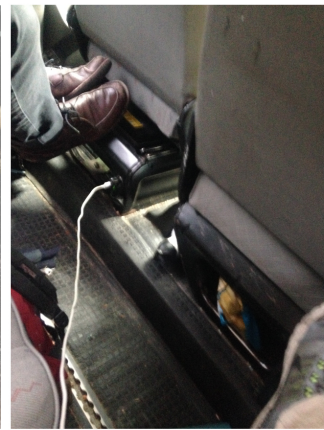


The 12-Hour Drive as a Sculpture

a generative piece by Max Eilbacher



The 12-Hour Drive as a Sculpture

When composing a piece of music, a basic question arises: where should a sound be placed in a timeline and for how long? This question can be circumvented and further explored by introducing a generative technique within the piece.

In the same state of mind in which I put my body in a poorly maintained van hurling at 80 miles per hour down the freeway for weeks on end, I created a generative system that acts as a vehicle that moves sound through time and thus through space. The monotony of a long drive makes me question the nature of perception in its relation to the passing of time. Small and large details become blurred in a paradoxical way. A driver can tell the difference between driving on a highway in the Czech Republic and cruising down a roadway in western France. The highway is still just a highway but the many details, large and small, sculpt the immediate experience of the passenger in the van. The passing and morphing of topographies as seen from the rearview mirror act as a clock. When driving many hours a day, for many days in a row, the monotony of routine displaces the role details play in marking time. The uniformity of details negate their differences: all rest stops serve the same purpose, it does not matter what language is spoken at the counter or what potato chips are inside the rest stop. The rest stop serves a function that is repeated every few miles. The repetitious action of leaving the van seat, going to the bathroom and buying a snack creates monotony. Within this tedium of existence, the task of claiming one's own time and creating a meaningful reality is a subjective role left up to the individual. Each person must use the details of their banal and homogenous environment to give worth and merit to an endless landscape of reiteration. The Individual is “sculpting” an existence out of a sea of regional trucker decals and foreign chocolate bars.

Within my generative piece, “The 12 Hour Drive as a Sculpture,” sound is the medium in which the individual can derive meaning from point A to point B. The underlying material in the piece is of acoustic nature. These sounds were collected between many long drives and through many changing landscapes. The samples placed within my generative system are field recordings from the past year of touring. Out of many field recordings, I chose four recordings that I felt had the most interesting and malleable characteristics. These recordings play simultaneously and are generatively mixed. The first recording in the system is of metal coat hangers on a metal clothing rack in Amsterdam, Netherlands. The field recording evokes the sound of Harry Bertoia's self-playing resonant metal sculptures. The second field recording in the piece is of a band member playing a

quick melodic line on a home organ in Berlin. The third recording used in the system is a teenage gabber rave in Nante, France. The fourth recording is the main inspiration for this piece of music: a rest stop somewhere in Poland in the middle of a very long drive.

“The 12 Hour Drive as a Sculpture” at its core utilizes four stochastic impulse click generators, also referred to as “dust.” These “dust” generators sidechain a series of gates on each of the four field recordings. The random instantaneous sharp sounds act as a random mixing control over the field recordings, and are not audible. The rate at which the “dust” is generated is slowly and constantly changing, as are the gate settings on each of the field recordings. As the patch runs, the pitch of each field recording is modulated slowly. While the piece is running, the aural characteristics of the four recordings are constantly in flux. Yet the four sounds, especially the metal coat hangers, are never fully modulated out of recognition. Instead, pitch, sustain, and release are slowly modified to subtly shift the phonic field. The overall sonic field of the piece modulates over time. A whole new set of sonic characteristics emerges with each new pitch iteration of the samples used.

The organ field recording illustrates the fine line between monotony and rich detail. While the piece is running, the same short melodic organ line is constantly repeated. However, at a slow rate, the three or four note inflection is altered; the pitch and audible position within the piece is constantly in transition. This adjustment creates new inharmonic melodic lines. Fragments of the organ line burst in and out between the dense clouds of resonant metal sounds. Just as with the recording of the gabber rave, the organ line frequently changes but never fully morphs into an entirely different recording.

With the patch controlling the four recordings, the auditory substance of the piece is mutated by the passing of time. As the piece progresses, the listener will hear multiple constructions of aural fields. With each new combination of pitch, timbre and mix, the listener is forced to reflect on sound as a temporal material. Has time really passed? How far has the piece progressed? Have these sounds been heard before? Have enough sonic details changed? Has the piece progressed? Isn't the passenger of the van using the same urinal as they did a month ago? What tour was that on? Or is this my first time at this rest stop? The stochastic gating system is a key component to the notion of ambivalent looping and repetition. The field recording of the Polish rest stop is the longest recording in the piece. As the overall piece runs, new sections of the recording can be heard. While at other times the rest stop recording will be stuck on a certain section for sometime, the ambient

room tone of the gas station might be playing for an extended period of time in the piece without being noticeable. Same rest stop, different cosmos of sound.

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