something happens then something else happens then all sorts of other things happen / James Saunders / 2025

something happens then something else happens then all sorts of other things happen is a modular composition which uses a series of states that present a wide range of different types of activity. The players cue states at will, responding to the new prompts as quickly as possible. Occasionally more than one state may be active, requiring players to decide how best to proceed when there is too much to do. The piece explores how we make decisions in groups, especially in work-focused situations where task overload and impossible time constraints force us to develop strategies to cope. The title comes from a line in Diane Settterfield's novel *Once upon a river* (2018)

at least 4 players

duration: variable (ideally at least 10 minutes)



Commissioned by soundinitiative with funds provided by Diaphonique. First performed by soundinitiative and Collectif Fabrica at CRR93, Aubervilliers, Paris on 11 April 2025.

SETUF

RESOURCES

Each player needs their own setup, with sufficient resources to undertake the actions specified in the states used in the performance. As a general guide, this is likely to include:

pitched instrument recording and playback device with built in or local amplification (not a PA) paper (multiple types and sizes) pencil printed texts collection of everyday objects, some of which are an identical set (e.g. lots of different objects and 17 clothes pegs), or can be combined to build other objects devices that can be turned on and off

Some states require specific materials (e.g. harmonicas, metronomes) which are noted in the explanations below.

If any of the states requiring audio or video playback are used, then a system for this is needed. These states should be audible/visible to all players and the audience, so a PA and video projection are the best options. The projection and playback are controlled by a single player, who may be part of the ensemble or operate separately. The audio and video files for these states are provided in the accompanying folder. Any cueing method is fine, but it should be setup in a way that allows quick access. It is not necessary for more than one audio or video file to be able to be played back simultaneously (i.e. only one projector is needed), but this can be explored if equipment is available.

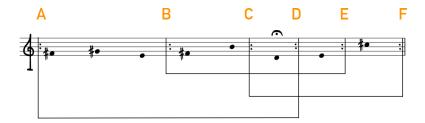
PREPARATION

In advance of a performance, the group needs to decide which states are available to use. This can be determined in any way, but there needs to be agreement among the group. There should be enough states selected to provide sufficient possibilities for change and variety, although more focused realisations are also possible. Once the selection of states has been decided, players should assemble the required resources to complete the requisite actions.

The text below is in two parts: a descriptive title and explanation of each of the states, and a summary score with just the numbers and titles, along with any other notation needed. The first part is used for preparing the performance and understanding what to do in each state, while the second part is used in performance as a score to aid recognition of the states. If not all the states are used in a performance, simply cross them out. It is also possible to add further annotations as needed to aid recollection.

NOTATION

Some of the stave-based states use a nested repeat notation as below. This creates a continuously looping set of routes through the material. In the example below, available loops are A-D, B-D, B-E, C-D, C-E, and C-F, as well as playing directly through with no repeats.



PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS

The piece involves players cueing a state by calling out its number, followed by all players undertaking the actions required by that state.

Any player may cue a state, and states can be cued at any time.

To cue a state change, players say 'state x', where x is the name of the state (e.g. 'state 37'). Do not call out the descriptive tile, only state and number.

When a state is cued, all players respond as quickly as possible to the change.

In general, always try to switch to the new state.

When a state is active, players complete the actions it specifies until a new state is cued.

As a player is about to cue a state, it is best for that player to be ready to start it immediately as this helps other players switch quickly.

The previously active state(s) may continue after a new state is cued, unless the instructions indicate that it should stop once a new state is cued. Any continuing states can stop at any point, for example when they come to a natural end or synchronised with a subsequent cue. It is therefore possible for multiple states to be active at any one time, although priority should always be given to the last state cued. Players may try to keep many states active in this way once they have been cued, but only if they can complete the current state with adequate focus.

In general, players act independently or in parallel, although there are some states which require more dependent interaction with others.

For states requiring audio or video playback, only one player (or assistant) should cue these files. This player is referred to as the player with the AV setup in the instructions. The whole group, including this player, respond to the sources as with other states. In the description for these states, [audio] or [video] playback is noted so that the point of reference is clear.

The piece begins by one player cueing a state.

The piece ends after an approximately agreed duration by one player saying 'end'.

Any language(s) may be used in the performance, although priority should be given to a language most likely to be understood by the audience and players.

In general, try to act as naturally as you can. Try not to exaggerate actions for dramatic effect. Just do the tasks in a straightforward way.

Do the best you can.

STATE INSTRUCTIONS

state_001 unique short sounds

lots of very short sounds every sound should be different to the others played by you and the group try to play when nobody else is playing do it quickly, without too much thought

state_002 play along to the music [audio]

play along to the music you can choose any part of the track to follow try to play in time and follow it as accurately as you can the audio is controlled by player with the AV setup a different track may be used each time this state is cued

state_003 chords

anyone can call out the name of a chord call out multiple chords to construct sequences everyone plays the chord, or a pitch it contains, or an arpeggiated distribution play as soon as possible after the chord is cued don't extend the chord too much: play it once then wait for the next cue

state_004 bells

any kind of bells play the bells, trying to keep a continuous sound across the group at the moment I am learning to ring church bells, but they are probably impractical for this state it also reminds me of the Swiss alps, where we like to go on holiday

state_005 build a tower

use a set of identical objects stack the objects on top of each other to form a tower if the tower falls over, rebuild it if you run out of objects, just wait might be best to think carefully in advance about the objects you use

state_006 devices on or off

a collection of devices that can be turned on and off
when on they should be able to work continuously without any further attention
they could make sound and/or move in some way
when this state is cued, any inactive devices may be turned on (from none to all)
when this state is cued, any active devices may be turned off (from none to all)
any devices that are on when a new state is called remain on, and can only be turned off when this state is active again

state_007 manipulate object

hold an object or material in your hands manipulate it constantly so that it makes a continuous but possibly unstable sound it is likely this will be fairly quiet

state_008 very quiet unstable drone

sustain a very quiet unstable sound as continuously as possible accept that it might break up uncontrollably try to let it sit on the border of sounding and not sounding where you have limited control embrace the unpredictability

state_009 list 32 things in a category

whoever cues the state also chooses the category list 32 things in the category by saying them out loud no repetitions if possible, either of your own things or those of other players but that might be difficult for some categories

state_010 whirly tubes

circle the whirly tube around your head try to keep the sound as continuous as possible vary the pace as preferred to produce different pitches take a break if your arm hurts

state_011 white noise (or something like it)

play any white noise, or something like it try to keep the sound as continuous and unchanging as possible

state_012 descending scale

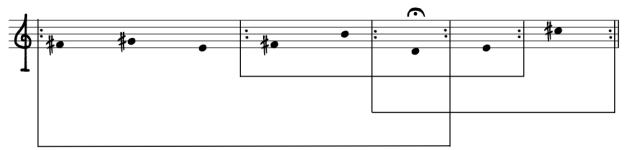
play a descending scale which you agree in advance as a group it can be at any speed and with any articulation you could do it in an individual way or blend with the group

state_013 stand or sit

you can either stand up or sit down change at any point, perhaps in response to what others do everyone does this independently: just stand up or sit down when you want you could definitely do this while another state is active

state_014 slowly and lyrically

play slowly and lyrically, independently of others (although you might like to follow them occasionally) when you get to the fermata, wait for at least one other person to arrive there before continuing



state_015 traffic lights [video]

in the video score, choose a single type of light (red, amber, green, green arrow) make a sustained sound when the chosen light is lit if there is more than one traffic light, choose which one you will use the video is controlled by player with the AV setup a different video may be used each time this state is cued

state_016 a long sound

play a long sound it should be as static as possible, no variation at all it just sits there as if it is frozen

state_017 holding up signs

in advance prepare a set of signs that can be held up for the audience to read each sign should have a single word on it hold the signs like a deck of cards and bring the active card to the front independently hold up one sign at a time for long enough so it can be read by the audience, or much longer any language is fine

state_018 bouncing

use an object that bounces when dropped onto any kind of surface repeatedly bounce the object by dropping it onto the surface it is probably a good idea to do this in a controlled area to avoid it bouncing away

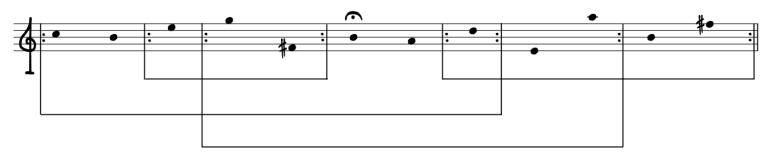
state_019 traffic [video]

in the video score, choose a vehicle when your chosen vehicle passes a fixed point (a tree, a lamppost etc.) or another vehicle, make a short sound choose a new vehicle each time your previous vehicle leaves the shot the video is controlled by player with the AV setup a different video may be used each time this state is cued

ger			
ound			

state_020 as fast as possible, and occasionally stopping

play as fast as possible, but occasionally stop and then continue keep moving through the repeats or just stay in one area for a while when you get to the fermata, wait for at least one other person to arrive there before continuing



state_021 wait

just sit still and wait for a bit don't make any sounds deliberately, and don't move anything active sounds may continue while you are waiting, so you can listen to those perhaps just wait patiently until someone gives another cue have a rest

state_022 copying text

take any existing text and write out a section of it by hand using pencil/pen and paper

state_023 quiet whistling

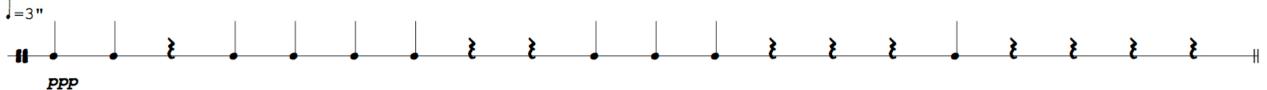
whistle a sustained pitch as quietly as possible no patterns or melodies, just a single pitch if you are not able to whistle (I only worked it out fairly recently), then any kind of resulting air noise is fine give it a go though at least

state_024 push object across a surface

choose any object push the object from one side of a surface to the other in a straight line as slowly as possible try to do this continuously without stopping if you can this is one of my favourite ways to make sounds

state_025 low ringing pulse

any low pitch or sound let ring, as resonant as possible start anywhere and repeat as needed



state_026 tear paper into long strips

use a very large piece of paper tear the sheet of paper into as many long strips as possible, one at a time personally I think this is best when done very slowly, but any speed is fine

state_027 build the object

use something that takes the form of a kit, perhaps with instructions starting with the component parts, then build the specified object if you are interrupted, continue from where you left off when cued again do not worry too much if it is not fully built, frustrating though that might be

state_028 harmonicas

breathe in and out at a natural pace through the harmonica generally the same tuning, or a group of closely related tunings do no try to co-ordinate, but accept any entrainment that occurs

state_029 sing

one player plays a reference pitch or chord other players sing the pitch or a pitch from the chord anyone can play the reference pitch or chord play multiple reference pitches to construct melodies

state_030 Couperin

as a group, play the piece as best you can play the pitches that are within your range where possible try to maintain the general patterning, but it is fine if the synchronization drifts a little it still amazes me that these pieces were written in the 1650s

state_031 swapping

swap at least one of your objects with the same number belonging to another player you choose what to swap, but you might like to bear in mind their wishes too (it's only polite) but really, it's your choice

state_032 play until everyone is playing

any sustained sound join in one by one and hold your sound until everyone is playing, and then stop repeat this process any number of times

state_033 birds [audio]

listen quietly to the audio recording of birdsong it is very relaxing I hope the audio is controlled by player with the AV setup a different track may be used each time this state is cued

state 034 metronomes

start a metronome or a device that functions in the same way each player's tempo should be different you can stop and start the metronomes and change the tempo at any point when a new state is cued, the metronomes can continue for a while if you like

state_035 something melodic

play something melodic as a group, but do not plan it in advance nothing well known you can individually start and stop as needed, but try to keep the group melody going try to all play the same melody, responding to changes of direction as best you can

state_036 copy player

when cueing the state, give the name of the person to copy (e.g. "state 000, Winnie") the chosen player may do anything all other players copy the chosen player while the state is active, anyone may give the name of another player, or themselves, to copy

state_037 freight train [video]

in the video score, containers indicate a sound, and gaps between containers indicate silence use the left edge of the frame as the point of reference make a sustained sound when a container is passing this point do not make a sound when a gap is passing this point the video is controlled by player with the AV setup a different video may be used each time this state is cued

state_038 additive sequence

build sequences, adding one pitch at a time (1, 12, 123, 1234...etc) start at the beginning and get as far as you can



state_039 ascending scale

play an ascending scale which you agree in advance as a group it can be at any speed and with any articulation you could do it in an individual way or blend with the group

state_040 make and/or play back a recording

use any kind of recording device
when making a recording, record what is audible at the time
when playing back a recording, chose any of the recordings made during the performance and play it back
use local amplification, ideally directly from the device
use this state to start recording or playback
you may stop the recording or playback at any point, even when a different state is active

state_041 drop objects

a collection of objects, ideally that are not breakable drop each object on the floor one by one if you run out of objects, just wait you might need to pick them up at some point if you need them for another state

state_042 dancing! dancing!

dance in a way you feel comfortable

it could be anything from full on, moving around the room to just a minimal movement sitting down, whichever you prefer I really don't like dancing, but apparently some people do

state_043 arrange objects in a line

arrange the available objects in a line based on your own classification it doesn't matter what the classification is, but choose a process that makes sense for you, and possibly to anyone watching

state_044 listen to the music

somebody may play some music from a device everybody else stops what they are doing and listens to it pick something you like, or that you think others might like

state_045 read out selected words

take any existing text and read aloud every seventh word pace the delivery as if you were reading the full text to yourself, reading the words aloud at the appropriate point omit any repeated words alternatively, adopt another process for selecting non-contiguous words (every fourth word, a number process, at random etc.)

state_046 play the pitches [audio]

follow the random pitch sequence playback you can play it in any octave if you miss a pitch either don't worry about it and move on, or keep trying until you get it right (either is fine)

state 047 cross out letters

choose a letter

in any printed text, cross out every instance of that letter with a pencil or pen

state 048 have a chat

have a chat with one or more other players you can talk about anything that comes to mind just talk at a normal volume and don't try to make it audible to an audience please try not to act; you're not a film extra

state_049 paper throwing

set up a wastepaper bin in a location central to all the players repeatedly screw up pieces of paper into a ball and try to throw them into the bin change state as soon as someone succeeds in throwing the paper into the bin do not change state until someone manages this it might take a while, but if necessary you can cheat a bit

state_050 place objects in the box

put all the objects in the box when all the objects are in the box, just wait

state_051 countdown

starting at any number, count down or up as a group until you reach zero
a higher starting number may result in a longer sequence
anyone may shout out a number which is either one higher or lower than the previous number (e.g. if the last number was '22', then another player may shout out '21' or '23')
you may not shout out more than one number in sequence
you must wait for another player to shout a number before shouting another number yourself
if the state changes before completion, either continue while completing other current states, or restart from the same place if the state is cued again
this state can be used as a way to time the performance, with the piece ending at zero

state_052 triangles

everyone play triangles in more or less the same way let this emerge from your collective action it may change over time

state_053 reinforced ambience

listen to the ambient sounds of the space, or the environment if outside double or imitate any sounds that you notice using the sonic resources available to you let the ambient sounds have priority and don't feel you need to make constant sounds individually or as a group

state_054 sine tones

play a static sine tone (quietly) each time this state is cued, play a different frequency

state_055 toys

choose a toy that means something to you or a member of your family play with it involve others if you would like to I seem to have a history of borrowing my children's toys to use in pieces (I mostly remember to ask them first)

state_056 Debussy

as a group, play the piece as best you can play the pitches that are within your range where possible or find another way to join in

state_057 eating and/or drinking

eat and/or drink something of your choice

do be aware of the dietary preferences of those around you and avoid any foods likely to cause allergy problems if the state is cued more than once then either continue eating/drinking previous items, or start something new if you run out of food/drink, just sit and wait or ask if you can share somebody else's

state_058 fast repeated pitches

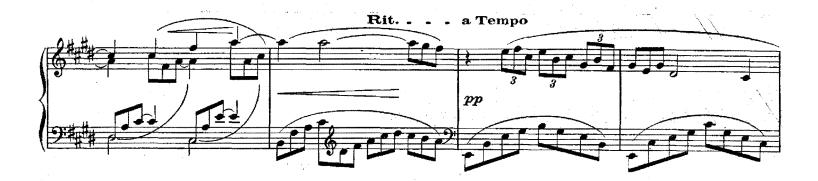
play repeated pitches as fast as possible but without using techniques that facilitate this so no flutter tongue, tremolo, rolls etc.

just single sounds articulated as quickly as possible to the point where it is uneven and hard to control choose a starting pitch and occasionally change to a different pitch take breaks as needed as this might be a little stressful after a while

1ère Arabesque

CLAUDE DEBUSSY









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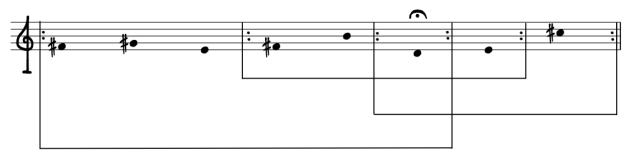
Paris, 4, Place de la Madeleine

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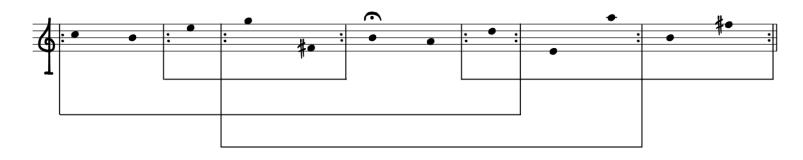
/ 2025

state_001 (unique short sounds	state_021 wait	state_041 drop objects
state_002	olay along to the music [audio]	state_022 copying text	state_042 dancing! dancing!
state_003 c	hords	state_023 quiet whistling	state_043 arrange objects in a line
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state_010 v	whirly tubes	state_030 Couperin [score]	state_050 place objects in the box
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state_017	nolding up signs	state_037 freight train [video]	state_057 eating and/or drinking
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state_019 t	raffic [video]	state_039 ascending scale	
state_020 a	as fast as possible/stopping [score]	state_040 make and/or play back a recording	

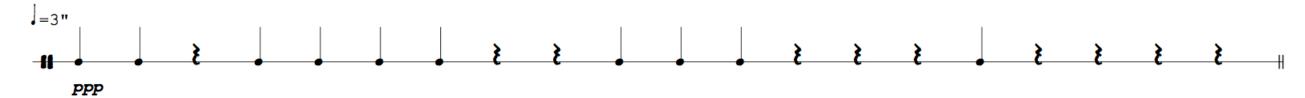
state_014 slowly and lyrically



state_020 as fast as possible, and occasionally stopping



state_025 low ringing pulse



state_038 additive sequence



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Prélude

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