

Oscar van Dillen



DRONE SCAPE 8

the four pillars of reason

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Dronescape 8

Dronescape 8: The four Pillars of Reason is the tenth in a series of albums, containing contemporary Electronic Symphonies by Oscar van Dillen.

The work on this album was composed, created, and recorded January-March 2022.

Music and cover art were created by Oscar van Dillen.

Tracks

- | | |
|----------------|---------|
| 1. Identity | 1:06:36 |
| 2. Opposition | 0:54:22 |
| 3. Analogy | 0:52:23 |
| 4. Resemblance | 1:09:39 |

Total duration

4:00:00

Dronescape

The title Dronescape suggests the contraction of the terms *Drone* and *Soundscape*, inferring a music which might at first sight be mistaken for ambient only. But not at a hearing: there is mostly a friendly and pleasant surface character to most compositions, but careful listening will reveal less obvious details and sounds, sometimes surprising, at other times perhaps disturbing.

In music, a *drone* (or *bourdon*) is understood to be a continuous sound, interval, or chord, usually an accompaniment to a modal structure (melodic music based on a particular scale). Special instruments exist, dedicated to playing the drone only, such as the *tanpura* and the *swar peti* from India. Instruments are found all over the world that include drones within the melodic instruments themselves, such as the *taraf* strings on many Asian string instruments, but also the drone pipes next to the *chanter* in bagpipes, or the hurdy gurdy, and its predecessor the *organistrum* with their drone strings. Aboriginal didgeridoo music can be considered to consist

purely of a rhythmized drone. Traditionally, drones with their sustained pitches are used as a harmonic support to the melodic music performed. In the *Drones* by van Dillen the music itself has become rhythmized drone and soundscape at the same time, foregoing the traditional compositional hierarchies of theme and accompaniment, by using the following musical elements, in order of prominence: 1. sound 2. harmony 3. rhythm 4. melody. This non-prominence of melody stresses the absence of a traditional theme and accompaniment-oriented music, instead the work moves towards a more inclusive approach. This does not mean there are no developing linear structures, but rather that in a way the album can perhaps be regarded as being semipermeable to outside additions, whether coincidental and random (such as happening when listening outdoor or with windows opened), or improvised, or composed, or even as a large *minus one recording*, open to be supplemented by the listener, whether in imagined or performed future additional music.

The four Pillars of Reason

Van Dillen is a strong proponent of Method vs. System when it comes to how to compose, and how to teach composition (if it can at all be taught apart from the crafts[wo]manship related to it). Systems, invariably focusing on the result of creation, are closed entities, in denial or ignorant of and therefore often enemy to everything outside their scope. Method on the contrary describes a discipline, a way of working, and focuses on the process of creation rather than on the result.

Most Avant Garde music especially has been and still is dominated by systems varying from 12-tone composition over serialism or the *Tone Clock*, to adaptations of the *Modes à transpositions limitées*, and the Carnatic music inspired rhythmic systems connected. In jazz there have been similar attempts, such as assimilation of the aforementioned *Tone Clock* as well as the *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization for Improvisation*. The pantheon of "modern composers" still

encountered in concert programming is largely dominated by a small group of systematic doctrinists that are being artificially kept world famous for an audience that largely does not understand their music. Such doctrinal extremism led to a historic loss of contact with audiences, a contact already having become delicate at the coming of atonality and modernism since the 1920s. There was still a continuous artistic landscape in the first half of the 20th century however, and we can see how composers such as Igor Stravinsky and Dmitri Shostakovich composed in practically all styles of their day, not making the distinction between “serious” and “entertainment” music as the media and therefore we do today. Dividing the audience is a bad idea, which does not serve young artists, nor does it promote the advancement of music and culture in general. Composer Erik Satie must have felt something like this was coming when he deliberately challenged his critics by producing his beautiful and refined *musique d'ameublement*. So what is music? Is it merely any coherent sound production done with some deliberation, is it organized sound, does it have to obey

established rules or organization and form? And what if someone found the answer to this question, who will that be to decide what music is for me, for you, for everybody on the planet? As the writer György Konrad once wrote "To the question about the meaning of life, we each respond with our lives" thus we can venture to respond: "To the question what is music, every culture and every composer, musician and listener responds and has always responded with the music they create, love or listen to".

The four Pillars of Creation was strongly inspired by the works of the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, most specifically the titles of the parts refer to a passage in his major work *Difference et Répétition*. These four sections are not true parts in the sense of being separated beyond the mere tracks in this album: the work is conceived and composed in a single movement, a single musical form and gesture, lasting 4 hours. If 4 hours seem long, try working for 8 hours per day (or 16, as some composers do). Some people watch television or are gaming or are busy with (a)social media for longer, on a daily basis. So 4 hours should not be

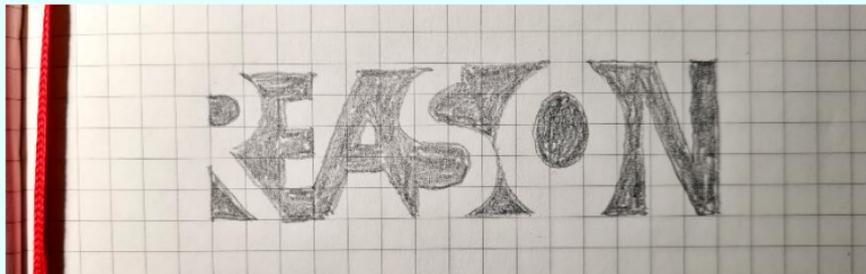
a problem for a civilization which guarantees enough leisure time on a daily basis. The span of 4 hours does pose a problem perhaps for those accustomed to do this and that, who are used to spend their life out of focus, dividing their attention as broadly and as fine cut in time slots as possible. Undivided attention is a skill which most of us actively unlearn in our youth or are untaught in our safe schools. We live our lives as if they were entertainment, instead of considering this a one-time chance at sense and fulfillment. In this sense, the single long duration of this work is simply unmodern and not fashionable, much too demanding for our pampered times, it is also a challenge: The four Pillars of Reason Challenge.

The work came into being thanks to a lucky accident. During the creation of Dronescape 7 Jñāna – Rigpa the modular synthesis setup responded differently from what the composer intended and expected, but it was a pleasant surprise, of which he took advantage in using it. This was already described in the booklet of that album: “When all filters’ amplifier gain-knobs had been turned to

zero, silence ensued. But after a short while, and with a gentle crescendo, the sound came back up again to the surprise of the composer. As it turned out, in this way typical stops and silences added an unexpected bonus to the piece. It is a beautiful calm ending, in a way very similar to how van Dillen's first String Quartet concludes, and to how his recent orchestra work *Disintegration* is constructed: with many stops to silence and then still continuing. One is never sure when it ends, just like life itself. The remarkable fact however that this happened unintentionally this time, but completely in tune and accordance with his compositional practices, is a remarkable consequence of his thoroughly composed process of composition, which leaves room for chance."

As it turns out, the coincidence was used, but apparently not to the full, because van Dillen made further recordings of his setup and expanded it slightly to bring out more possibilities of variety to create a much longer form out of this bubble-shaped music. Music in the form of sound bubbles. Crescendos followed by diminuendos, an endless chain of beginnings and endings creating a large-

scale form. The crescendo at first hearing seem to create a music in the louder parts, but careful listening will reveal there is an equal importance in the soft and silent parts: the four Pillars of Reason is composed in forms and counterforms, sound objects creating spaces, spaces creating objects, in an endless chain of reasoning.



Form and counterform, to illustrate this beyond the all too obvious image of two profiles creating a vase in the middle, the composer made this small drawing in his sketchbook. Obviously, the word REASON is created by drawing with a pencil, but half of the letters are created indirectly, by leaving space open as 1221 or אבא. In a similar way, the music of Dronescape 8 should be heard.

The fact that we can even read this points to the all-important interpretational activities in our clever human brains. Clever, but also limited beyond its own ken alas.

The four Pillars of Reason is a deeply abstract work, which should not be burdened with premature explanations of a supposed content. The music is what it is, and is a challenge to listeners, and not for its duration alone, but as a mirror to one's own inner life. It can be listened to in endless situations, varying from concert to art installation, to background listening or used for relaxing, it can be listened to while sitting up, or walking about, or lying down, or while reading, or doing work indoor or outdoor. Essentially it is up to the listener to choose the right setting at any time personally, but the word of warning with Oscar van Dillen's Dronescares is still true: one cannot expect the world to be the same while and especially after careful listening. Some sounds will turn out to have been part of the worlds we already inhabit: both the outer and the inner world will be found to contain them or resonate to them. Thus a former silence may find a voice.

The composer found this to be very true also during the creation phase, to the point where he had to attenuate certain sounds so as not to transgress certain boundaries of ethics, and to mitigate and balance the strongest effect to have an impact that leaves the listener still free.

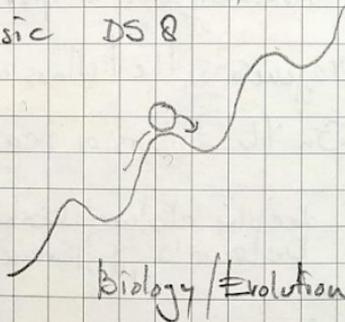
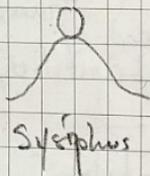


The modular setup used to produce all sounds was created around virtual ARP2500 parts, as shown above.

This originally created modular instrument is a somewhat developed version of the one used for Dronescape 7 but is very similar overall. In the final result one can hear these familiar ARP2500 sounds as partially unchanged yet surrounded by new sonorities derived from them by sound design, including running the analog sounds through live granular synthesis, emulating a Fairlight type of sample-based synthesis, but all is still derived from the original ARP2500 sound, of which the composer recorded many very long tracks to form the basis of his mix and sound design, in a process of working akin to that of the composer Eliane Radigue. In digital times however these processes can be very much faster than during her pioneering times, but this ease can be misleading, as the compositional and sound design challenges are no less, if anything they may be perhaps greater, as with greater possibilities comes greater responsibilities and greater problems. At a certain point a technical bug occurred which was very hard to solve. The kind advice of friend and sound engineer Aleksandar Obradovic then saved the day, allowing again for a pristine result.

What is music - who decides what is
when and why

Very slow music DSQ



A traditional view on the efforts of humans is represented in the myth of Sisyphus (erroneously misspelled in the image above, but it is the image that matters here). Every attempt to make a stone roll up a hill is followed by the failure of it unstoppably rolling down again on the other side. The true nature of human effort and evolution even contradicts this myth totally and emphatically and does this very well documented too. To begin with, growth,

development, progress, and evolution are not faced with a mere hill to begin with. The upward motion is more akin to a much larger mountain, the top of which is unknown and perhaps even unknowable. When a step has been truly mastered and completed, a next level is reached which has some stability to it, such as learning to swim is not unlearned by not swimming for 50 years, the accomplishment has become unalienable. Such is the nature of biology and human growth, but also of careful listening to music that is abstract and not obviously entertaining as the four Pillars of Reason. It is in this very image that the form was created. And it is also why the mentioned bubbles of sound, constantly slowly swelling and decaying, can support this very long form.

The titles of the sections refer to the first chapter of Deleuze's work *Difference and Repetition*, and these are the four Pillars of Reason: Identity, Opposition, Analogy and Resemblance. Deleuze argues that these four pillars have long overshadowed the true nature and importance of Difference, which is rather a *differential*, the Leibniz dx

and not the subtraction of identities. He argues that difference needs to be seen as an object of affirmation rather than negation. Deleuze's Difference is of the same order as the four pillars. So is Repetition as well.



Musical time only really exists in the present when sound and silence are manifest. Yet musical time also implies past and future, explicitly present in the form of memory and expectation. Memory and expectation in music have been in existence in a special codified form in European

music, where it was embodied by a tonal system with functional harmony, this led to the so-called common practice period. Memory and expectation have been dealt with in other musical traditions from all over the world with a variety of different creative means, among which are scale-based modal and rhythmical means.

Repetition occurs in all musical tradition, and the many repetitions that constitute the form of Dronescape 8 the four Pillars of Reason, which was called a bubble form above, but could as well be seen as a chain form. This form is ideally seen as an image of tree rings. In this image of tree rings, all times are present at the same moment of observation. This is how the music has been conceived and composed, not solely as a linear development in linear time, but like a 2-dimensional circular time, in which repetition and difference in a Deleuzian sense synthesize the three dimensions of time: past, present, and future.

Van Dillen has often described this is how he experiences the Self: it is perceived as a cross section of year rings. The human self exists simultaneously in three dimensions of time: one can truly be a 5-year-old person when meeting a child. This is a concept of inclusive time, and hence also of an inclusive age for a person, anyone realizing this will be *zero up to and including the number of years lived*, and not only the mere number calculated by a calendar. It is in this very real and personal sense that the music was

composed: every moment in the work is a on tree ring in an inclusive time, up to and including 4 hours, and every moment represents the whole. By employing repetition it is also a differentiation dx from the next and former moment.

Inspired by Deleuze's complex work, the music here uses a musical form which embodies these differing repetitions and repeated differences, escaping the Sisyphus trap and venturing on a long path the end of which is not near.

We are listening to sound processes not sound objects.

This dronescape, like Dronescape 3 Infinity, can be considered to be *pantonal*, despite its consistent use of certain bass tones. These are echoes of chanting which predated philosophy and science, modulated to fit more complex times: more complex emotions and thoughts.

During the finalizing phase of the compositional process, the unthinkable happens, and Reason is again abandoned or abused in the larger world of politics, leading to a new global war, and to more polarization between people, to complicated processes the end of which may not be so near, the scope of which none fully comprehend. This has affected the admission of fearsome and ominous sounds in the second half especially, but since they still fit the larger theme, the work likely benefitted from this sad fact. Isn't it time the old man-made myths were abandoned, all of them, to make place for a new and freer reality in which all humans can share and grow?

Dronescape series

So far, the following Dronescares have been released:

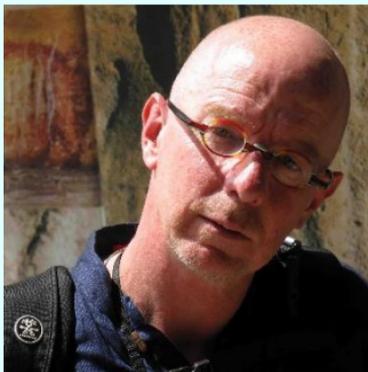
1. Genesis
2. Genomes – Emanations
3. Infinity
4. Requiem for a Planet
5. Myrmecology
6. Oneirology (series of collaborations)
 - a. solo version Oscar van Dillen
 - b. version with Kudsi Erguner
 - c. version with Henri Tournier
 - d. version with Pier Sante Falconi (in preparation)
7. Jñāna – Rigpa
8. The four Pillars of Reason

New Dronescares are in the making, you can follow Oscar van Dillen and Donemus Records publications by their websites, but also for example on Twitter.

A word of warning: after careful listening, the world around you may not sound the same any longer.

Oscar van Dillen

Oscar Ignatius Joannes van Dillen ('s-Hertogenbosch 1958), is both a composer and a visual artist. A generalist rather than a specialist, next to his music studies in Indian classical music, Jazz, European medieval and renaissance music, and contemporary composition and music theory, he also studied architecture and mathematics. He was a founding member of the Rotterdam School of Composers, having written its manifesto in 1997. His works span a wide variety of styles and genres, encompassing full score compositions for classical musicians ranging from solo pieces to full orchestras, style-specific scores for ensembles of jazz and world music musicians, as well as electronic works, and electro-acoustic compositions. In a more advisory role, he has been and is part of cultural advisory boards and competition juries, as well as on the board of Donemus, and on the board of Wikimedia International, having founded the Wikimedia organizations in the Netherlands as chairman.



He teaches music theory, music history, composition, and improvisation at Codarts Rotterdam Conservatory.

Oscar van Dillen's personal website can be found at

www.oscarvandillen.com

OIJRECORDS can be found at

www.oij-records.com

Donemus and Donemus Records can be found at

www.donemus.nl

Photo Oscar van Dillen by Elise van Rosmalen

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music is sound and silence



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