

Normalization of Deviance

for seven musicians and electronics

(2025)

Mason Moy

Instrumentation:

Trumpet in B-flat
Trumpet in B-flat / flugelhorn
Alto sax / tenor sax
Clarinet in B-flat / baritone sax
Viola
Violoncello
Vibraphone
Conductor / Electronics

Program Notes:

The Normalization of Deviance is a sociological theory developed by Diane Vaughan after the failed launch of the Space Shuttle Challenger in 1986. When unsafe practices are allowed to continue without consequence, those behaviors become standardized.

My piece tries to replicate complex systems failure in a chamber music setting. Instrumentalists are asked to play melodies, responding to what they hear other performers do. Deviance: during each movement, someone will begin to improvise. Normalization: when a musician on stage suspects someone of improvising, they follow, until every member of the ensemble is no longer playing what is on the page, but fully improvising. The movement is then “reset” by an electronic interlude, transitioning *attaca* into the next.

Performance Notes:

Duration:

Each movement should last 3-4 minutes. The entire piece should therefore last 15-20 minutes. The conductor / electronic musician will cue the beginning and end of each movement, as well as the transitions between movements.

Rhythm:

Rhythms are to be interpreted loosely. No consistent pulse is shared between members of the ensemble, except in the final movement. A slow accelerando occurs throughout the movement, until the material is no longer playable and the conductor / electronic musician cues the end of the piece.

Switching between melodies:

Each musician is presented with a collection of up to six melodies, and an instruction on when to switch between melodies. These instructions can be based on subjective or objective criteria - the performer's ear is always the final deciding factor.

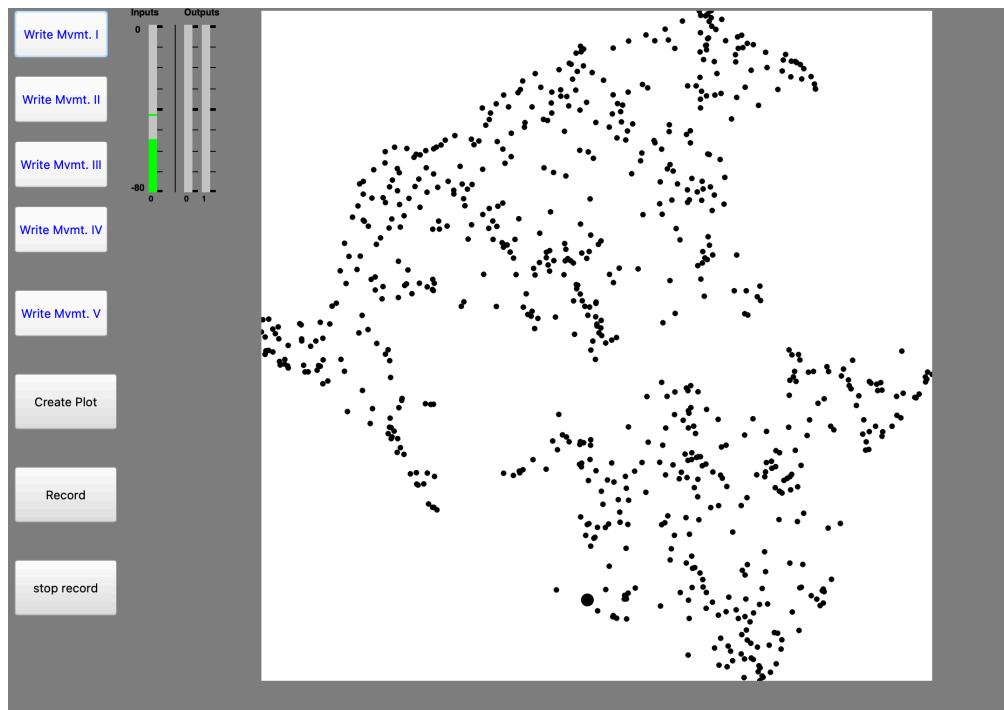
When switching, always begin at the start of the melody. Switch immediately after the criteria is met, even if that is in the middle of a melody. Always play the melodies in order, and do not jump around inside of the melody.

If a musician suspects any other musician of improvising, they are to start improvising. After it is clear that all musicians are improvising, the conductor / electronic musician will cut off the ensemble and begin the electronics interlude.

Electronics:

The electronics are a SuperCollider patch (available upon request). This patch, detailed below, records the performance of the acoustic musicians for 150 seconds before analyzing and plotting short (less than 1 second) slices of the recording. The short slices are plotted according to descriptor values (including spectral shape and loudness) to create a plot where similar sounds are sorted together.

The electronic musician uses this plot to improvise interludes between each movement. A separate controller such as an iPad or MIDI keyboard can be used to perform with this patch.



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Normalization of Deviance

Mason Moy

I.

switch after you play in rhythmic unison with anyone

Clarinet in B \flat

Measure 1: Treble clef, key signature of two flats. The staff begins with a repeat sign. The first note is a half note B \flat (middle C) marked *p*. A slur covers the next two notes: a half note D \flat (B) and a half note E \flat (D). The staff then has a whole rest. The next phrase starts with a half note F \sharp (E), followed by a half note G \sharp (F), a half note A \sharp (G), and a half note B \sharp (A). A slur covers these four notes, with a crescendo hairpin underneath. The staff then has a whole rest. The final note is a half note B \sharp (C) marked *mp*. The measure ends with a repeat sign.

Measure 2: Treble clef, key signature of two flats. The staff begins with a repeat sign. The first note is a half note B \sharp (C) marked *p*. A slur covers the next two notes: a half note C \sharp (D) and a half note D \sharp (E). The staff then has a whole rest. The next phrase starts with a half note E \sharp (F), followed by a half note F \sharp (G), a half note G \sharp (A), and a half note A \sharp (B). A slur covers these four notes, with a crescendo hairpin underneath. The staff then has a whole rest. The final note is a half note B \sharp (C) marked *f*. The measure ends with a repeat sign.

switch after anyone fits into your harmony

[illegible]

switch after you land on pitch unison with anyone (assuming octave equivalency)

[illegible]

II.

switch mute on every repeat

Trumpet in B♭ 1



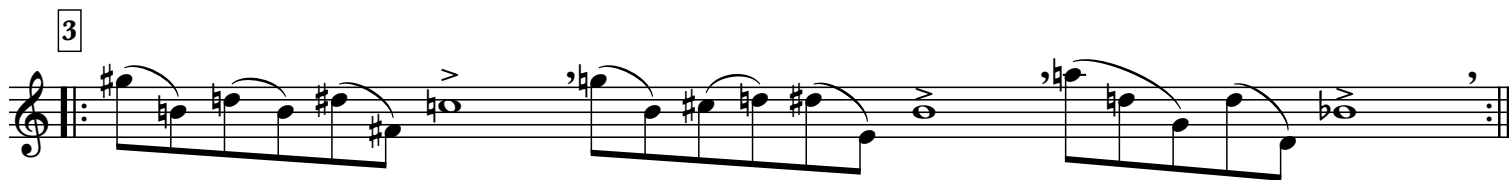
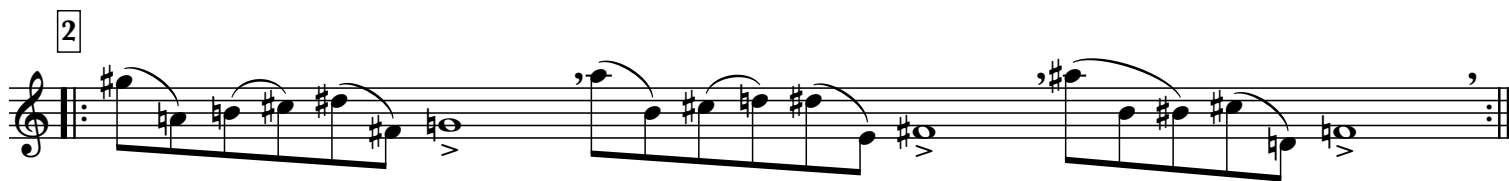
switch mute on every repeat

Trumpet in B♭ 2



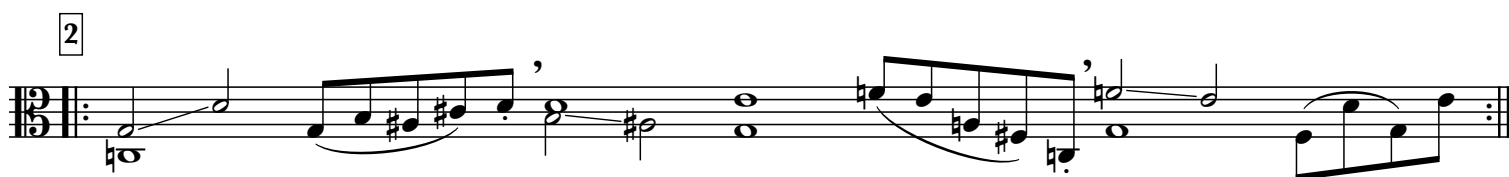
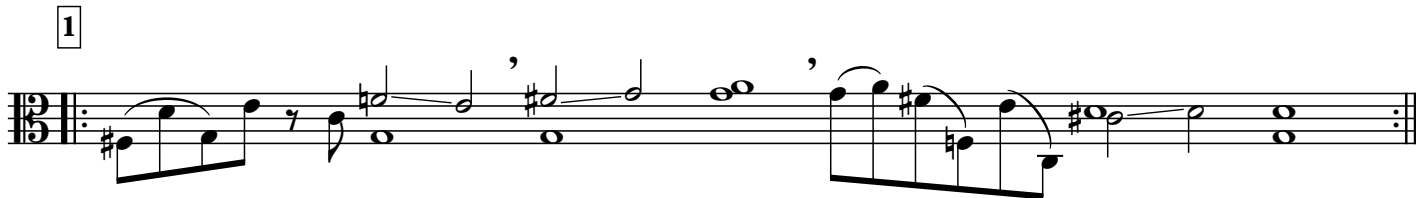
switch after you hear dissonance/crunch from trumpets

Tenor Saxophone



switch after you hear unison/octaves from trumpets

Viola



III.

switch after playing a dissonance with the viola

Baritone Saxophone



switch after playing in rhythmic unison with anyone

1

Vibraphone

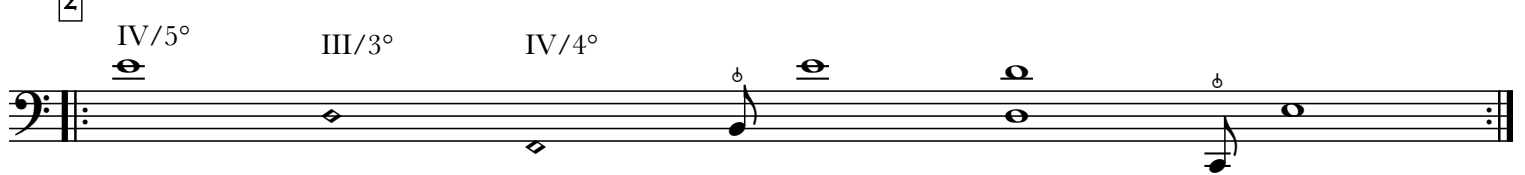
switch after playing a dissonance with the bari sax

Violoncello

1



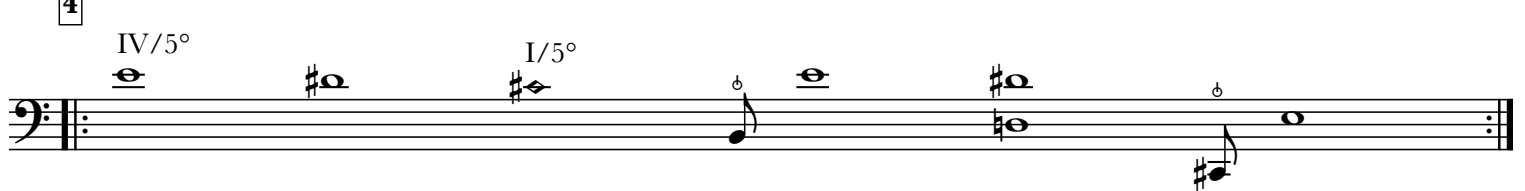
2



3



4



IV.

switch after hearing any perfect intervals

Trumpet in B♭ 1

1

half-valve ord.

2

flz. ord.

mp *f* *mp* *mp* *f* *mp*

3

flz. ord.

f *mp*

switch after hearing any unisons

Flugelhorn

1

half-valve

mp *f*

2

flz. ord.

mp *f* *mp*

3

switch after hearing a major 3rd

Alto Saxophone

1

flz. ord.

mp *f* *mp* *mp*

2

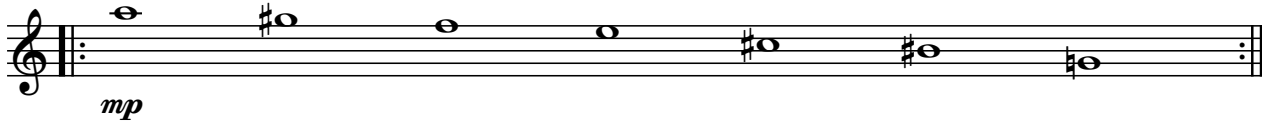
multiphonic ord.

mp *f* *mp*

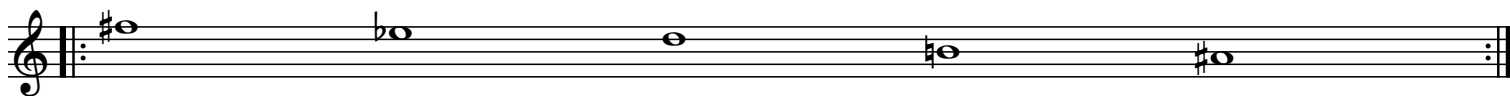
switch after hearing a minor 3rd

1

Baritone Saxophone



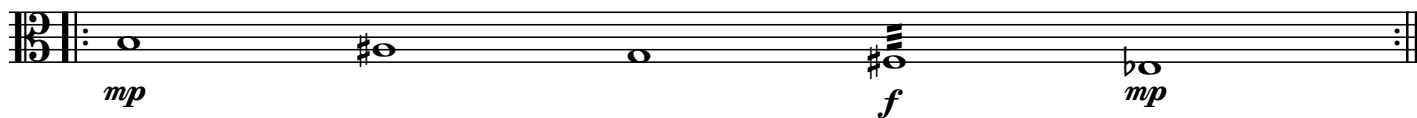
2



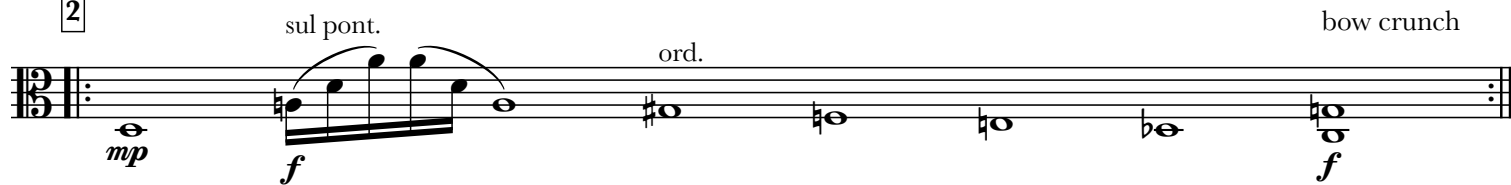
switch freely

1

Viola



2



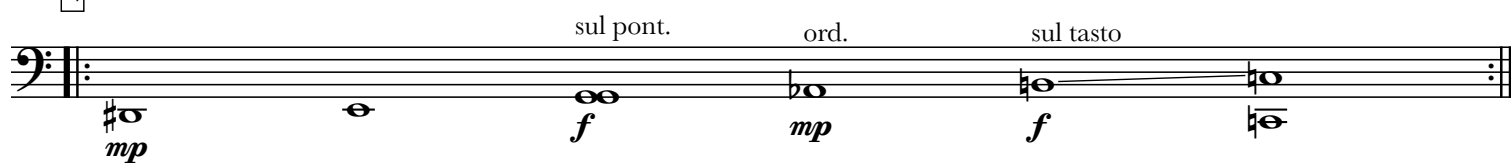
switch freely

1

Violoncello



2



V.

switch after you play in unison with anyone

Trumpet in Bb 1

1

2

3

4

switch after you play in unison with anyone

Trumpet in Bb 2

1

2

3

4

switch freely

Alto Saxophone

1

2

3

4

5

6

switch after you play in unison with anyone

Clarinet in B \flat

1 2

3 4

switch after you play in unison with anyone

Viola

1 2

3 4

switch after you play in unison with anyone

Violoncello

1 2

3 4

switch after you play in unison with anyone

Vibraphone

1 2

3 4