Abstract. SKR1BL (2016, c. 10mins) is an audiovisual composition for solo laptop performer with gestural controllers. The score consists of ‘sampled’ graffiti tags that are formally arranged to highlight similarity and variation, and to provide opportunities for sonic contrast and counterpoint. The performer creates fine detail through interpretive, intuitive and exploratory responses to the score, sound library and DSP processes. The work is part of a wider study on the use of graphic notation in live electronics to create a body of work that falls in the gaps between improvisation and repertoire.

Keywords: Non-musical performance interface, embodiment, timing, mapping strategies and design, (un)control

Introduction

Grounded in Hip-Hop culture, there’s a musicality to tagging with rhythms and repetitions, and importantly, tags seem spontaneous and improvised, yet crafted and cultivated. The visual style is reductive, symbolic and object oriented. The morphology and material character of the tags guides the performer in respect of sound shape, texture and gesture such as granular microstructure due to combined qualities of a repetition, the graffiti surface and the marking paint or ink. The performer should look for established direction and extensions of movement and make connections in material though superimposition, stratification, juxtaposition, and interpolation. The overall duration of the work, and of individual passages, will vary as a function of the interactions between the different elements.

Graffiti tags are by turn angular, abstract, reductive, compressed, contained, expressive, expansive and iconic, with lines that connect and organise, shifts in weight, arcing trajectories, ASCII like decoration, punctuation and texture, with embodied formal and filigree qualities. Their use in notation provides the “something to hold on to factor” (Landy 1994b). This work might be described as chamber electronics, and is characterised by fast moving details, developments and interactions between sound objects and technique. The score provides a framework for returning to scripted play and guides the overall direction of the work.

Tags may demonstrate some common gestures, but also contain improvised variations. At this stage the work is focused on human structuring, performance and remediation, but technologies for archiving and gesture following graffiti tags are available (Roth 2010, Caramiaux 2012), and the production of scores might develop by investigating processes of graffitization (Berio and Leymarie 2015).

Links between graffiti and the structuring and performance of music and sound can be found in the view that tagging is an embodied form of interiorised repetition of developing skills, style and serial objects (Brighenti 2010). It’s possible to identify a mapping between formal expression of character, changes in direction and the speed of the gesture, “mak[ing] the most expressive mark possible in the fewest amount of lines in the shortest amount of time” (Roth 2009).

Design theory and literature such as Kandinsky’s writings on Point, Line and Plane (1926) provides some insight into ways in which the formal qualities of tags might be interpreted in musical ways as an aid to score creation. Kandinsky examines the tensions inherent in curves and angles. Tension refers here to the potential for movement and resolution. Like springs, curves and angles are lines under tension, and could potentially resolve to straight lines. Morphology and taxonomy offer additional frameworks for visual analysis (Roth 2009, Schaeffer 1966, Smalley 1997), while gestural and situated aspects of graffiti tagging can examined for indicative relationships (Smalley 1996).
There’s a material link between the form and impact of graffiti tags and the material qualities of the surface, space and tool (Chmielewska 2007). The graffiti surface will possess varying qualities of texture, from the very smooth to the very rough, affecting the ease of marking or paint transfer and coverage. The combination and contact of spray or ink and surface can map to malleability and fluidity in an object/substance field (Smaley 1996).

Graffiti scores are ideally suited to gestural interfaces such as the graphics tablet and stylus, not least because of the inbuilt link to penmanship and calligraphy. Graphics tablets allow us to re-scribe the gestures contained in the tags. This creates a shared energy and morphology, and we can develop the stable, scrutable, learnable response required for more sophisticated expression (Croft 2007).

The base sonic material consists of fragments of early Hip-Hop that are distributed across a number of DSP layers. A graphics tablet, 3D space navigator and midi controllers are used to trigger and scan material, which is subject to further processing and manipulation in a manner reminiscent of both early tape works and modern turntablism. Typical gestures include scrubbing and scratching, dipping, oscillation and bowing (Wessel et. al. 2002). The live video component remediates the graffiti further using similar mapping strategies to the audio part.

The work addresses themes of non-musical performance interface in the use of devices like the graphics tablet and 3D space navigator, embodiment in the re-mediation of graffiti signature, timing and flow, mapping strategies and design in the interaction of the different DSP layers such as inverse crossfades and useful ranges, and (un)control and unpredictability in the self-sampling processes as the performer’s attention and intention shifts between layers.

A video example can be seen at: http://vimeo.com/155386533

![Figure 1. SKR1BL performance MaxMSP patch](image-url)
Figure 2. SKR1BL score fragment

Figure 3. SKR1BL video processing screenshot
Biography

Jules Rawlinson (b. 1969, UK) designs sounds, visuals and interactions, and performs with live electronics. Jules recently collaborated with Matthew Collings on 'Requiem for Edward Snowden', which blends live electronics with a chamber trio and realtime visuals. Following sell out performances in Edinburgh and Glasgow, this work was selected for Creative Scotland’s Made In Scotland showcase at Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2015, and has played at Aberdeen’s Sound Festival and Utrecht’s Gaudeamus Muziekweek. He is a founding member of the LLEAPP network (Laboratory for Live Electronic Audio Performance Practice), which has fostered an ongoing and reciprocal series of workshops and events at a number of UK institutions. Jules has a PhD in Composition from Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh, where he is a lecturer in Digital Design. For more information visit http://www.pixelmechanics.com

References


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