

Shipsides and Beggs Projects - DECIMATION in A-flat and F-minor

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Decimation in A-flat and F-minor - Configured for Piano  
Shipsides and Beggs Projects  
Audio artwork (inc. 12 inch vinyl record)  
31min  
2018

An excerpt of the audio work is here :



### Three minutes of Decimation for two pianos in A Flat and F minor. Shipsides and Beggs Projects 2018

from Neal Beggs

03:05



The full work is here:

30:51



Decimation in A-flat and F-minor - Configured for Live Piano  
Shipsides and Beggs Projects - performed live by Caroline Scotton  
36min  
2018



After an intensive period of working, transcribing the midi to sheet music and arranging the composition it was then developed and performed live by professional French classical pianist Caroline Scotton-Goulard. The event took place at La Cuisine Centre d'Arte et de Design, in

France as the final phase of the Lament of the Accvolade Tree exhibition by Shipsides and Beggs.

Live audio documentation of this event is here:

35:19 |



Draft text:

Decimation in A-flat and F-minor is a work which has developed over several years, refining a process and developing a programming system and concept to a point where the project has reached a significant level of maturity and resolution – thanks in huge part to Neal.



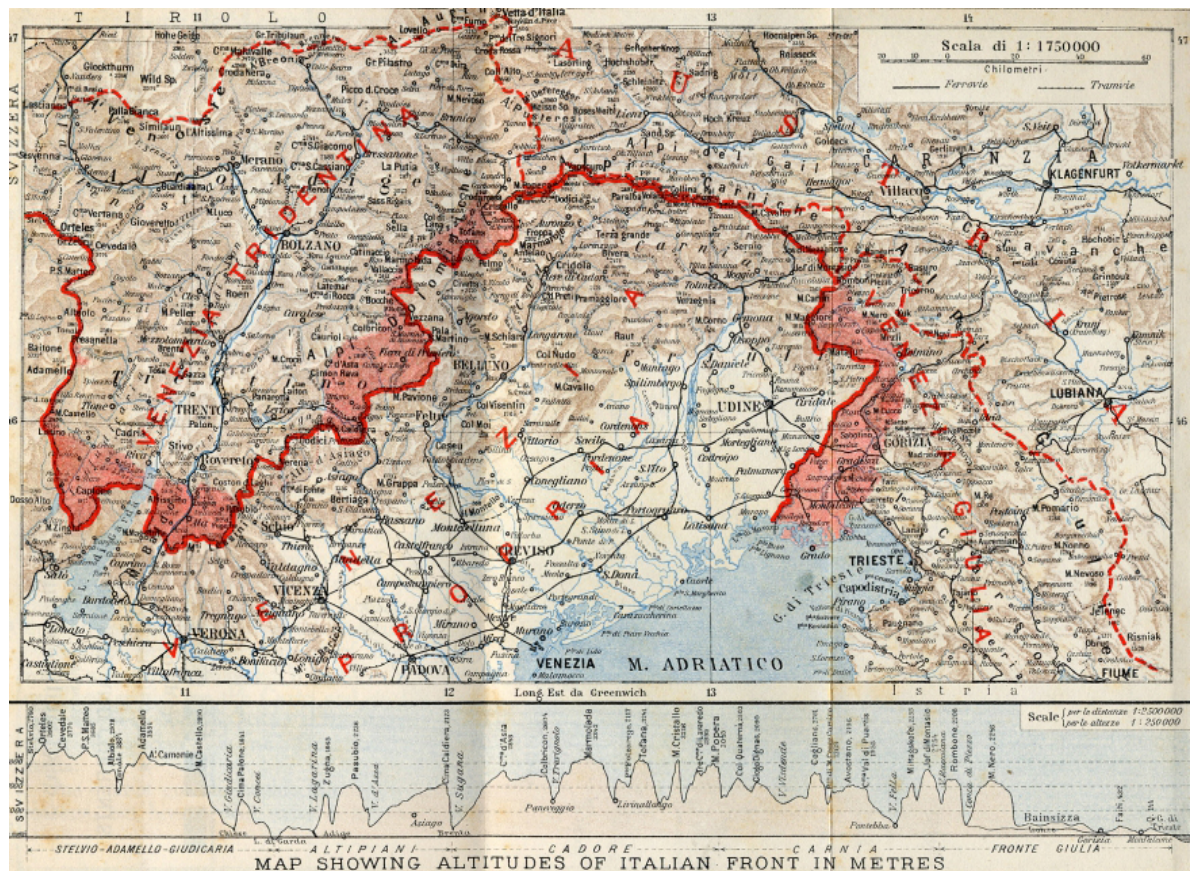
The principle is that of transcoding altitudinal height of geographic, topological and political partitions into audio data and then producing musical forms out of that data. Partially the concept developed through an association with the steel wires of Via Ferrata (tensioned metal cables and stemples introduced in WW1 as a way of industrially and militarily occupying the summits of that war frontier) and the metallic and potentially musical noise they make whilst climbing in the Dolomites and imagining what form of sound and music these literal partitions (these iron-lines in the landscape contributed to a significant historical partitioning of Europe) might constitute. The SBP work [BIVACCO](#) (2011) explored some aspects of this phenomenon.

The process has been developed through several stages and artworks. Neal prototyped the concept through a work *From Our House to the Summit of Europe* – which took a line from the summit of Mount Blanc to his house in northern France. We have also developed other works using the political partition of Belgium (some of which features in [Zombie Line](#) and in the

exhibition at L'Orangerie, Bastogne, 2015) and that between France and Spain (performed at Pau at the Bel Ordinaire, 2016).

Often these partitions have developed in a way to facilitate live performance (with guitar, harmonica, melodica, drums, voice, electronic instruments and improvised wind instruments) which has allowed a level of flexibility and shift so as to accommodate vernacular or popular music as elements of the partition melody connect to or suggest – for instance in the Spanish - France partition Somewhere Over the Rainbow is present in the notation. The harmonies that emerge also allow us to fold in other songs including those of our own. A raw version of the Decimation concept was experimentally performed with guitar, drums, electronics and other instruments at Microclima in Venice in 2017 and makes up the spine of a series of edited videos of this performance called **THE IRON WAY** (this audio/video/performance work was originally called Decimation in D and was the basis of this matured work).

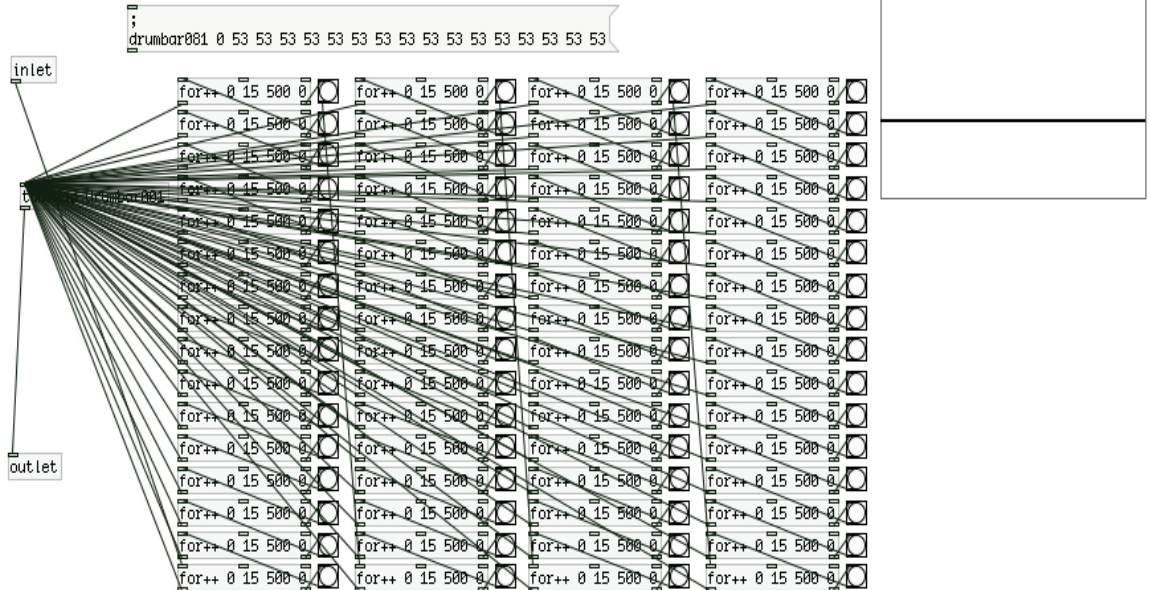
It is useful and important here to say that in French the word "partition" also refers to harmony in music in terms of how octaves are constructed and operate in relation to audio frequency – so the double meaning with geo-political partitioning is a useful tool into establishing a conceptual frame for this work.



Decimation in A-flat and F-minor derives its data from the Italian-Austrian frontier in 1916 where we climbed in phases of field research and encountered the WW1 histories which is still very much a present and, at times, ghostly phenomenon. In this war, the Italian army re-instituted the terrifying policy (it also was a system used in Roman times) of Decimation. Decimation is where one in ten soldiers could be randomly selected and executed if any soldier in that section was thought guilty of cowardice. In practice, it was routinely undertaken whether cowardice had been suspected of taking place or not. In this way, the army sought to establish and exploit unwavering obedience. In a way, it establishes the fascist dynamic of totalitarian brutality where the individual has no justice, value or autonomous agency. In this light, the mass of men was decimated without attention to specific or individual value, sense or what might in be the best interests of even the local war objective – and most definitely with no cognizance of the wider interests and potential of human relationships. Decimation as a term might be a way of also thinking of the fascistic indiscriminate relationship to the planet, environment, humanity, society and the individual that follows through much of western power and economic driven politics through the 20th Century and through to neo-liberalism today.

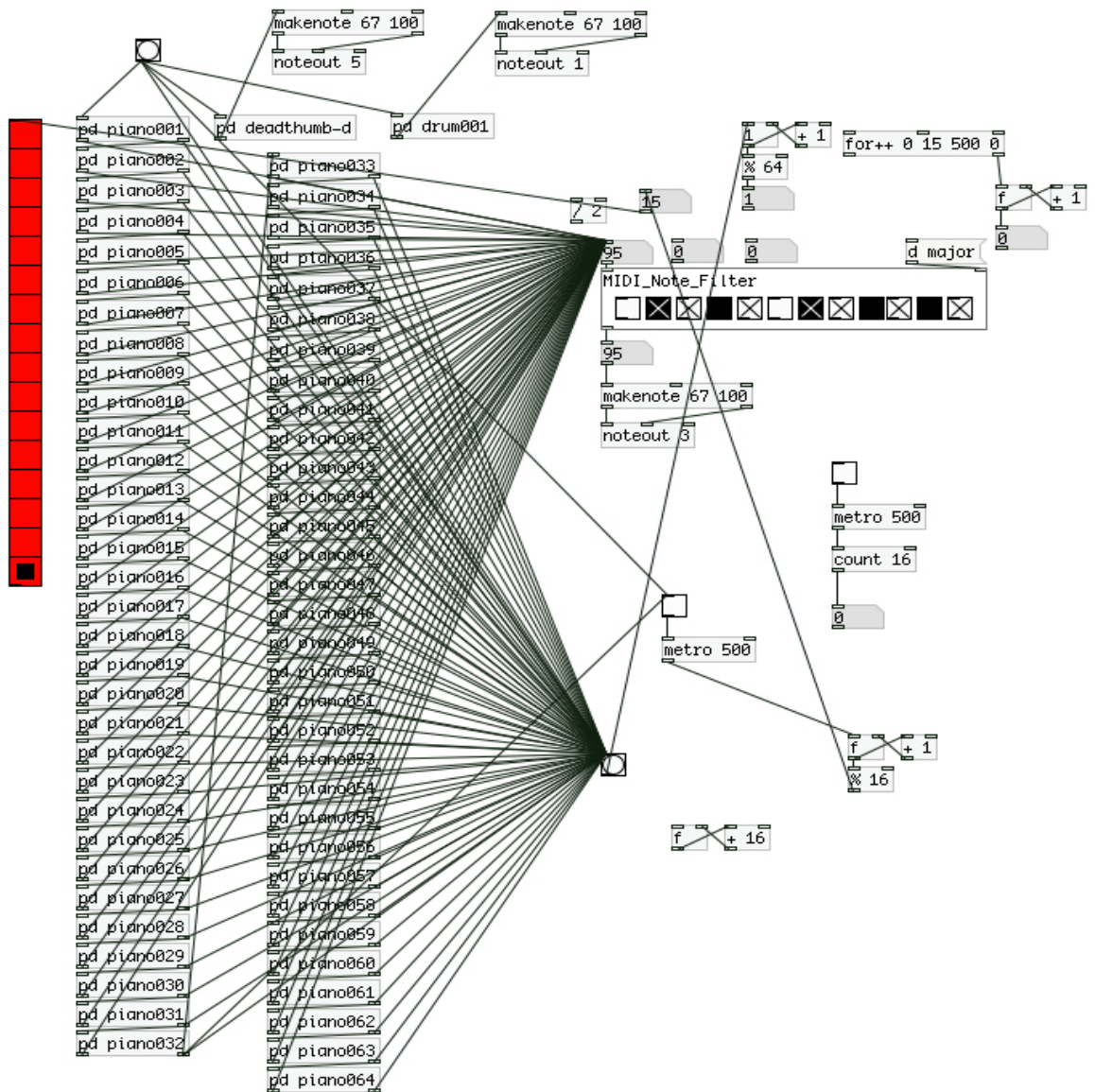
In this context, climbing in the Dolomites (as in many other climbing locations) brings a connection to global politics and the haunting nature of what much of its power dynamics are historically built on – brutal partition, decimation and exploitation.

drumbar001



Consequently Decimation in A-flat and F-minor emerged from this context and has a particular haunting sensibility and beauty – although it also light and simple. It is configured for two pianos playing in chords A and F#. The notation in these works (and most pronouncedly developed in Decimation in A-flat and F-minor) is not simply coded from the altitudinal data – that is near impossible because one has to make decisions as to how to organise the data into sets of usable and coherent information – establishing sets of octave based data. In doing this – using Pure Data programming the process sets about creating harmonics out of chaos. So, (quote from a performative talk in Venice 2017):

We became interested  
 In the octave  
 And the chaos  
 Of  
 Frequency  
 And how it is partitioned  
 To create  
 Harmony  
 And  
 Some kind Of  
 Order  
 And in the same way  
 Continents  
 Are  
 Partitioned  
 To create  
 Some kind  
 Of balance  
 Now, whether that is good  
 Or  
 Bad  
 In discord  
 Or Whatever  
 is an open question.



Graphically Pure Data allows information to be organised and made active visually – in patch-like sets. So, the sets of information establish a painstaking rigorous systemic flow between data faithful to the process undertaken from terrain mapping to music. There is a minute focus on details – making numbers active within a system in sets of patches – and a sense of establishing coherent harmonies within a mass of otherwise incoherent chaotic data. The system does not totalise the general idea but brings its’ structure from the terrain and the need to set up harmonic patches. This might relate to Cezanne’s landscape orientated approach to the “patch” where (we spoke about this is in the conference in La Cuisine) he speaks of perceiving harmonies which are not made from blended total scenes but from patch against patch so that difference and juxtaposition exist as crucial elements.

This system of coding through Pure Data is worked by hand (Neal's hands) - this aspect is not computer derived or batch processed. Each piece of data is individually worked with and assigned a relationship within and to the partition. It is painstaking work – but this level of proximity and built-in nuance allows for the human quality of the electronically outputted work. This is why it sounds so much as though Decimation in A-flat and F-minor is actually played by a human pianist - and why to have it performed live then became the next logical and creative step.

The work exists in several forms:

- as Pure Data electronic output audio data file
- as a vinyl record pressed using the audio file
- as transferred into music notation for live performance (first arranged and performed by Caroline Scotton Goulard La Cuisine in September 2018 - see above.)

A raw version of this concept was also performed with guitar, drums, electronics and other instruments at Microclima in Venice in 2017 and makes up the spine of a series of edited videos called **THE IRON WAY** (this audio work as originally called Decimation in D and was the basis of this matured work). This material is here:

**THE IRON WAY**





