Assemblage
for solo performer and found objects and live electronics

Michael Boyd

Pre-performance preparation

Begin by locating three objects that contain multiple parts or components, and are not traditional musical instruments. Examples might include (but are not limited to) a book, a bicycle wheel, a piece of luggage, a blender, or a trash can with a foot-operated lid. When selecting these objects (hereafter referred to as "primary objects"), keep in mind that, as will become clear momentarily, they may be altered and/or destroyed during the course of a performance. Thus objects with significant sentimental or monetary value should probably be avoided.

Once the three primary objects have been chosen, select several items (hereafter referred to as "modification implements") that can be used to connect, separate, or otherwise modify the primary objects. Examples include (but are not limited to) tape, string, rubber bands, a pair of scissors, an electric drill, a sledgehammer, a stapler, clamps, or glue.

Finally, draw one abstract, network-like diagram for each of the primary objects. Each diagram should demonstrate how the object as a whole functions, and how its parts relate to each other. Diagrams should consist of nodes (vertices) that correspond to the object's parts, and lines (edges) with or without arrows and/or numerical values that show how those parts interrelate (the arrows and/or numbers can be used to show additional detail beyond a simple connection).

Performance setup

The performance space should include two medium- to large-sized tables, one music stand, and a chair. One table and the chair should be placed in the central part of the space. The primary objects and modification implements should be organized on the second table. The music stand should be placed so that it is visible and accessible to the performer while seated at central table; the stand should hold the three diagrams that were created during the performance's preparation. This piece also requires a computer running Max/MSP or Max/MSP Runtime, two microphones, two microphone stands, and two speakers. The computer and any ancillary audio interface devices should be placed on side table. The microphones should be arranged so that they will capture sounds made at the central table; the microphones should be separated sufficiently so that each will capture a different sonic perspective. Each microphone should be connected to the computer's input; the computer's output (stereo) should be sent to the two speakers, placed to the sides of the performance.

Performance process

Choose one of the primary objects and place it on the central table. Select one of the diagrams that corresponds to a *different* primary object, and place it at the front of the music stand.

Use the object to make sounds. Your actions and/or the resulting sounds should be directed by your interpretation of the selected diagram; the diagrams of course are not specific with regard to performance output and must be interpreted creatively. For example, a triangle-shaped diagram consisting of three nodes connected by three lines could result in an alternation between three distinct but related sounds, the coordinated use of three parts of the object to make sounds, or any other of an infinite number of interpretations. While working with a particular diagram and object you should attempt to express the diagram's essential nature through a variety of different interpretations.

Once you begin to approach the essence of the first diagram through varied interpretations, you should switch to a different diagram and begin using the modification implements to combine first primary object with another (one that does *not* correspond to the newly selected diagram) – this process should be directed by the current diagram and may involve partially or wholly deconstructing or destroying one or both objects.

Make sounds with the newly created hybrid object, interpreting the currently selected (second) diagram to direct your actions and/or the resulting sounds.

Repeat this process with the final diagram and object.

The performance ends once a hybrid of all three objects has been created, and, using it, the essence of the final diagram has been expressed.

Live electronics

During the performance the two microphones should be relatively close to the performance and may be moved during performance; the placement and movement of the microphones should be directed by your interpretation of the network diagrams. Sound from the microphones, once fed through the computer running Cycling 74's Max/MSP (or Max/MSP Runtime), will subtly processed; distorted fragments of the performance will be echoed, interspersed with periods of silence. The volume of the electroacoustic output should be moderate, so that it blends with, rather than overpowers, the live performance. The Max/MSP patch (file) that is necessary for performance will be provided by the composer upon request.