

Speculative Scores Outside of Standard Time

Jules Gimbrone

EAR | WAVE | EVENT

Issue Six
Summer 2021
issue6.earwaveevent.org

There are unfelt textures, unseen colors, and unheard sounds that ring in a mind when presented with their lack. During this time of internal twisting, where forms become visible in an unearthing of ancient systems, when the water clocks of our hearts become standardized into the widths of pixels and we perceive our world as if we are exiles, there is finally enough distance to hear it clearly: that something taking root in our innermost bellies, a type of growth that seems to fill out and up inside of our throats and into the words we speak, a loosening and unraveling of time. Drip drop drip. One of the first things that my friend Candice says to me as we shine our newly anointed faces unmasked into the NYC sun like mole rats unearthing and flinging themselves into the vaccinated promise of a new social life: *Oh, how time feels so compressed*. Did we change? If not, we feel a sense of missed opportunity. If we did, we throw ourselves onto the concrete haven of stuff, things, music, bodies, and say, yes! We are here. We did something.

In the United States, for most of the 19th century, time was told through the sun, the railroads, or the clock at the center of town. The clock, usually located in the highest tower, was a fulcrum around which the town appeared. Before a shared electrical grid, sewage, or school district, there was time, in its most physicalized object (a giant clock) that connected people in a shared geographic community. This local time, for those that could see or hear the clanging of the bells announcing the hour, was a mechanism of power and control. All the air penetrated by the sound wave emanating from the bell of the clock was under its precise domain. Diiiiiiiiiiiiing.

Local time, however, varied town to town, and therefore to do things, to make plans, to set appointments, but more importantly to *build*, the railroads rallied for a universal time that would govern all of the land. In 1883 the railroads of North America set this standard time for the trains and factories,

allowing for the standardization of time that helped to lead to the birth of the industrial revolution. Tick Tock, American workers lined up across the land in sync, in tempo, with machines and punch cards, entraining themselves to a mechanism of control that would set the foundations for globalization, exponential growth, and urbanization.

Never before in my lifetime has there been a real break in this tempo. And this is the question, I think, that the pandemic asks us. Is there a breath here? A gasp for air from an exhausted metronome that ran nonstop for at least the last two hundred years. Planes stopped flying. People stopped going out, stopped traveling, stopped making plans, stopped going into offices; went into hospitals exhausted, too much, too little; had to go to work; saw contrasts, saw inequalities more starkly; people protested; people thought about their energy; people moved into the country from the cities; people stayed; people heard birds, heard frogs, smelled air that was a little less chocked full of exhaust; people died alone on Zoom; people slowed down.

This is the question of progress. But what about a refusal? An image I keep returning to is that of the toppled statues of confederate war heroes, of activists ready for something other than the glorification of people that prospered through and because of the violent history and legacy of slavery. The empty pedestal. The empty pedestal is another speculative question that marks a refusal, a break, a breath in the concept of history as a ceaseless march forward: the horse and man moving in a shared vision of conquest and progress no more.

It is with this image of absence, that I began to think about a call for speculative scores. Deep in the space time of the pandemic, when time and the grasp of codified time-history was loosening around our bodies, I wondered about a time outside of time, where we could feel free to build something new, or even imagine a new way of building something together.

I asked friends and colleagues to reflect on the concept of **Speculative Scores** for this issue of EWE. Since this journal, and certain discourses around sound and music have a certain lexicon of meaning through which we draw from, the idea of a "score" can be seen as part of that history. But a score is also just a codified way of telling someone (or things) to do (or not) do something at a future date (or maybe it is a past date if you can figure that out!). Then the idea of speculation in this ask can be taken as a nod to the position we have all found ourselves in. I mean always the future is, but especially now, speculative?

The metronome is not speculative. The metronome is a consistent pulse that we rub our mess up onto moment by moment. In the score, the implicit and explicit structures that give rise to the dominance of tempo are usually loud. When a score is absent of tempo, we look at the structures and forms through which this score was created—the social control that encircles that previous piece or worlds that the composer previously created. The soft stroke of the ambiguous or open-ended tempo rendered it clear and dominant in a shared history: we do not meander, we do not trot, we speed to the end, we allow for exuberance collective crescendi.

If we feel change, time has passed. But in the absence of change, in stasis, do we start to breach the walls of standardized quantities of time that formerly defined us? We begin to notice time through different lenses: the beginning of a semester, the passing of a loved one, a chin hair grown long, the plan to travel to see a mountain or a friend, walking to the store, a parking space, a need for touch. One second, one minute, one hour, one day. All jumbled and swirled during a time that we were all, each of us, in different and similar ways, thrown into.

As I drove through New England this summer, I was struck by the signs greeting you at the edge of town: Lebanon, N.H. Established 1761; Northampton, M.A. Established 1883; White River Junction, V.T. Established 1847. All founded along the axis of standardized railway time. Day-dreaming, I found myself speculating on establishing a town, a place, and wondering if there were locations where we could establish something new and how or if that is even possible now? And if so, what would be the charters (score) of this new place? Can we make somewhere outside of Standard Time?