



Puppet Whispers

Interim Progress Report
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A Brief Description

Puppet Whispers is a performance system centred around a graphical animated notation system which combines elements of traditional score based performance with directed improvisation. The performance relies on a physical situation where all of four performers are separated by opaque dividers that allow only shadow information to be transmitted visually. The performance explores the musical potential of a situation where the traditional affordances of instrumental ensemble playing are removed and filtered to performers as sound and score information from a combination of sensors.

There will be 4 – 5 short pieces each exploring the separated ensemble's ability to communicate and work toward a collective musical goal. These pieces are inspired by metaphors drawn from telecommunications, shadow theatre as well as concepts of traditional group performance dynamics.

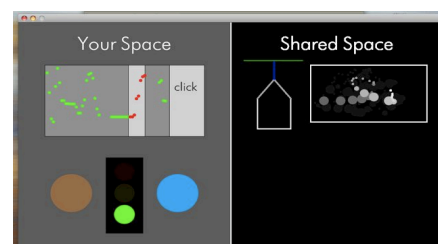
Physical Setup

The four performers are separated by a cross shape of cream coloured sheeting which allows a distinct shadow to be projected whilst remaining visually opaque. Each musician then has a quadrant where

they must remain for the performance.



In each quadrant with the performer will be a computer screen upon which a graphical score is displayed. The score is presented visually as program written in the Processing and Max/MSP programming environments.



The screen is central to the musicians' ability to communicate through physical gesture. All four computers both display and collect information which is shared over a LAN through a network hub.

Sensor Design

After considering various sensors I decided to use a combination of two force sensing resistors (FSRs) and an accelerometer per performer. For the purposes of the compositions these provide an ideal amount of information as they communicate definite gestures whilst leaving the exact physical state of the user ambiguous. For example, the accelerometer can convey speed and tilt information but provides less accurate information about a performer's exact location. The sensors are attached to each user in an inverted Y shape placing the FSRs underneath each foot and the accelerometer velcro'd to the performer's chest.

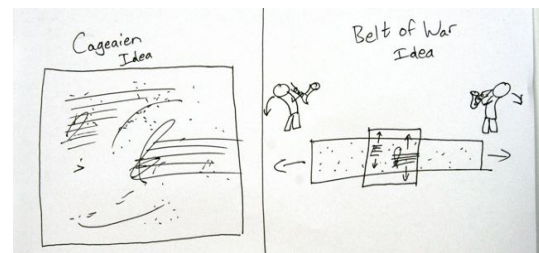


Composition

The pieces to be performed are based on ideas drawn from research into graphic notation, puppet theatre, tele-communications and non-verbal communication. Timbrally the aim is to loosely follow a Chinese theme which divides instruments into silk, bamboo, wood, stone, metal, clay, gourd and hide categories. Use of approximated instruments have been requested from the Music department and specific gongs are being kindly lent by the Anthropology department at Queen's.

The pieces themselves are as follows. *Communal Areas* presents the performer with a score split into two halves, the shared and the individual spaces. Shared space is similar for all, but the individual space is private. *Lost in*

Translation is inspired mainly by the tradition game of 'telephone' or 'chinese whispers' where an original message is slowly degraded and misinterpreted over time. This piece focuses on the shadow information as a way of (mis)communicating musical phrases to one another. Specific roles such as passing on the message or creating a new one will be moderated and distributed through the score. *Tug of Score* is inspired by Zorn and Cage's *Music for Piano*. A score is presented as a page of notes without staves. A clef is superimposed over the page and the music to be performed is shifted, squeezed and stretched by two performers in a type of Tug of War styled game.



Tantrum explores the idea of cliques in child's play. Of four players, one is always designated the outcast, and to perform as part of the group the performer must have a tantrum and stomp their feet, which eventually kicks one person out of the group. *Cups and String* is the only piece which will be purely synthesized and is based on performers manipulating sounds based on their balance as if interconnected by strings.

Current Status

On July 30th we held a first rehearsal to test ideas mainly for *Tug of Score*. At the moment two of five pieces have functioning graphical scores and sensors are ready for two performers. Further rehearsals are scheduled for August and musicians have all been confirmed.

