

Juan Parra Cancino

Interview on the 21 September 2012 about the creation of *Sounding Drawing*: two pieces of one minute each.

Because there were two main constraints, both were time constraints, I wanted to create with a single methodology regardless of what the picture would be. I took the original file that was presented and I first did a series of reconversions of the picture from format to format: jpeg to pdf to Photoshop. I didn't really care about the effect on the image itself, but about the effect on the data.

All the files were of different sizes and formats and this changed the header structure in the actual metadata file. The numbers that make up a metafile have a unique identity – they're different from others.

Years ago I made a little program for 'sound hap' that allows you to play any kind of file as if it were a sound file. What happens is that if it is not a sound file, it is a rendering of digital noise of different flavours depending on the size of your file (bits) and also, because it is not a real sound file, you need to impose a stamp of a sound file like a description. You need to assign a bitrate and a resolution, like how many hertz and how many channels it has and the format.

So I opened these different picture files as sound files and saved them as sound files with different assigned descriptions (channels and bitrates). There was one common factor: the end result was going to be a sound file of about one minute long. When you play a 110KB jpeg as a sound file you end up with something that is less than a second long – so if you want it to be a minute long, you have to lower the bits, decrease the channels and the resolution to make it appear low quality like an mp3 file. I played with the configuration of the data. So the output of each of these picture files was going to be a minute-long sound file of different formats and they're all basically digital noise.

[Juan shows the basic layer which came out of Tim's drawing.]

So you end up with this digital noise that is very uniform and only once in a while a little click/glitch because the chunk of numbers is not always uniform. Once I had these files, they're all basically very static. That was my way of creating the timbres – the instruments that I was going to use – and then the process started to match these sounds into my interpretation of what the picture as a score was going to be. Whether there were colour differences or spaces and densities, linearly like from left to right or from top to bottom as a musical score.

Then I did a second process of transformation of the image with an online web editor where you can render a file and save it as an ASCII file. This allowed me to have a text file that I can import into sound editors as analysis files. I can force a sound editor to read a text file as if it were sound analysis or envelope curves, all sorts of metadata that have to do with controlling isolated parameters like dynamics or panning. I have fed these text files into the sound editors per channel and ended up with four different image versions per drawing: jpeg, eps, pdf, tiff. These four files were transformed into sound files of one minute each. So I had the sound editor with four tracks and then for each track I added a bunch of plug-ins – effects to differentiate the timbre from each other even more: so a ring modulator or a phaser or an equaliser to separate them as different instruments.

I ended up having these different channels with different effects and colouring. Then the transformation of these effects over time as well as the dynamics and panning position over time were done by using these ASCII codes as a basis for the sound editor. Still, because it is such a short time span, it didn't create a very varied or dynamic thing. Once this output was ok, I added an extra

layer. I freely went through the drawings and chose which elements I wanted to increase. I followed certain periodicities of the drawing and the fact that the trace is present everywhere. These kinds of continuous masses were made up from the periodic lines. These trombone-like sounds are appearing whenever you have white events – there are only four of them. They were of more regular outputs. I removed these parts of the sound as they were the drawing. I did this process with both drawings.

Because both drawings were considered as kind of density maps, you have huge contrasts. In the case of Tim you have a lot of activity and then nothing and then four clear elements and then nothing again and then a mass. I made a huge vacuum in here and took things out from everywhere and I left only four clear isolated elements.

That was the only kind of less technical and more artistic intervention to the final result. That is what I always do in my signification pieces. Once I have my data I start to 'unmass' it to match as closely as possible elements in the source material. In this it was even more so because of the time constraint.

I think that one of the things I expected is that when you explore transforming non-sound files into sound files you end up with things that are very periodic. The more you stretch the file the more rhythm you produce – and the rhythm here, with a certain frequency and pitch, became a trombone-like sound. When you talk about real compositions of longer pieces, you can play with this much more. Here you have periodic, static things, and you could only escape this by adding layers or masking things or taking things away.

It is playing with temporalities.

When you work with digital sounds, you need to be aware of the fact that there is no organic evolution of the sound. You play one note and it stays there. In this case there are two main ways to break that: structurally by taking things away, but also internally to bring in effects. Otherwise it is really crude. It is no different to the static noise on the TV. What you want is to break in and as these are not infinite numbers, you start hearing things that repeat themselves. The data you're using is very limited. There is so little change that when there is change in these elements, you want to preserve them.