Reconstruction
for solo performer with a found object and live electronics

Michael Boyd

Performance preparation

Choose an object that interests you that you are not afraid to destroy. This object, when used in ways that are both intended and unintended, should make several different sounds, and should feature multiple parts that function in a variety of ways. Traditional music instruments may be used.

Study the object and take notes and/or make diagrams as necessary to fully absorb its functionality and possibilities.

Select several items (hereafter referred to as "modification implements") that can be used to disassemble, deconstruct, shatter, reassemble, or otherwise modify the primary object. Examples include (but are not limited to) tape, string, rubber bands, a pair of scissors, an electric drill, a sledgehammer, a stapler, clamps, pliers, hacksaw, vice, or glue.

Performance setup

The performance space should include one medium- to large-sized table and a chair that are placed in the central part of the space. The object and modification implements should be organized on the table, the object centered and the implements set off to the side. This piece also requires a computer running Max/MSP or Max/MSP Runtime, two microphones (condenser microphones are ideal), two microphone stands, and two speakers. The computer and any ancillary audio interface devices should be placed on the side of the table, or second table or platform. The microphones should be arranged so that they will capture sounds made at the central table; the microphones should be sufficiently separated 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 on either side of the performance.

Performance process

The performance should unfold in two stages. The total duration of a performance, as well as the duration for each stage, is left to the performer's discretion and should be partly determined by the size, complexity and general nature of the featured object.

Stage 1: Destroy your chosen object. Shatter, smash, sand, erode, crush, tear, shred, crumble, hammer, cut, implode, explode, chisel, fracture, break, saw and/or otherwise disassemble it. Attempt to rend the object into so many small constituent pieces that any given piece is too vague and amorphous to suggest the composition of the original object. Use any necessary modification implements.

Stage 2: Use the remnants of your object to recreate that original object in a new way. This process is not literally focused on reassembling the object in its original configuration (in fact this should not be possible if the instructions for "Stage 1" are fully executed); instead try to imitate the object and its inner workings anew, considering the pieces before you as raw materials that are completely divorced from their original context. Begin by arranging these fragments into groups based on size. If any dust is present, push it into a pile. Using your knowledge of the original object and its functionality, begin to use these parts along with any connective modification implements to recreate the original. Operate the recreated object to demonstrate its functionality. The performance should end when the physical and sonic nature of the original object is fully expressed through the reconstructed object. After ceasing to perform, the electronics should continue to run for a short span of time, the exact duration of which is left to the performer's discretion.

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 can be intuitively determined to best fit a given performance scenario. Sound from the microphones, once fed through the computer running Cycling 74's Max/MSP (or Max/MSP Runtime), will be subtly processed; altered 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.