

Moss Freed

## **Micromotives**

For between 7 and approx. 20 improvisers



## **Micromotives**

It's worth stating first some things that this is not. It is not a finished 'work'. It is not an incorporation of improvisation into predetermined structures. It is not 'conduction' or 'soundpainting'. It is a compositional approach designed specifically for big groups of improvisers (7+) that is as flexible as the players. It is a system that allows creative powers to move freely around the group and aims to give individual performers levels of freedom akin to those found in free improvisation. There is no single leader and players can be as directorial, passive, aggressive, or tactical as they like. They can change their minds, opt out, join in or subvert one another's ideas, play or be silent, use given materials or improvise freely as they individually desire.

As a group methodology, this has evolved over many rehearsals and discussions with a large pool of players. Developments in ways of working have been largely oral, which have then been reflected in new iterations of the score/notes. I have attempted to summarise these developments in a way that makes the system accessible to other ensembles here. However, this should be seen more like a snapshot of present practice rather than any kind of fixed entity.

*Micromotives* is made up of two main parts: a set of mechanisms, a method of communication and shared language, a *practice*; and sets of carefully grouped materials (working as extensions of the mechanisms) that can be thought of as *pieces*. Whenever desired, players can refer to these materials and mechanisms and try and get the rest of the group, or a subset of players, to join them using a sort of bespoke sign language. It is therefore important that all players can see each other, which usually necessitates some sort of circular or semi-circular formation, and gives an approximate upper limit of 20 players.

The base modus operandi is the **improvised situation** - players can always choose when and what to play, and when to be silent. Mechanisms and materials should not be seen as hurdles but rather as ways that individual players can try to instigate something beyond the usual scope of large group improvisation. They are not *impositions*, but *enablers*, allowing detailed information to be silently communicated in real-time. Materials can be used or interpreted in any way and often have been designed to be deliberately vague or polysemantic. Crucially, there is **no obligation** for players to actually use any of the given mechanisms or materials. Instead, players should improvise as a default, knowing that the mechanisms and materials are there as means to try and instigate particular eventualities. If a group were to play one of the pieces by doing nothing other than freely improvising, that would constitute a valid performance.

Any player, at any time, can nominate themselves to try and instigate the group, or a subset of the group, to do a specific thing. These instigations should be seen as 'invitations to join' as opposed to dictatorial gestures (i.e. 'let's form a trio to look at this material', not 'you play a solo now'). As proffered ideas are suggestions only, these can be ignored or subverted if desired. For example, if someone gestures to the group to finish the piece, one person could decide not to follow suit and to keep playing, thereby keeping the piece going and negating the initial idea. NB: The default position should be to try and help others to fulfil their musical ideas, with an 'opt out' if individuals feel strongly about an alternate musical outcome. Once players agree to be part of a sub-ensemble there is no obligation for them to remain within it. Likewise, sub-ensembles are not exclusive - anyone are always free to join any situation happening around them. Of course, players are able to explore any materials or mechanisms in their individual playing at any time.

NB: The only hard and fast rule that cannot be subverted or ignored is the 'piece' mechanism. I.e. all players must be referring to the same, singular piece at any one time.

## **Pieces:**

**All the pieces work with the backdrop of the improvised situation plus the mechanisms sheet.**

**Piece 1 'Kilter' functions as the 'mechanisms' sheet when used alongside all other pieces.**

For clarity, each piece requires the following pages in performance:

**Piece 1:** 'Kilter' sheet only

**Piece 2:** 'Starlings' sheet plus 'Piece 1/Mechanisms' sheet

**Piece 3:** 'Union of Egoists' sheet, 'Melodics sheet' (available in various transpositions), plus 'Piece 1/Mechanisms' sheet

**Piece 4:** 'Hidden Hand' sheet plus 'Piece 1/Mechanisms' sheet

**Piece 5:** 'Left Leaning' sheet plus 'Piece 1/Mechanisms' sheet

**Piece 6:** 'Hung Parliament' sheet plus 'Piece 1/Mechanisms' sheet

**NB:** Piece 4 'Hidden Hand' is unique in that individual materials cannot be specifically referred to. Instead, it is only possible to refer to a *group* of materials (e.g. 1. polyrhythms). As such, a unique hand signal is used (hand shaped like a 'C'). Any players directed towards a group of materials in 'Hidden Hand' can move freely between individual materials within the group. E.g. a player may set up a sub-ensemble trio to refer to '2. Pitch Sets'. Each of the 3 players can then move freely between the four pitch sets.

**NB:** Piece 5 'Left Leaning' is the only piece where certain materials are available *at certain times*. Initially, only 'Figures A' are available. After some time (how long is completely open-ended), players should decide to move on to 'Figures B', at which point 'Figures A' ceases to be in use. After some more time, players should move on to 'Figures C', at which point they stop using 'Figures B'. At every point in the piece, only one of A, B or C should be in use, although there may be some overlap as players are agreeing to move on.

## **'Global' mechanisms:**

These potentially apply to ALL players. If you instigate one of these, you should stand up and make sure everyone has seen.

'Piece': If the ensemble decides that they want to be able to move between pieces, they may use the 'piece' sign to indicate which piece number to move to. You may decide to specify a 'set list', with gaps between pieces, in advance, thus negating the need for this symbol.

'Finish': This applies to the entire piece or set. It only applies as a global, final end for the whole band (as opposed to finishing use of a specific material, for example).

'Trade ensembles' (T): This allows two concurrent sub-ensembles to alternate. It does not imply that sub-ensembles should respond to one another musically, other than to stop when the other starts. If two sub-ensembles are playing at the same time and someone indicates to trade ensembles, on the downbeat one sub-ensemble stops and the other carries on (the decision on which sub-ensemble should emerge first should be decided organically). When the other ensemble starts playing the first should stop. This can keep going as long as desired (there is no gesture to finish this but it will come to a natural end) and may require as much visual attention as aural, especially if one sub-ensemble is playing at a low dynamic.

'Orchestration swap' (X): The function of this is to instigate a change in players - whoever is playing stops, and whoever is not starts. The new players may decide to continue with similar materials or not.

Various combinations of mechanisms and materials involving 'X' and 'T' can be used in interesting ways. For example gesturing 'X' then 'T' together before a downbeat would suggest that there is a change of players and then the new sub-group will trade with the sub-group they just took over from. Or gesturing to those 'Currently tacet' to remain silent followed by the 'X/T' combination would result in an ensemble trade where one of the sub-ensembles is silent.

### **Sub-ensembles:**

Players can set up a sub-ensemble by using the 'ok' hand gesture. If you want an indeterminate ensemble size there is no need for further gestures, but if you specifically want a trio, for example, you can hold up 3 fingers with the unoccupied hand. Note that the instigator is one of the 3 players of the trio.

Other players indicate with a hand up and/eye contact/head nod that they want to join. Once a potential sub-ensemble has been established, the instigator should indicate which type (and potentially number) of material they want to do, e.g. '\ 4' = 'Interactions 4'. Once a sub-ensemble and material are established there are three ways to start them - 1) start organically with no explicit coordination, 2) show a clear downbeat for a synchronised beginning or 3) show a curved downbeat to indicate a gradual transition.

### **'How':**

Everything in this section of the 'Piece 1/Mechanisms' sheet are optional 'filters' which instigators can add, once a sub-ensemble and material have been established. E.g. set up a quintet sub-ensemble to play free, then use the 'Role' gesture to specify that they should sonically dominate the current situation. Another example: In Piece 3 'Union of Egoists', set up a duo to refer to melody 3, then add the filter that they should 'Use contour' (keep the shape of the line but with free pitch choice), play a 'Faster' version, and also to 'Move through the materials sequentially' (i.e. once played melody 3 move onto melody 4 etc).

### **Piece-specific materials:**

Each piece has individual sets of materials divided into groups e.g. 'Textures', 'Interactions' etc. Each of these groups has an associated hand gesture, shown next to the title of the group e.g. '\ for 'Interactions'. These are symbolised on the page by lines or sketches but correspond to whole forearm positions. Pieces 4 'Hidden Hand' and 1 'Union of Egoists' have unique types of materials with associated hand signs, not used in the other pieces.

**REMEMBER:**

- Silence is not something to be afraid of. It doesn't necessarily indicate that the piece should finish.
- Consider giving soloists who emerge space and time. If you are that soloist, consider continuing as such for some time.
- Consider sticking with a single idea. Or changing between many ideas quickly.
- Consider dedicating to a dynamic - if you can't hear yourself clearly you're still contributing.
- Consider obvious and obscure types of interpretation.
- If you are confused don't worry, remember there are no obligations. Follow your gut and improvise. You could stop, or equally you could go for it.
- If you want to try something but aren't sure if you're allowed, you are allowed and you should do it.
- There is no rush. Pieces can be as long or short as they need to be but judge this in situ.
- The presence of mechanisms and materials doesn't mean they need to be used.
- Don't plan. However, an intimate understanding of the mechanisms and materials doesn't constitute planning, it will only help you make stronger musical decisions in real time with less confusion.

NB: Alone, this page is 'Kilter'. It also functions as the 'mechanisms' page and is to be paired with all other pieces

# Piece 1/Mechanisms

Kilter (for John Zorn)

**Global**  
\*STAND UP\*

Piece  
(plus piece number)



X number of players  
only (specify 1, 2 or 3)



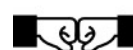
Orchestration swap



Trade ensembles



Finish



\*STAND UP\*

Tutti



Currently  
playing



Currently  
tacet



**Who**

Sub Ensemble  
(plus size if desired)



**What**

Free



Silent



Join in with  
current situation



Refer to previous  
situation



**How**

Role



Dominant  
Counterpoint  
Accompaniment

Use contour  
(free pitch choice)



Move through materials sequentially



Loop material



Fast(er)



Slow(er)



NB: Alone, this page is 'Kilter'. It also functions as the 'mechanisms' page and is to be paired with all other pieces

# Piece 1/Mechanisms

Kilter (for John Zorn)

Global  
\*STAND UP\*

Piece  
(plus piece number)



X number of players  
only (specify 1, 2 or 3)



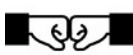
Orchestration swap



Trade ensembles



Finish



\*STAND UP\*

Tutti



Currently  
playing



Currently  
tacet



Who

Sub Ensemble  
(plus size if desired)



What

Free



Silent



Join in with  
current situation



Refer to previous  
situation



How

Role



Dominant  
Counterpoint  
Accompaniment

Use contour  
(free pitch choice)



Move through materials sequentially



Loop material



Fast(er)



Slow(er)





## Piece 2

Starlings (for Christian Wolff)



### Interactions

1

Play intermittently.  
Synchronise stops/starts

3

Support  
current activity

2

Follow me

4

Give each other  
lots of space



### Textures

1

One or two isolated,  
considered events

2

Focus on sound

3

Long & slow  
moving sounds

4

Pure tone



### Intensities

1

Add space

2

Peaceful

3

Smoothly

4

More silence  
than sound



### Figures

1

Focus on 2nds & 7ths

2

Repeated sound

3



NB: Alone, this page is 'Kilter'. It also functions as the 'mechanisms' page and is to be paired with all other pieces

# Piece 1/Mechanisms

Kilter (for John Zorn)

Global  
\*STAND UP\*

Piece  
(plus piece number)



X number of players  
only (specify 1, 2 or 3)



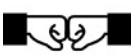
Orchestration swap



Trade ensembles



Finish



\*STAND UP\*

Tutti



Currently  
playing



Currently  
tacet



Who

Sub Ensemble  
(plus size if desired)



What

Free



Silent



Join in with  
current situation



Refer to previous  
situation



How

Role



Dominant  
Counterpoint  
Accompaniment

Use contour  
(free pitch choice)



Move through materials sequentially



Loop material



Fast(er)



Slow(er)



## Piece 3

Union of Egoists (for Anthony Braxton)



### Interactions

1 Trade

2 Weave around  
one another

3 Contrast starkly with  
current activity

4 Sync strong  
pulse feel



### Textures

1



2

(sync) moving/  
changing sounds

3

Untidy

4

Noise



### Intensities

1

Frenetic

2

Overblow  
/distort

3

Intensify

4

Expansive



### Figures

1

Use boxed cell from  
given melodic material  
as contour/figure

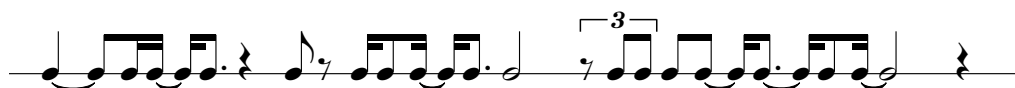
2

Repeated sound

3

Repeating Phrase

4



Sync one pitch throughout

(Piece 3)

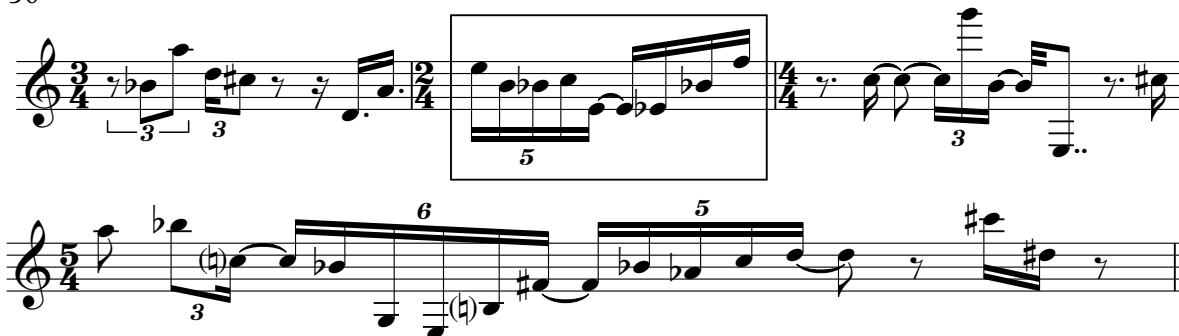


Melodics

C Score

♩=50

1



2



3



4

E

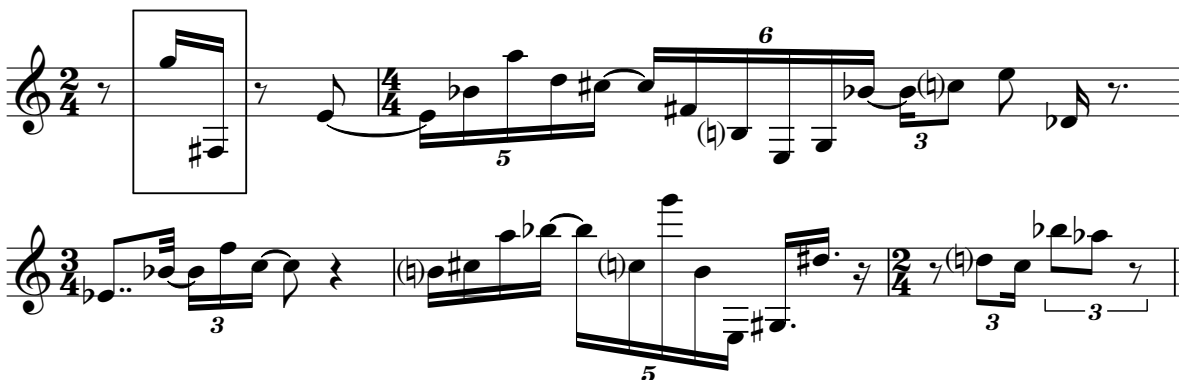
5



6



7



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# Piece 1/Mechanisms

Kilter (for John Zorn)

Global  
\*STAND UP\*

Piece  
(plus piece number)



X number of players  
only (specify 1, 2 or 3)



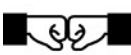
Orchestration swap



Trade ensembles



Finish



\*STAND UP\*

Tutti



Currently  
playing



Currently  
tacet



Who

Sub Ensemble  
(plus size if desired)



What

Free



Silent



Join in with  
current situation



Refer to previous  
situation



How

Role



Dominant  
Counterpoint  
Accompaniment

Use contour  
(free pitch choice)



Move through materials sequentially



Loop material



Fast(er)



Slow(er)



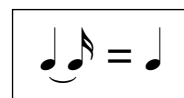
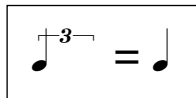
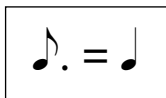
# Piece 4

Hidden Hand (for Terry Riley)



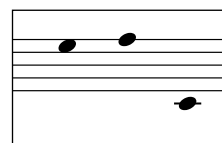
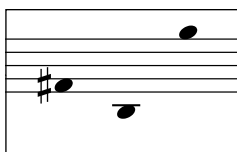
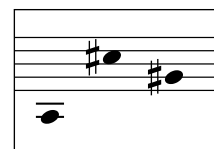
## 1. Polyrhythms

Relate new pulse to those around you



## 2. Pitch Sets

Freely explore



## 3. Dominoes

Match register / intensity

Short, strong notes

Follow as quickly as possible

Play 1 or 2 notes close together

If you hear an isolated note, follow with 2 quick notes

If you hear 2 successive notes, follow with 3 quick notes

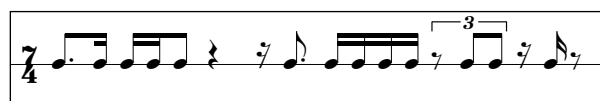
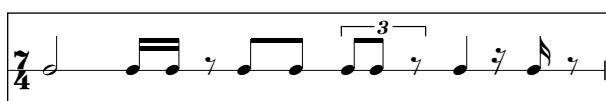
If you hear 3 successive notes, follow with 4 quick notes. Then rest before playing a single note

Agree a tempo



## 4. Rhythms

Any contour / pitch



NB: Alone, this page is 'Kilter'. It also functions as the 'mechanisms' page and is to be paired with all other pieces

# Piece 1/Mechanisms

Kilter (for John Zorn)

**Global**  
\*STAND UP\*

Piece  
(plus piece number)



X number of players  
only (specify 1, 2 or 3)



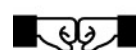
Orchestration swap



Trade ensembles



Finish



\*STAND UP\*

Tutti



Currently  
playing



Currently  
tacet



**Who**

Sub Ensemble  
(plus size if desired)



**What**

Free



Silent



Join in with  
current situation



Refer to previous  
situation



**How**

Role



Dominant  
Counterpoint  
Accompaniment

Use contour  
(free pitch choice)



Move through materials sequentially



Loop material



Fast(er)



Slow(er)



## Piece 5

Left Leaning (for Louis Andriessen)



### Figures A

1

2

3



### Figures B

1

2

3



### Figures C

$\text{♩} = 110$



NB: Alone, this page is 'Kilter'. It also functions as the 'mechanisms' page and is to be paired with all other pieces

# Piece 1/Mechanisms

Kilter (for John Zorn)

Global  
\*STAND UP\*

Piece  
(plus piece number)



X number of players  
only (specify 1, 2 or 3)



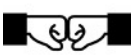
Orchestration swap



Trade ensembles



Finish



\*STAND UP\*

Tutti



Currently  
playing



Currently  
tacet



Who

Sub Ensemble  
(plus size if desired)



What

Free



Silent



Join in with  
current situation



Refer to previous  
situation



How

Role



Dominant  
Counterpoint  
Accompaniment

Use contour  
(free pitch choice)



Move through materials sequentially



Loop material



Fast(er)



Slow(er)



## Piece 6

Hung Parliament (for Pauline Oliveros)



### Interactions

1

Find a triad  
between you

3

Move towards  
dissonance

2

Play so you can  
hear the quietest  
person

4

Find a common  
pitch



### Textures

1

Sing

2

Bell-like

3

Thin, weak,  
noisy sounds

4

Altissimo



### Intensities

1

Burst of  
energy then  
stop

2

Swells

3

Machine gun

4

Heavy-Handed



### Figures

1

Log in your memory a  
phrase, pattern or  
sound around you,  
count to 12 then copy it

2

Steve Reich

3

Drunk groove

4

Sudden Tempo changes