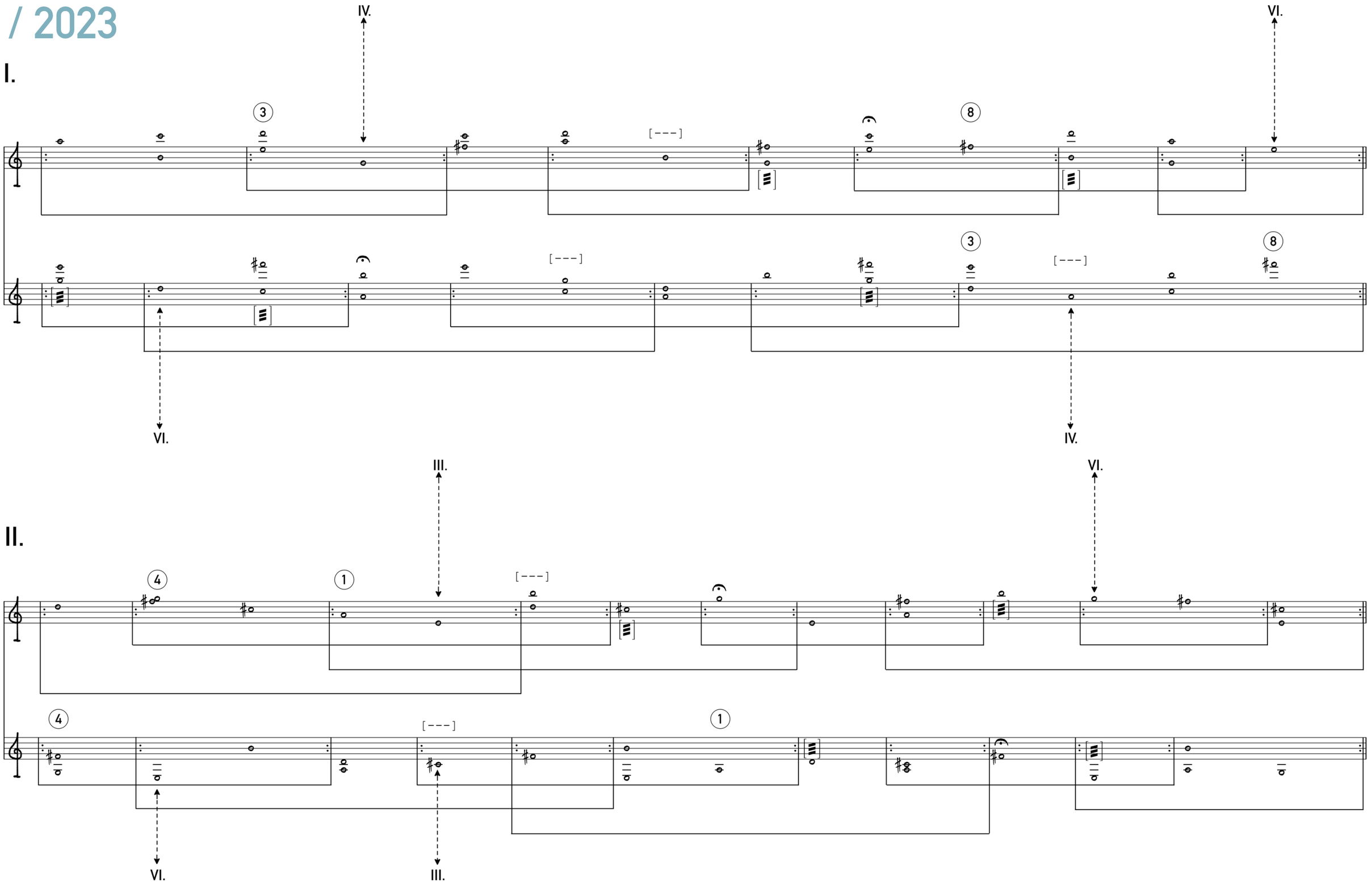
I.



II.

III.

II.

V.

7

12

II.

V.

IV.

I.

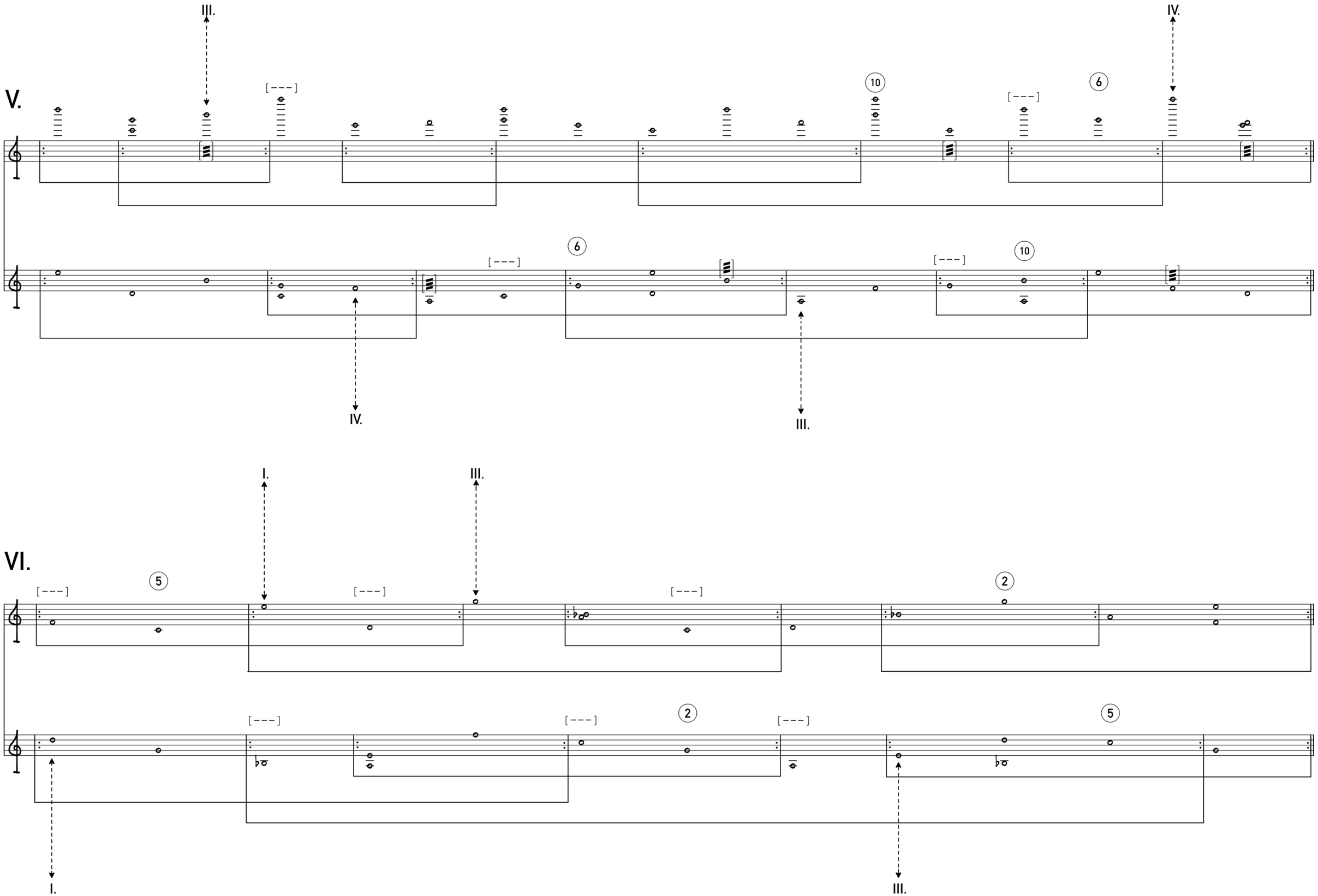
V.

9

11

I.

V.


V.
III.
IV.
[---]
10
6
IV.
III.
VI.
I.
III.
5
2
I.
III.