

Composition: Electronic Media I

Sept. 26, 2007

Followup on Assignment 1

1. This would be a very productive and instructional assignment. When I made the instructions, I could have been clearer about how to blend the attacks with the main body. This would have prevented the tendency of having attacks sound like grace notes.
2. Everybody made at least one very good sound. The weaker sounds were easily improved. In general, these were the following weaknesses:
 - a. The attacks very separated from the main body by silence. This created two or more cardboard sounds instead of one multidimensional sound.
 - b. The whoosh attacks were sometimes too long. They are more effective when shorter, as they appear to initiate or lift up the main body. If the whooshes are too long, they act to announce the main body.
 - c. The main bodies sometimes had a very high noise component. Noise works better as an attack.
 - d. The main bodies sometimes sustained too long without internal rhythm produced by loudness or timbral change over time. The result is a flat, dead sound. Just as a good violinist knows how to keep a note alive, so should a composer who takes on the role of performer in the electronic medium.
 - e. The tails were sometimes too bumpy. A smoother fade in on the tail would help it blend better.
3. Here is what was learned:
 - a. How to record into the computer using Pro Tools.
 - b. How to work with soundfiles in Pro Tools by arranging sounds in the edit window and using automated volume and pan.
 - c. How to edit, fade in and out, change pitch, change duration, reverse, and normalize in Peak.
 - d. How to hear details of attacks, tails, and rhythm within a sound.
 - e. Most importantly, that a sound has many elements that can be composed.
4. An important principle was also learned: if an electroacoustic composition is dead, muddy, and lacking presence, the composer can glue on subtle attacks and tails to some of the sounds to give presence and depth to the work. It is not necessary to do this with every sound, just enough to enliven the overall effects.
5. Here is what was created:
 - a. A collection of source recordings made in the studio.
 - b. 40 fragments categorized as main body, attack, and tail.
 - c. Five fused objects and their variations.
6. The assignment can be extended in the following ways:
 - a. Re-arrange the 40 fragments by combining different attacks and tails with the main body in Pro Tools.
 - b. Edit the 5 fused sounds as demonstrated in class.
 - c. Transform the 5 fused sounds with pitch, duration, fades, and reverse.
7. A fused sound can be used as the basis of a motive or melody, as follows:
 - a. Create several pitch transformations emphasizing steps and gap-fill patterns (discuss in class).
 - b. Arrange the melody in Pro Tools, so that legato effects produced by overlaps can be achieved.
 - c. Remember to subtly vary the envelope and loudness of each sound, so that the overall effect does not sound canned (discussed in the Sept. 17, 2007 handout "Repeatability in Peak").
8. A fused sound can be used as a grain in a sound mass, as will be discussed in Assignment 2.