



ARTIST: Tony Conrad (1940–2016)	TITLE: <i>Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain</i>
ACCESSION NO.: L04307	YEAR: 1972 – ongoing
MEDIUM: Performance with live music and film	
DURATION: Approximately 90 minutes ¹	

INTRODUCTION²

This document is the third part of a dossier of information that must be consulted prior to activation of the work and must be disseminated to the appropriate parties at the appropriate moments in the lead-up to the performance.

The dossier comprises the following documents:

1. Performance Specification
 2. Guidelines for Projectionists
 3. Guidelines for Musicians
 4. Guidelines for Sound Engineers
 5. Associated contextual and audio-visual documentation³
- As there is no score to guide musicians, since the piece was always conducted by Tony Conrad in person, the present document aims to provide an overview of the musicians’ role in the performance.
 - It is important that musicians become acquainted with Conrad’s work; the media files that sit alongside this document are designed to assist this process.
 - The musicians’ role is akin to, and intrinsically linked to, the role of the projectionist. As such, it involves liaising with the projectionist in order to understand the timing and feel of the performance.
 - Although they contain repeated sections, musicians should also refer to the Performance Specification and Guidelines for Projectionists to learn more about the work.

¹ This is the duration that can be found on Tate’s collection management system. Different contributors, including Andrew Lampert, Regina Greene and Andrea Lissoni, have stated different durations between 90 and 100 minutes, often considering silent moments before and after the performance as part of the performance itself.

² This document was created by Tate’s Time-Based Media Conservation team (Louise Lawson, Hélia Marçal and Ana Ribeiro) along with various other contributors: Rhys Chatham, David Grubbs, Angharad Davies and Dominic Lash, who have participated in past performances as musicians and received direct instructions from Conrad how to play the instruments; Andrew Lampert, Regina Greene and Esther Harris.

³ The materials contained within this section will be varied and may change from display to display depending on the context of display, size of venue, and so on.



DESCRIPTION OF THE PERFORMANCE

Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain is an approximately 90-minute film and music performance work involving four⁴ 16 mm film projectors, a projectionist, a pre-recorded audio file of Tony Conrad (hereafter referred to as 'the artist') playing solo violin, and live, amplified accompaniment by three⁵ musicians performing on violin or viola (hereafter referred to as 'violin'), electric bass guitar and a unique instrument called a 'long string instrument' or 'long string drone' (LSD).⁶

The performance features the three musicians playing a durational, minimalist and somewhat improvisational⁷ accompaniment to the recording of the artist. There is, intentionally, no score to guide musicians; the artist has stated that 'My idea was to eliminate the social and cultural function of the score as a site'.⁸ The musicians are positioned to one side of a screen, upon which there is a projection coming from four 16 mm projectors arranged side-by-side in a row, whose projected images are lined up edge-to-edge⁹. The 16 mm film loops each contain the same pattern of alternating light and dark vertical stripes which appear to move across the screen. Every third frame, the image switches between its positive and negative form, intended to create an intense, pulsating effect. Over the course of the performance the focus of each of the projections is subtly altered to create different effects. Roughly halfway through the performance the projectors and projections are incrementally shifted inwards at a very slow rate so that they gradually unite to form one pulsating, overlapping projection. The projectors and projectionist are set up on a raised platform behind the audience, who are located in the middle of the darkened space.

⁴ The number of projections has varied: three projectors were used in the performance in Leeds in 2006 (EVOLUTION 2006 festival, Leeds City Art Gallery) due to the fourth projector breaking just before the performance, and six projectors were used in the 2013 performance in Bologna (Live Arts Week Festival II, Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (MAMbo)). This was agreed with the artist, who was present in both cases.

⁵ The number of musicians has varied across previous performances, from three at The Kitchen, New York in 1972 to seven at the performance at BOZAR, the Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels in 2007.

⁶ The term 'long string instrument' is used by musicians and long string instrument practitioners. The reference to the instrument as a 'long string drone' came from Tony Conrad as a form of word play, since its abbreviation carries the double reference to the psychedelic drug LSD. Rhys Chatham, personal communication with Hélia Marçal, Kit Webb and Ana Ribeiro, 24 April 2019.

⁷ Given that the artist is no longer able to guide and perform the work following his death in 2016, there exists a tension between his improvisational practice and the need for the musicians to respond to the fixed recording of the artist playing.

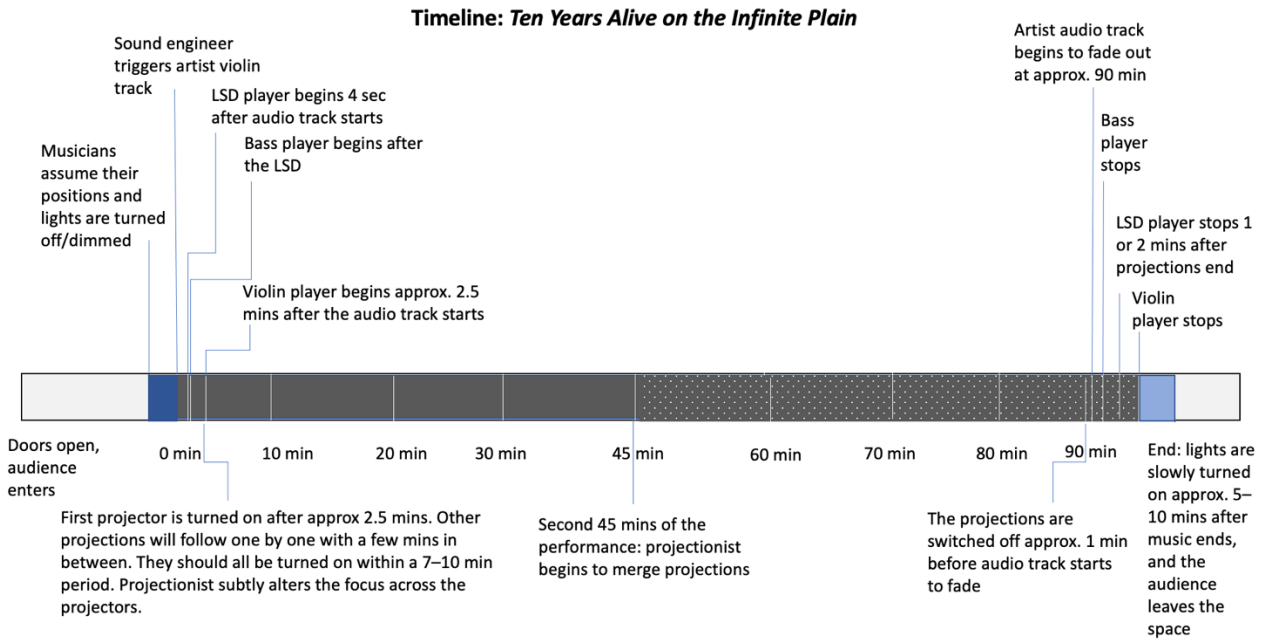
⁸ Tony Conrad in Hans-Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of New Music*, Zurich 2013, p.194.

⁹ Information provided by Andrew Lampert.



TIMELINE OF THE PERFORMANCE AND THE ROLE OF THE MUSICIANS

The performance is approximately 90–100 minutes in length. The duration of the music and projections has become fixed to the duration of the recording of the artist playing the violin. The additional time is accounted for by the two moments of darkness and silence at the beginning and the end.¹⁰



Beginning:

- The beginning of the event is marked with the doors of the performance space opening and the audience entering the dimly lit space and finding their way to sit, stand or roam as they choose. The audience space is situated between the projection surface and the projection platform, the exact positioning of which is dependent on the chosen space.
- When the performance is ready to start, the musicians assume their positions with their instruments, chairs, instrument stands and amplifiers. The projectionist takes their position behind the projectors.
- When ready, the lights are turned down or off to create a darkened space.¹¹ There is a dim spotlight on the musicians throughout the performance.

¹⁰ Information provided by Andrew Lampert, Andrea Lissoni and Regina Greene.

¹¹ Information provided by Andrew Lampert.



- The performance begins with the playback of the pre-recorded audio track, triggered by the sound engineer. This represents the first violin of the performance; the remaining musicians are considered to be supporting the artist's audio track.¹²
- The LSD starts after four seconds of playback.
- The bass player starts playing immediately after the LSD, providing a '1 note pulse': a steady C# pulse throughout the whole performance.¹³
- After around two and a half minutes, the violin player begins; this allows the work to be heard in the way that the artist presented it in the past – starting and ending with him playing solo violin. The hope is that it will be as clear as possible to the audience that the violin heard at the beginning and end of the piece is the artist playing.¹⁴
- Also at around two and a half minutes, the first projector is turned on. After a few minutes the second projector is turned on, followed a few minutes later by the third, and then the fourth a few minutes after that; it should take around 7–10 minutes for all four projectors to be turned on.
- The projectionist is then free to slowly move between projectors, gently and incrementally adjusting their focus, creating different visual patterns within the linear row of projections.¹⁵

Middle:

- For the first forty-five minutes of the performance the projectors remain stationary. At roughly the halfway point in the performance, the projectors are gently manipulated by the projectionist so that the projections very slowly merge into one single image during the remainder of the performance.
- Merging the images into one should take around 35 minutes and should happen almost imperceptibly slowly.
- During this time, focus is also continually shifted as in the first half of the performance.

End:

- The end of the performance is determined by the end of the audio track (which fades out with about a minute remaining); in anticipation of this, each performer has a role to play in order to finish the performance:

¹² Information collated by TiBM conservation based on the feedback session, Tate Liverpool, 16 May 2019.

¹³ Information provided by Regina Greene.

¹⁴ As an example, for the 2017 activation of the performance at Tate Modern, violinist Angharad Davies decided to come in when Conrad transitioned from playing on a single string 'to playing a double-stop' (two strings together).

¹⁵ Information provided by Andrew Lampert and Regina Greene.



- By one minute prior to the end of the audio track the projectionist should have converged all the projections and turned off each projector, one by one.
- Shortly after the final projector is turned off, the bassist stops playing.
- After the bassist, the LSD player stops (1–2 minutes after the projections end).
- Shortly after the LSD player, the violinist stops (dampening the strings of the instrument).¹⁶
- The exact timing of these final steps is dependent on the musicians' flow;¹⁷ for example, if the musician is in the middle of a bow, they finish their movement.¹⁸
- A moment of darkness should be allowed after the music and projections finish.¹⁹ Only a dim light should be on in order to allow the audience to leave the space. The lights should not be immediately brought up to full brightness as this detracts from the power and aftereffect of the work on the audience.²⁰
- House lights can be turned on after around 5 to 10 minutes.

PHYSICAL COMPONENTS (to be supplied by Tate)

- 1 x long string drone (LSD) (with 1 x metal cylinder/slide used to play the instrument).
 - Tate component number: L04307.002.
 - Overall dimensions: 120 x 1563 x 114 mm (see fig.1).

Conceived of by the artist, the LSD produces a drone sound when played with a bow or similar. This LSD was produced by Conrad's estate and can be replicated in the future. Musicians can use other materials to play with the instrument.²¹

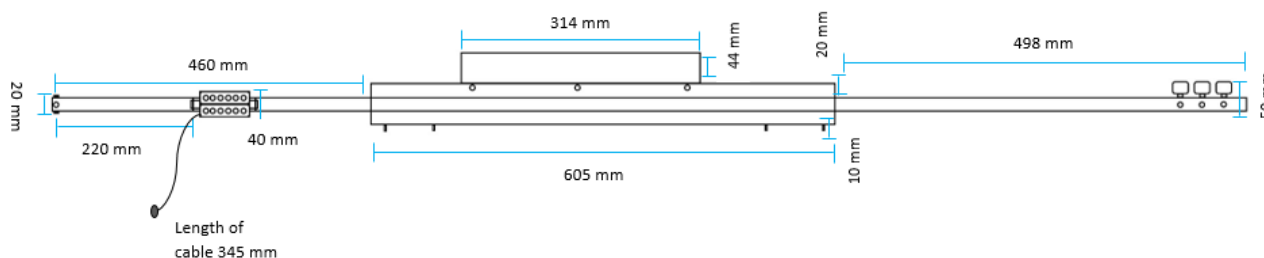


Fig.1
Diagram showing the dimensions of the long string drone

¹⁶ Suggestion from Rhys Chatham during rehearsals at Tate Liverpool, May 2019.

¹⁷ Information provided by Regina Greene.

¹⁸ Information provided by Regina Greene and confirmed by Angharad Davis and Rhys Chatham.

¹⁹ Information provided by Andrew Lampert, Andrea Lissoni and Regina Greene.

²⁰ Information provided by Andrew Lampert.

²¹ The LSD player at Tate Liverpool in 2019, George Maund, handled the LSD using different materials, including a metal rod and a water bottle. Performers are advised to experiment with different sounds during the rehearsals.



PHYSICAL COMPONENTS (to be supplied by the musicians)²²

- 1 x concert acoustic violin (with bow and resin)
- 1 x electric bass guitar

EQUIPMENT AND OTHER MATERIALS (to be supplied by the venue and/or musicians)²³

The following requirements are set for equipment to be used by the musicians:

- 1 x guitar amplifier is to be used for playing the LSD (Fender Twin, Roland JC-120 Jazz Chorus or equivalent can be used).
- Bass amplifiers can be Gallien-Krueger (400RB, 800RB or 1001RB), Laney RB9 300-Watt Bass Head, Trace Elliot, Ampeg, SWR (but **not** SM-900 or SM-1500), Euphonic, or equivalent.
- Bass speakers are to be from brands such as Hartke, Ampeg, SWR, Trace Elliot, Mark Bass, Bergantino, Hughes & Kettner, EV, JBL, Peavey or Laney (but **not** Gallien-Krueger).
- 1 x acoustic instrument clip-on contact microphone (for violin) is required.
- 1 x table for the LSD. Requirements for the table:
 - The table should be at least 1600 mm wide.
 - It should be neither made of material that audibly resonates nor be made in a way or contain components that cause audible resonance.
 - It should have a thin top to which the LSD will be clamped.
 - It should be sturdy and not move when the instrument is played.
 - It should be of a comfortable height for the chosen performer.
- 2 x clamps to secure the LSD to a table (plus a soft barrier to go between the clamp and the LSD).
- 3 x straight-backed chairs with no arms for the musicians.²⁴

REHEARSALS

Criteria for rehearsals:

- At least three days should be set aside for installation and rehearsals.
- Rehearsals must take place in the same space as the performance.
- All performers, facilitators, the sound engineer and producer (or key producers) should attend the rehearsals.

²² Information collated by Time-Based Media Conservation.

²³ Information collated by Time-Based Media Conservation.

²⁴ Information provided by Regina Greene and Carly Whitefield.



- All of the rehearsals need not be of the same duration as the performance itself; rather, shorter rehearsal sessions are advised. At least two shorter rehearsal sessions are required.
- Time must be allocated for at least one full-length rehearsal in advance of the performance, but two full rehearsals are advised. These rehearsals will include the venue's full production team so that technical/backline considerations can be addressed and worked out.²⁵

Rehearsals provide an opportunity for the musicians to:

- Get together and discuss their understanding of the work in general and more specific matters such as gathering an understanding of tuning from reading the guidelines and checking the media provided as part of the dossier.
- Work out how best to manage time, and while time management is important, musicians must also allow themselves to become absorbed in the performance in order to properly respond to the actions of the other performers.
- Get a sense of how demanding, and potentially draining, performing this piece can be; rehearsals allow a time to anticipate any consequences of this or any steps needed to make the individuals more comfortable throughout.
- Determine exactly where the musicians will be positioned within the space.

POSITION OF THE MUSICIANS IN THE SPACE

Where the musicians will be positioned in relation to each other, the projectionist, the PA and the room in general depends upon a number of considerations:

- The dimensions and architecture of the space and the desired layout within it.
- Technical considerations and limitations, such as potential feedback from the instruments (especially the LSD).
- Musicians are normally positioned to the side of the film projections.
- It is important that the musicians are able to connect within one another, so placing them in a very slight curve can work, depending on the space.
- The personal preferences of the musicians themselves, specifically in relation to how they interact with each other and the screen.
- The ability to see the screen is important but the musicians are responding first and foremost to the artist's recording, not the projections.
- Often the LSD is placed centrally between the violinist and bassist.²⁶

²⁵ Information provided by Andrew Lampert and the Time-Based Media Conservation team.

²⁶ As seen in the 2017 Tate Modern performance and the 2019 Tate Liverpool performance.



- There have been instances where the musicians were positioned in front of the projections, such as in Bologna (2013).²⁷

NOTES ON HOW TO PLAY THE INSTRUMENTS, IMPROVISATION AND TUNING

General notes:

- The roles of the LSD and the bass are more fixed whereas the violin is allowed more flexibility and room for improvisation.²⁸
- According to different sources, the instruments have been tuned differently in past performances. This may be related to artistic freedom given by the artist himself when instructing the musicians. The audio recording of the artist that is now used in his place means that the tuning is now constant.
- Please note that the following information was taken from a number of sources and was compiled by art conservators, not musicians. Where these notes are ambiguous, inconsistent or contradictory, the player should defer to the accompanying audio-visual materials to get a better sense of what is required to play and tune the instrument as part of the work. It is hoped that between this document, the audio-visual materials and collaboration with the other musicians, the player will be able to approach the LSD in a way that feels both true to the artist's practice and true to themselves as a participant in the work.

Long string drone:

- The LSD is based on a design created by the artist.
- David Grubbs explained that the LSD is a monochord, two-octave instrument whose two bass strings are tuned to the same pitch.²⁹
- Rhys Chatham explained that the LSD was 'tuned to a low C#, an octave above the C# and a perfect fifth above the low C#, which would be a G#'.³⁰
- Grubbs indicated that the two outer strings should be tuned to an octave below the pulse note played on the bass guitar for the performance, so that when barred at half scale the LSD will be the same note. In most recent performances this pulse note is a drop D on electric bass (D2)

²⁷ This should take into consideration the stroboscopic nature of the film and the impact it might have on the musicians. If it is decided that the musicians should be placed in front of the projections, this must be agreed with the musicians in advance.

²⁸ Information provided by Regina Greene.

²⁹ Information provided by David Grubbs, Tate Liverpool, May 2019.

³⁰ Information provided by Rhys Chatham.



(see the David Grubbs video for reference). In other words, if the bass guitar is tuned to drop D (D2) then the outer strings should be tuned to D1 and the inner string should be tuned to D2.³¹

- It is helpful for the performer to mark the body of the instrument with a pencil at a few places corresponding to the centre (D2), a full step down (C), two steps down (B \flat) and a full step up (A).³²
- To play the LSD, the performer should slide up towards the centre (D2) but let the note die before reaching it for the first half of the performance. When the performer feels ready, they should begin sliding down towards the centre (from high to low, towards D2) but let the note die before reaching the centre.³³
- Grubbs stated that 'It's one of those instruments that's so incredibly simple ... you learn when you are playing it, like, there's no way that you can't be listening and learning ... and it all just moves so slowly that it's impossible to play a wrong note on it. I guess you can start it at a pitch that sounds particularly out of tune ... but then you just listen and move the slide and you get it in tune.'³⁴
- George Maund indicated that, due to the physical way in which the LSD is played, it can slip out of tune over the course of the performance. He stated that, while this may at first feel problematic, it is 'a natural part of the process, and the glissando is performed in such a way that the initial note tone is not of vital importance: you slide away relatively quickly as you strike – it is not a held note.'³⁵
- Maund suggested that the 'strings should be flat-wound, if possible, to allow for an optimal glissando'.³⁶
- Grubbs suggested that a heavy, solid lap steel guitar slide should be used to strike the strings and play a repeating glissando,³⁷ and that a regular guitar slide is not heavy enough.
- Maund added that 'I found when performing that a glass guitar slide provided the "most" sound – the largest number of overtones/harmonic frequencies – and so the loudest tone. Due to cramps in my arm from performing, I moved between several objects including a glass bottle, a couple of guitar slides, and 1–2 cm thick metal rods. This was in order to provide consistency in sound throughout.'³⁸

³¹ Information provided by David Grubbs, 2019.

³² Information provided by David Grubbs, 2019.

³³ Information provided by David Grubbs, 2019.

³⁴ Information provided by David Grubbs, 2019.

³⁵ Information provided by George Maund, Tate Liverpool, May 2019.

³⁶ Information provided by George Maund, 2019.

³⁷ Information provided by David Grubbs, 2019.

³⁸ Information provided by George Maund, 2019.



- Chatham remarked that, at the inaugural performance of the work at The Kitchen in 1972, which was the first time he played the LSD, he played it following the artist's instructions which were conveyed via a practical demonstration. For Chatham, these instructions left no room for improvisation.
- Maund, who played the LSD at Tate Liverpool in 2019, has supported this suggestion that there is no scope for improvisation for the LSD player and that the playing should be 'firm and forceful'.³⁹
- When asked about the degree of variation allowed, Chatham explained that he played the same glissando for 90 minutes, and that his way of playing was connected to what the artist plays on the violin. The timing or silence between the glissandos is for the LSD player to decide.
- Chatham recalled that his improvisation skills as a musician were called upon as he listened to the artist playing the violin and had to follow him. It is important to listen carefully to the artist's phrasing and keep attention to the bassist's 'pulsing'.
- Grubbs reiterated this by suggesting that 'The main thing is that it locks in with the bass pulse. The bass pulse is a single pitch, it's very slow... this [the LSD] is everything that the bass pulse isn't... the pitch is continually changing, it's not stepped, it's a glissando.'⁴⁰
- Maund echoed this sentiment but differed slightly with regard to where his attention was focused during the performance: 'I found myself tuning into the violinist's playing, listening for cues on timing, rather than going of [sic] the bassist's very steady pulse playing. There was always the sense that despite the rigidity, the [LSD] was played in a way that disregarded the rhythmic material of the bass part: it was more led by the violinist's change in bowing direction. So, precisely – the violinist is the conductor in this way.'⁴¹
- Chatham also mentioned that the improvisation required for the work is similar to the improvisation used in the group Theatre of Eternal Music in which the artist, and later Chatham himself, played.⁴²
- There may be issues with feedback concerning the LSD.⁴³ The instrument makes a very low sound and is built with a metallic body. There are four things that can be done to mitigate this:
 - Ensure the table used is made of materials that tend to absorb more sound rather than resonate, i.e. wood, not metal.

³⁹ Information provided by George Maund, 2019.

⁴⁰ Information provided by David Grubbs, 2019.

⁴¹ Information provided by George Maund, 2019.

⁴² Information provided by Rhys Chatman in an interview in 2019.

⁴³ Information provided by Barney Rosenthal.



- Change the strings of the LSD – extra strings are provided with the instrument.
- Move the instruments a bit further away from the PA system.
- Change the position of the musicians.
- Grubbs suggested that the LSD should be played through an amp with ‘a good bit of low end’ and that he recommends the highs be rolled off in order to highlight the bass frequencies of the instrument and reduce the ‘klank’ coming from the player striking the strings.⁴⁴ However, it is assumed that the LSD should be equalised according to the acoustics of the space and in order to achieve an overall aesthetic deemed desirable by the musicians and sound engineer working in collaboration.

Violin:

- Over the course of the performance, the live violin and Conrad’s recorded track should ideally become intertwined and nearly indistinguishable, though the live violinist does have creative flexibility to improvise in response to Conrad’s recorded playing throughout the performance.⁴⁵
- Angharad Davies has stated that in the performance in Dundee in 2006 she was instructed by the artist to play on only two strings (and the top string on occasion) but she produced variations such as ‘changing the tempo, the speed of my bow, tuning through holding maybe an open string with exactly the same note on the other string’. She stated further that while she tried to make perfect fifths, in the 2017 performance at Tate Modern she tried to pick up some notes from Conrad’s recorded performance, which included microtonal interactions (50’).⁴⁶
- The violin uses A and D due to the introduction of the audio track.⁴⁷ Davies explained that her violin was tuned to a C# and a G# and a D#.⁴⁸
- In 2019 Davies explained that when she played the piece, she was ‘sort of weaving in the tuning of the artist’.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Information provided by David Grubbs, 2019.

⁴⁵ Information provided by Andrew Lampert, Regina Greene and Rhys Chatham.

⁴⁶ Information provided by Angharad Davies in an interview with Time-Based Media Conservation in 2019.

⁴⁷ In previous performances, staged when Conrad was alive, the violin used A, Dm, G and sometimes E. As the violinist now responds to the audio track, they use A and D. Information provided by Angharad Davies, interview with Time-Based Media Conservation, 2019.

⁴⁸ Information provided by Angharad Davies in the feedback session, Tate Liverpool, May 2019.

⁴⁹ Information provided by Angharad Davies, Liverpool 2019.



Bass:

- Chatham, speaking in relation to Laurie Spiegel, mentioned that the artist asked Spiegel to play a pulse on the bass and that she did not diverge from his instructions.⁵⁰
- The electric bass is re-tuned to a C#.⁵¹
- Dominic Lash, bassist at the 2017 performance at Tate Modern, suggested that while one is meant to play a low C#, he sometimes produced a higher note (by about an octave) to change the timbre.⁵²
- Maund noted that, as a response to the acoustics of the specific performance space at Tate Liverpool in 2019, bassist Emily Lansley ‘muted the low bass string with her right hand as she played, so as to prevent the low, open-string bass note from “ringing out” in a continuous fashion. This made for the more percussive and less resonant sound as heard on the recordings from prior activations. It could be that in the past, the bass guitar was tuned down to e.g. a C natural, with the first fret used to form a C#, thus making for a slightly duller overall timbre. Either way, Emily accurately replicated the tone we heard in archival performance activations; the transmitting bass player and her had discussions around this, I recall.’⁵³

REPORT CREATED BY: Louise Lawson, Hélia Marçal and Ana Ribeiro	DATE: May 2019
REPORT REVIEWED BY: George Maund	DATE: N/A
REPORT UPDATED BY: Duncan Harvey	DATE: Aug 2021

⁵⁰ Information provided by Rhys Chatman in an interview in 2019 and collated by Time-Based Media Conservation.

⁵¹ Information provided by Dominic Lash.

⁵² Information provided by Dominic Lash in an interview with Time-Based Media Conservation in 2019.

⁵³ Information provided by George Maund, 2019.