Composition: Electronic Media I
Fall 2010
Fixed Media Composition Plan of Work

0. Concept of "Plan of Work"
   a. In grant writing, a plan of work may be required.
   b. If it is not required, consider including it in the grant proposal anyway. It conveys rigor and experience.
   c. In writing a fixed media or electronic piece, the plan of work can be a powerful creative act.
   d. It creates background structure by organizing materials at micro-, small-, medium-, and large-scale levels.
   e. It helps the composer and grant-reader to think about abstractions in concrete terms.
   f. It lays out for the composer the kind of tasks that need to be done at lower levels.
   g. It gives the composer pre-composed gestures, phrases, and even sections that can be placed into the composition in relation to each other.

Plan of Work

1. Record sounds to be used in the project.
   a. If possible, do this in a studio or anechoic chamber.
   b. Consider using different kinds of mics for variety.
   c. Focus on a small number of sources, then find various ways of playing or hitting the sound source.
   d. Musical instruments are a good source, since they can be played in non-standard ways.
   e. Record at the highest level possible, without clipping. However, very short sounds often appear softer in the meter due to their quick response time.

2. In **Peak**, sound-mine the recordings by copying a given sound and pasting it into a new file with a name like "C3d".
   a. A logical naming scheme will help organize the sounds for use in **Pro Tools** or **Max/MSP**.
   b. The sound should be cleaned up, if necessary, normalized, and have no silence at the start of the soundfile.
   c. Having the sound begin precisely at the start of the soundfile helps you control rhythm in **Pro Tools** or **Max/MSP**.

c. Process all of the soundfiles a number of times using pitch-shift, time-scale, envelope, EQ, and other plug-ins or DSP functions in **Peak** or **Pro Tools**. Consider using batch processing in **Peak** to process a large number of sounds.
   d. Create sound objects out of these files by first importing them into **Pro Tools**.
      i. To make a sound object, take 3-5 soundfiles and select the most dominant one.
      ii. Use the non-dominant sounds to shade the dominant sound in the attack and tail.
      iii. Pan all of the sounds to create a sense of depth, physical and tactile texture, and human-ness, if desired.
      iv. Consider processing any of the individual sounds if needed.
      v. Consider how the different sound classes are used in the process. Is each sound object created by soundfiles of the same class? Is the dominant sound one sound-class and the attacks and tails other sound-classes?
      vi. Bounce the tracks to a stereo-interleaved or multiple mono soundfile.
      vii. How many sound objects should you create in this manner? Quantity is not as important as good quality and appropriate levels of distinctiveness. Something on the order of 20-30 is good for a short piece. Anything between 30-60 gives the composer a very good number of possibilities for organizing in a composition.
      viii. Organize the bounced sound objects into sound-classes with appropriate names.
      ix. Use these new sound-classes as you repeat Steps 2bii – 2dviii.
      x. Repeat the process again, if the material suggests it.
   e. Create gestures out of the sound-classes, many of which were created as sound-objects, above.
      i. Import all of the soundfiles into **Pro Tools**.
      ii. Take 5-10 and organize them into a gesture, as discussed in class.
      iii. Bounce the gesture into multiple mono soundfiles and import them into the session.
   f. Create phrases, sections, textures, counterpoint, chords, melodies, and anything other kinds of musical objects.
      i. Do this in a similar way to Step 2ei-iii.

g. Repeat any of the above until you have an appropriate level of quality and quantity of musical components.
h. Create a composition by organizing, combining, and processing any of the above musical components, as well as lower level gestures, sound object, and sound-classes.
i. Shade as many of the sound objects as necessary to make the work as physical, tactile, and expressive as possible.
j. Bounce the entire composition in multiple mono files and import into the session, with the original material either muted or cut out of the edit window.
k. Place the bounced tracks into the edit window, making several copies of each track.
l. Apply reverb, EQ, and compression to these tracks, while panning them to create a sound space that is musically interesting.
m. Bounce the result into a stereo-interleaved file for CD and stereo playback, or as multiple mono tracks for multi-channel playback.