

SEIKO

front/back cover: *Time Signatures for György Ligeti*, 2006; installation detail,
1 of 100 digital metronomes; 3.75 x 2.5 in

ISBN 978-1-926772-17-2
Title: Time Signatures – W.Mark Sutherland
Format: Book
Publisher: Visual Arts Centre of Clarington



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Time Signatures

W. Mark Sutherland

at The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington
August 28 – September 25, 2016

Signatures translated into the sing of the sign and sign of the sing by the passage of time.

Time Signatures is an exhibition of eight sound poems produced in a variety of time-based media. Each poem blurs the borders between the *signature* as a unique linguistic sign and as a musical tempo or key. —W. Mark Sutherland

Introduction

By **James Campbell**

Executive Director/Curator

“to make poetry that is visual art, visual art that is music, and music that is poetry – all of my objects, texts, performances, videos and audio-visual installations investigate the play of signs found in conflicting principles of authority between language, sound, images and objects.”

The preceding words were penned by Toronto based intermedia artist, W. Mark Sutherland. In the late summer of 2016, the artist took us on a compelling and intoxicating multi-sensory journey through all three gallery spaces in the 1905 Mill that is The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington. This journey was an interactive one, with *participants* in the exhibition accessing MP3 players, QR codes and CD players to engage, and at times, initiate Sutherland’s investigations into sound, sight, prose and perception.

Our main gallery housed five of the pieces. Upon entering the space, one was immediately seized by a repeating blast of synchronized audio-visual ‘static and white noise’ in the piece, “Static Poem”. As the artist explains in the pages that follow, there is conscious structure to this static. Based on a poem-painting by Dadaist icon, Man Ray, the two component piece involved

a wall-covering HD projection of 'visual static', its projection duration synchronized with guitar amp generated blaring 'white noise'. Our ears, eyes and brain were arrested, processing this seven minute, seventeen second repeating sequence.

The piece "Chorale" had no accompanying sound. It was visual language. Dancing through a 30 second loop on a wall-mounted HD monitor were the words 'sing', and 'sign', in a myriad of arrangements; the 'play of signs'. The four remaining pieces in the large gallery brought the VAC into a new realm, with accompanying QR Codes enabling smart phone wielding participants to access audio components at their discretion. In three of the pieces, the 'visual component' rang of technology past; the vinyl LP record, and the LP 'metal-master'. An MP3 player with headphones was kept in our main floor office, allowing that avenue of audio access as well. These same avenues of sensory access accompanied the piece "Radical Artifice", as our eyes and ears danced over 14 punctuation marks, extracted sequentially from the first three pages of Marjorie Perloff's book, "Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media". As the artist observes, each punctuation mark is "assigned its own unique signature sonic value". A "sonic symphony", if you will, composed of varied sonic "notes" assigned to punctuation marks.

A remarkable sound/sight/touch piece entitled "Meta4" made its exhibition debut in our small main floor gallery. Upon initial entry into the space, participants were greeted by a softly lit white wall and bench to their right. On the left, in precise repetition of placement, were four identical components: four wall mounted CD players, each with a contact microphone chord connecting them to four guitar amplifiers. In each CD was an individual sound piece by the artist, of three and a half minute duration. Each sound piece was activated by the visitor pulling the chord on any one of the four pieces, continuing in a sequence, and at a pace, of their choice: "The viewer is the DJ mashing Meta4 into a series of sound-poetry solos, duets, trios and quartets." During the course of the exhibition, this experience was solitary for some, and on other occasions, multiple DJ's reveled in a collective 'mash up'. It was a wonderful experience to witness. Participants sat still on the bench on the opposing wall, an "audio sweet spot", if you will, of convergence of individual sound compositions. Others paced back and forth in front of the four speakers, briefly highlighting, then gradually fusing, this entrancing four part symphony.

The third floor loft gallery in the VAC is a magical space. Flooded with natural light, rough-hewn support beams and ceiling timbers reveal the vintage of the building. It is a two story space,

ascending to a clerestory level some 25 feet above the floor. In this space, the artist shared another wondrous moment, *ongoing experience*, through 'time based media'. Visual art that is music, and music that is poetry. "Time Signatures for Gyorgy Ligeti", created in 2006, involved 100 digital metronomes placed on the gallery floor.

The artist gave a performance piece at our opening reception, gradually clicking on every one of the metronomes, reaching a finally of reading a poem whose 21 words were exhibited on the east wall of the space. Twenty one words, 100 letters in length, utilizing all 26 letters of the alphabet, the placement of the metronomes mirroring 'the physical shape of the poem'. Once again, as with "Static Poem", conscious structure. And so much more. With all 100 metronomes clicking rhythmically and at different individual intervals, an almost overwhelming cacophony of sound filled every corner of the space, rising up into the clerestory above. And indeed, this daily experience was time based: "The duration of the gallery installation-performance is determined by the lives of the batteries used: when all the batteries in the 100 metronomes are depleted of their charges the installation falls silent and the performance is complete."

Time. Duration. Sound. Sight. Language. W. Mark Sutherland engages and composes within these interconnected realms, within these *phenomena*. The physical manifestations of his immersion in these realms take many forms. Each of them engages *us*, leaving with us the indelible memory of sensory experience.

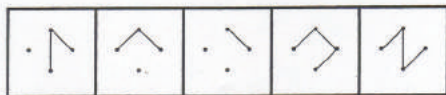
Time Signatures

By **W. Mark Sutherland**

1. *Chorale* (30-second loop)

2005; variable size; video, HD monitor, DVD player

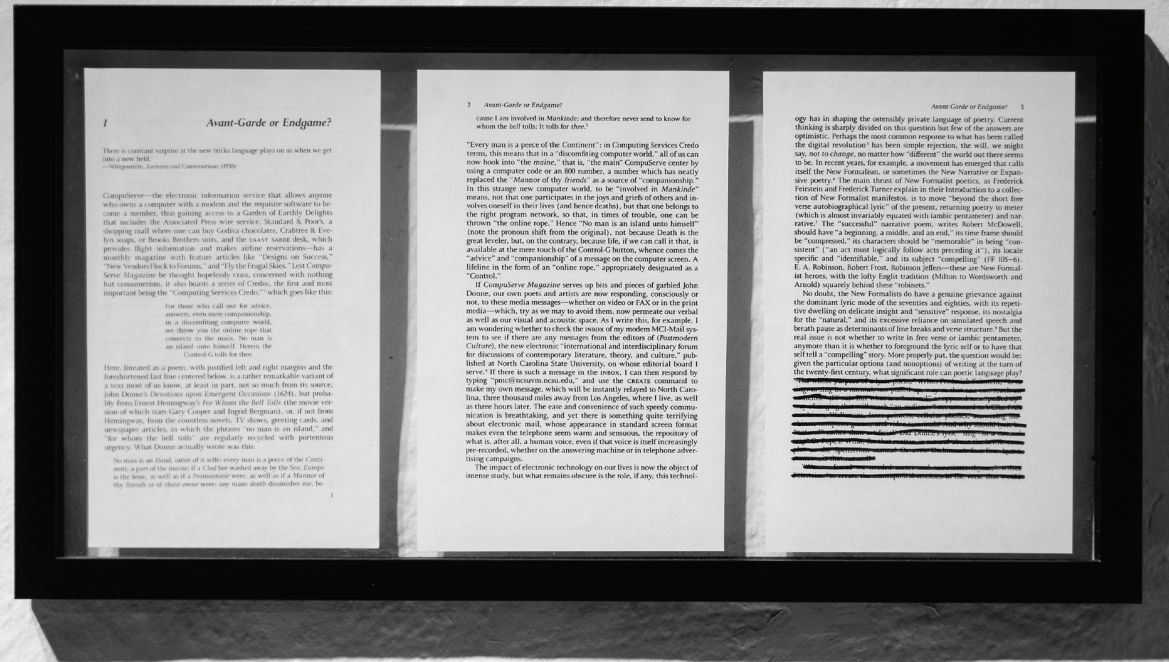
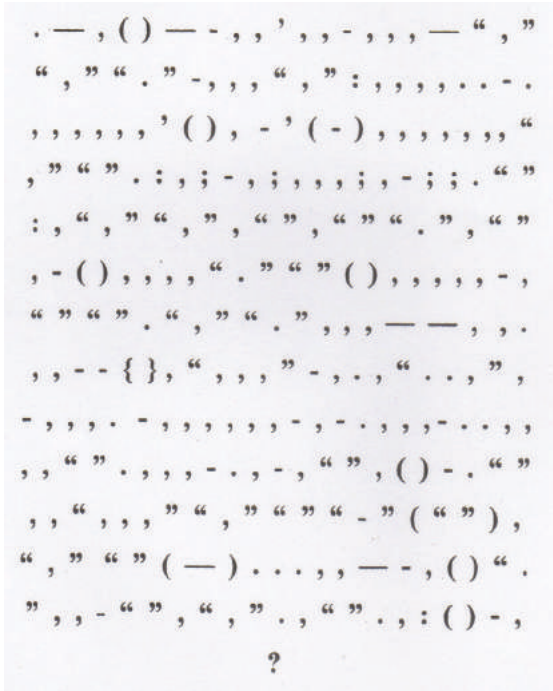
An animated concrete videopoem based on the words sing and sign—"sin in gin is sing sign," etc. A chorale is a vocal melody to which a hymn is sung. The typical chorale has a four-part setting (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) with the soprano/congregation taking the melody. I've recreated this musical form using a four-letter word. This videopoem has no soundtrack.



2. Radical Artifice

2003; approximately 10" x 20"; paper, MP3 player, headphones, QR code

Radical Artifice is a synthetic sonotext from my CD entitled *Sonotexts*. It is based on, the sequential reading of punctuation marks in pages one to three of *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry In The Age of Media*, by Marjorie Perloff (The Chicago University Press, 1991). Each of the 14 different punctuation marks (period, comma, opening parenthesis, closing parenthesis, apostrophe, etc.) that Perloff uses in those pages is assigned its own unique signature sonic value.



3. Scratch

1998; approximately 12" x 12" x 2"; metal, vinyl letters, MP3 player, headphones, QR code

These metal recording-masters (A and B sides) were used to manufacture my 1998 LP *Scratch* inspired by John Cage's 4'33", Eugen Gomringer's "Silencio," and Lazlo Moholy-Nagy's gramophone etchings. The word *scratch* was inscribed on a blank piece of acetate with a nail, after which a metal-master copy of the scratched acetate was produced. 300 vinyl records were pressed from this master. There is no recorded sound on these vinyl records. The only sounds heard on the MP3 recording are from the scratch marks made by the physical text carved into the original piece of acetate, the surface static on the vinyl record, and the running motor of the Califone suitcase record-player.

4. Pardon My French

2007; approximately 12" x 12"; vinyl record, MP3 player, headphones, QR code

Pardon My French consists of two separate French learning-language LPs, each LP cut in half down the middle. One half of each LP is then glued together to make a new recording. *Pardon My French* derives from my struggle with Canada's second official language.

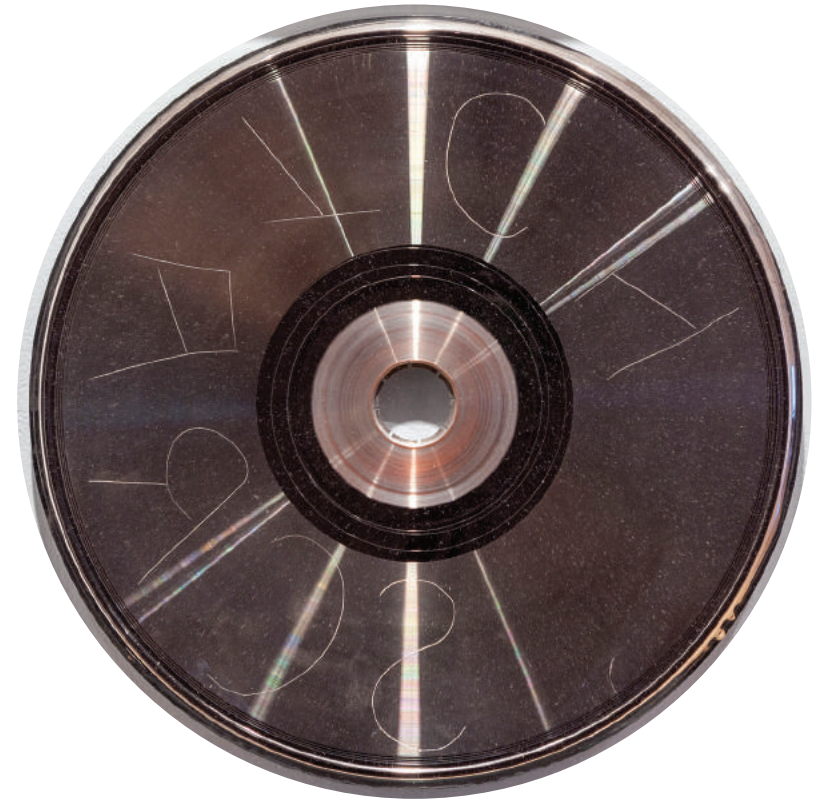
5. Cutup

2007; approximately 12" x 12"; vinyl records, MP3 player, headphones, QR code

Cutup consists of two specific LPs cut down the middle and then glued together differently. The two specific records used are William S. Burroughs' *You're Not The Guy I Want To Share My Money With* (Giorno Poetry Systems, 1981) and Brion Gysin's *Poem of Poems* (Alga Marghen, 1997). Gysin and Burroughs were the inventors of the literary cut-up technique.



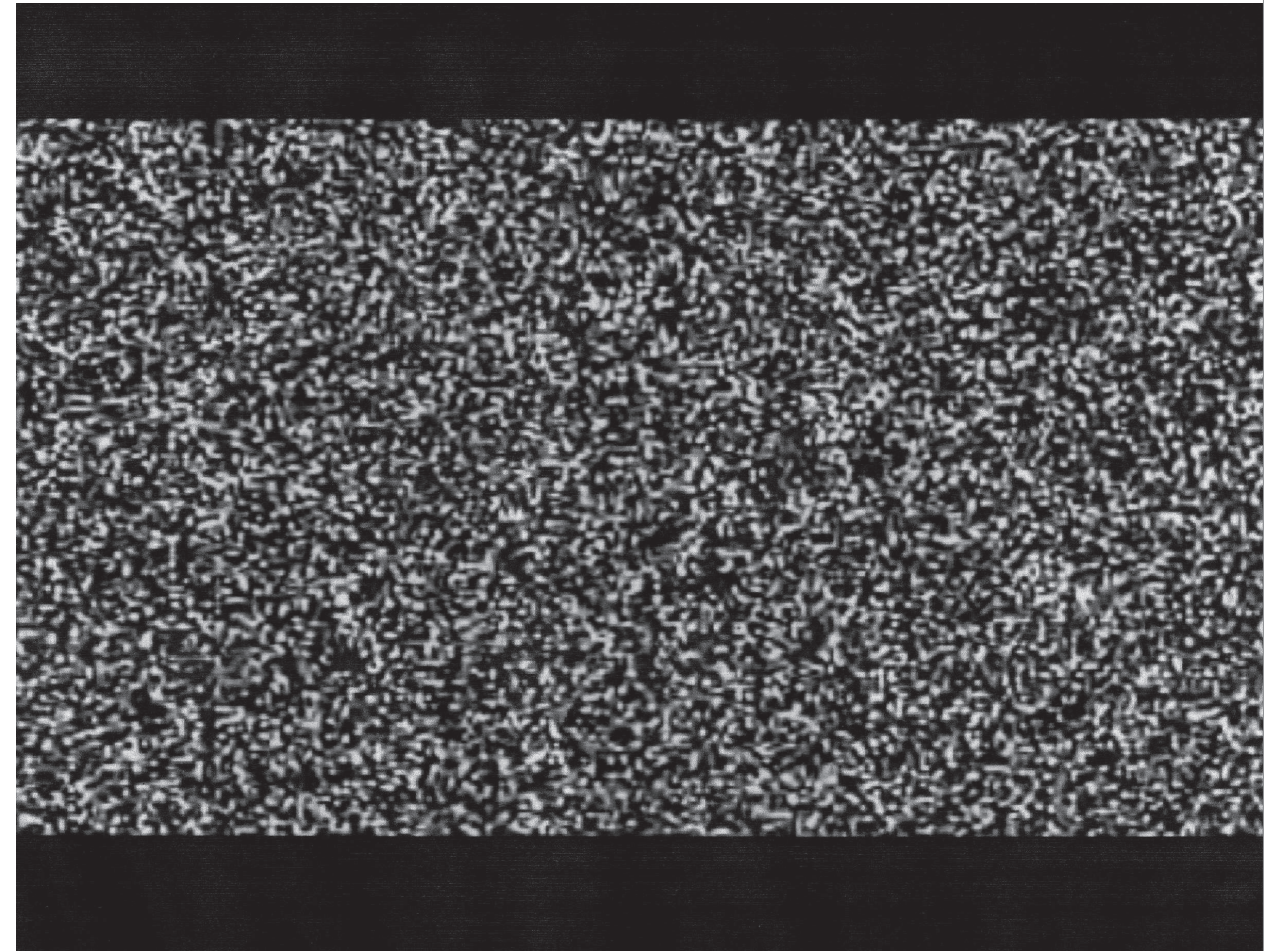
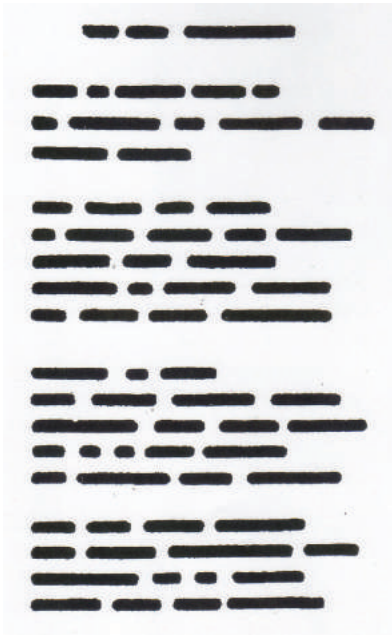




6. *Static Poem* (7:17 minutes)

2005; variable size; video, HD projector, DVD player, guitar amp

Static Poem is a videopoem based on Dadaist Man Ray's poem-painting "Lautgedicht." The videopoem was arrived at by placing Ray's poem on a grid, then arbitrarily assigning a time measurement of 2.5 seconds to the white space between the blanked-out words of the poem. That white space was replaced in the videopoem with visual static and white noise. The length of the white space between the poem's blanked-out words was used for exact measurements of the physical length of the blanked-out words, to each of which a sonic length, based on the white space's 2.5-second duration, was assigned. The blanked-out words of Ray's poem were replaced by silent black leader-tape.



7. *Meta4*

2016; variable size; 4 CD recordings, 4 CD players, 4 guitar amplifiers, 4 contact microphones

Meta4 consists of four separate wall-mounted CD players attached to four guitar amplifiers by four contact microphones. Each CD player features a different CD recording. Viewers can activate each of the four wall-mounted CD players by pulling a cord attached to each CD player's on-off switch. The viewer is the DJ mashing *Meta4* into a series of sound-poetry solos, duets, trios, and quartets. CD #1 is a drone created by microphone feedback made while recording CD #2. CD #2 is processed sounds made by placing a microphone in my mouth. The phrase "in other words" is repeated and treated with an echo/delay effects box on CD #3. CD #4 features synthetic-percussion.

8. *Time Signatures for György Ligeti*

2006; variable size; 100 digital metronomes

Time Signatures for György Ligeti is based on the late composer's 1962 performance score *Poème Symphonique* for 100 metronomes, originally proposed for one conductor, ten participants, and 100 manually operated metronomes. My piece is an audiovisual installation performance for an art gallery, using 100 battery-powered metronomes configured on the gallery floor.

A poem of 21 words, exactly 100 letters in length, and including all 26 letters of the alphabet, forms the visual and rhythmic basis of the piece. The configuration of the 100 metronomes on the gallery floor follows the physical shape of the poem. Each letter in the poem is represented by its own metronome. Those that stand in for the letter A are the only ones to use the pitch capacity possessed by modern electronic metronomes – the concert pitch A (440 Hz). The A metronomes are therefore the only ones in the piece that are not assigned a pulse rate.

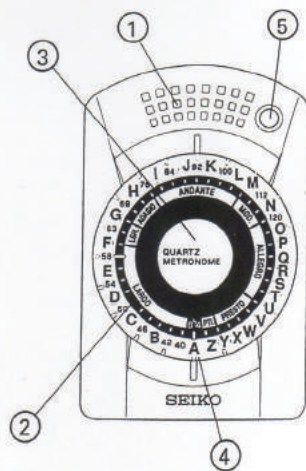
Thirty-one metronomes representing the 31 vowels (excluding A) in the poem have been hacked into, and a pitch control attached to the back of these metronomes. The pitch can be altered on each of the 31 metronomes without affecting their pulse rate. The rates assigned to the metronomes for all the letters beyond A – including the four other vowels – differ in each case, with B assigned pulse 44, C pulse 48, D pulse 50, and on to the letter Z at pulse 208.

The duration of the gallery installation-performance is determined by the lives of the batteries used: when all the batteries in the 100 metronomes are depleted of their charges the installation falls silent and the performance is complete. The average lifespan of the batteries used is approximately 80 hours.

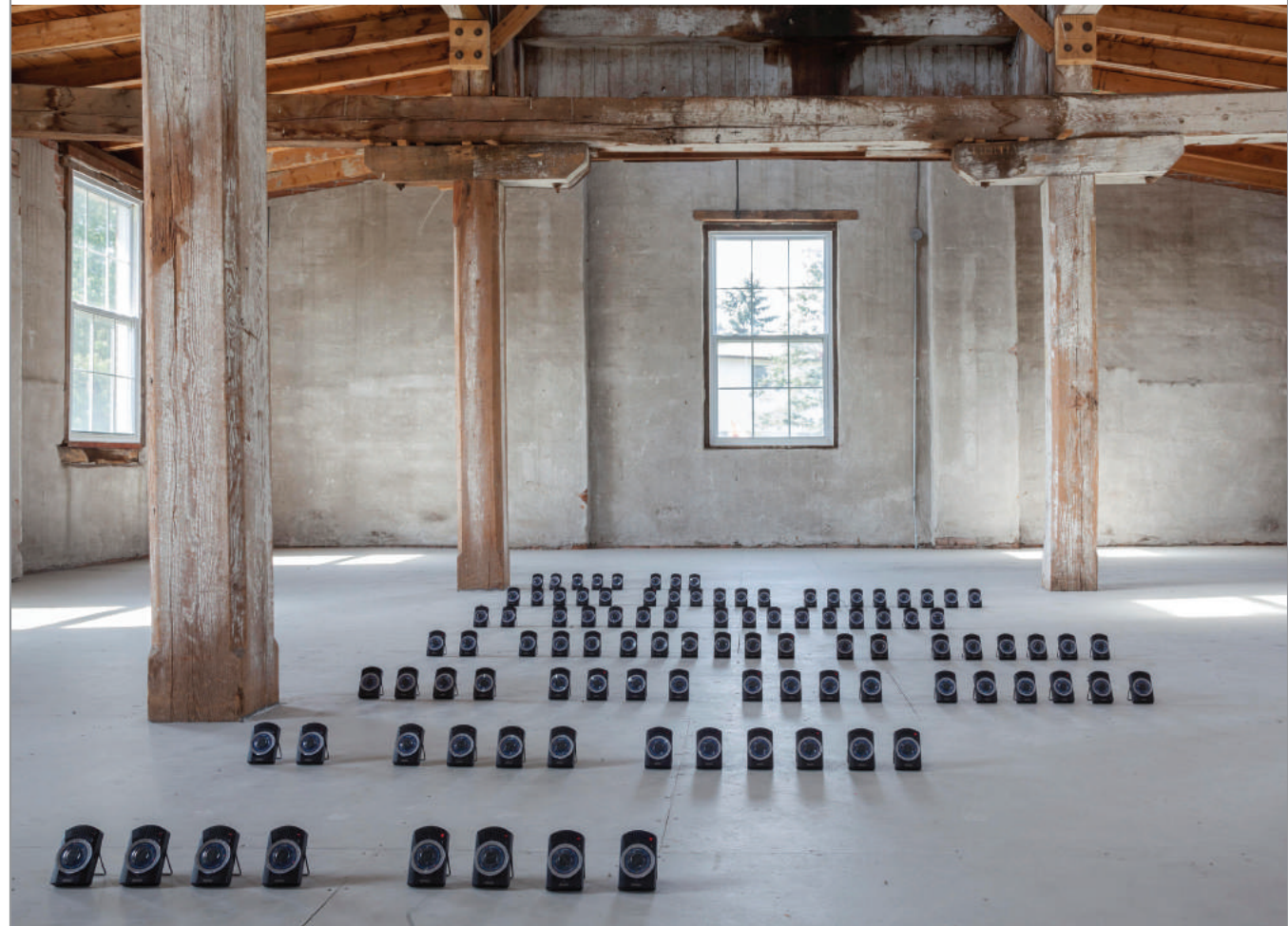


Time Signatures for György Ligeti

sound off
start rhythm machines
no quiet conductor
no xylophone or zither
kick drum wild violin
or bass guitar
just time



1. Speaker
2. Tempo Chart
3. Tempo Setting Dial
4. Reference note A (440Hz)
5. Tempo LED display



Acknowledgements

W. Mark Sutherland: Thank you Bill Blakeney, Lynn Campbell, Julian Cowley, Rob Cruickshank, Paul Dutton, David Gillespie, Karen Henricks, Jean-Michel Komarnicki, Laurie Kwasnik, Les Ladanyi, Lynn Lehman, Jurgen O. Olbrich, Jennie Punter, Steve Sherman, Barry Stainton, Jon Stainton, Robert Sutherland, Gayle Young, InterAccess and the Ontario Arts Council for exhibition assistance, James Campbell and the VAC staff of Dionne Powlenzuk, Ruth Read, Rachael Bird, and Linda Ward.

James Campbell: I wish to extend sincere thanks and congratulations to Mark Sutherland for sharing his compelling vision with the people of Clarington. We were taken on a multi-sensory journey of perception and absorption as we wandered the galleries of “The Mill”. Hearty thanks as well to Mark’s excellent “road crew”. Working in concert with our own exceptional installer, David Gillespie, Lynn Lehman and Barry Stainton carried out the complex installation with well-rehearsed efficiency. Thank you also to Dionne Powlenzuk of the VAC for her always great work in preparation of the invitations, and in all things social media for promoting the show. Thanks also to Linda Ward and weekend staff members, Marnie Packman and Theresa Consdale, for monitoring the varied audio-video components of the show during its run. Thanks also to Jean-Michel Komarnicki for his typical excellence as installation photographer. A final thanks to our funding partners, The Municipality of Clarington, The Ontario Arts Council, The Ontario Trillium Foundation, and The Bowmanville Rotary Club. And as always, a warm tip of the hat to our membership; we would not exist without them.

Publication to accompany the exhibition *Time Signatures* at the Visual Arts Centre of Clarington, from August 28 to September 25, 2016. The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington is supported by its Members and Donors, the Municipality of Clarington, the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Ontario Arts Council.

Photographer:
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Printer:
Moveable Inc.

