

Converging Objects

A set of workshops for musicians who improvise and use live electronics

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This is a proposal for a short set of workshops for:

- acoustic musicians who improvise and use live electronics in their own setups,
- those who play with other musicians using electronics, or
- electronic musicians who improvise and work with acoustic players.

As we proceed into the second decade of the 21st century we as composer/performers divide our time between conjuring up concepts, structures and scores and showing up on stage to play. We thrive on a precarious balance between creating and performing new works. That is not to say that we participate in every piece we make. But it does imply that the basis of our creative work is intimately tied to our individual playing, our instrument and our unique performing histories.

In this new century where interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary art and crossing borders are not only supported by our audiences but also highly recommended by the structural funding sources, the tag as composer/performer no longer implies something out of the ordinary. These folks play laptops in bands in the clubs while the next day their fully composed ensemble works go into premiere in a concert hall. They make music for theater productions and show up on the off days as improvisers in the local squats. They place themselves as improvising soloists in otherwise fully composed orchestra works as part of an international composition competition.

A significant number of composer/musicians is actively seeking for ways to use technology as an intimate and/or integrated partner for their acoustic instruments – some even design and build their own hybrid or purely electronic instruments. Their inspiration most often has its roots in their instruments and how they play them. It's how they use their own bag of tricks: their talents, artistic passions, unique virtuosity, conceptual twists. And how they depend on their highly developed and unmistakable personal voices as performers. And last but not least, how they engage and integrate their bodies as real-time creative forces. That includes every body part, from their inner ears to their tapping feet. This real-time kinesthetically and intellectually driven music making lends itself well to improvisation as a handy tool in their work. Improvisation provides room for them to experiment and develop both as composers and as performers. And, considering the state of affairs in music technology, improvisation continues to be at the forefront as the favored performance mode. Interfaces, hardware vs. software, analog vs digital and dealing with communication codes are still up and running issues for us all.

The Converging Objects workshop is a hands-on workshop that will deal with these issues. We will introduce some ideas and concepts, the participants will play their instruments and together we will work on improvising skills as well as developing approaches to using live electronics. We will try to cater the workshop to the needs of the participants as much as possible. The length of the workshop is flexible. We assume all participants bring some kind of playable instrument, whether this is acoustic, electronic or a mixture.

We anticipate that the range of participants using electronics will encompass those just simply amplifying themselves to those using sophisticated computer programs such as Max/MSP, Pure Data, Ableton Live and SuperCollider.

Following is the content that each workshop will have regardless of the length.

Introduction

A brief history of live electronics. This will give the beginners some ideas as to how they would like to proceed and it will give the more experienced musicians material to articulate why they have chosen the equipment they currently use.

Commercial and non-commercial hardware and software

This will cover some of the hardware and software we and the participants bring in.

1. the hardware: microphones, amplifiers, analog synthesizers, guitar pedals, digital FX units.
2. the software: Ableton Live, Max/MSP, LiSa, Supercollider.

Individual setups

Each participant will be asked to briefly describe their own set up and performance style. Beginners will be encouraged to talk about what they would like to use or to sound like. It is important for the participants to consider how they would like to build or extend their own instruments and their unique composer/performer/improvising voices.

Practical issues - How hardware works and how to use it while improvising

1. mixers
2. microphones
3. firewire interfaces (software and hardware)
4. MIDI (hardware and software)
5. controllers

Improvising with electronics

1. musical and instrumental gestures and how to control them technically,
2. musical ideas that leave room for the electronics and vice versa,
3. communication with an ensemble while dealing with one's own improvisational ideas and one's own electronic setup.

Ensemble playing

1. feeling at home with one's own set up to play without worries
2. listen, respond and lead as an improviser while still keeping track of the technology
3. understand the special sonic qualities of one's acoustic instrument, electronic instrument and how they work in different improvisational settings
4. create compositions that use improvisation

Play!

Participants will play in various combinations, after which we will discuss what went on.

In our duo Shackle we have created a set of guided improvisation compositions that are very well suited for a group of participants to play. We will work on a free improvisation and on a guided improvisation.

Participants will be encouraged to create their own guided improvisations for both solo and ensemble settings.