

Research Report

MULTIMEDIA SUITE: BLIND | THE WORLD WHERE I CAN'T BE BUT YOU LIVE IN

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ABSTRACT

From my personal experience, I have learned creating music and multimedia art enables me to project my consciousness and unconsciousness. As a result, it promotes physical and mental wellness. Expressing topics such as childhood memories, family relations, and unconsciousness by using non-verbal mediums of audio recording, improvisation, visual images, lighting, and space provides positive effects. These effects are related to the outcomes of creative arts therapies. Investigating metaphors embedded in my multimedia suite, *Blind | The world where I can't be but you live in*, leads to self-insight, and it helps the process of discovering defense mechanisms that may live inside of me.

1. INTRODUCTION

Blind | The world where I can't be but you live in reflects my exploration in life and expresses my unconscious emotions and thoughts. Creating art and music has been a personal journey of self-discovery. The act of creation helps me to understand who I am and where I came from. The journey never ends because I always make new discoveries through creating art — and consequently new questions arise. The recent discovery I had is that so many things that I do as an adult are tied to my family and childhood experiences. As a result, I am currently working on tracing my family relationships and revisiting events from my childhood. It may seem like these are obvious paths to take (especially to the Westerners) in order to consider my identity, but it took a long time for me to come to this realization.

I focus on releasing the emotions and thoughts that I hold inside, through my work. As a result, creating art has brought me comfort and insight. If my work also resonates with audience members and evokes feelings and memories within them, I would be thrilled. Connecting

my philosophy to the psychological and social aspects of my work in conjunction with academic investigation of these aspects made me realize my strong interest in music and creative arts therapy within the context of psychology. Studying creative arts therapy — a combined field of art and science — is part of my ongoing research. It played an important role in the content and concept of this piece.

2. ABOUT THE PIECE

I composed this work to illustrate a metaphor of an arc of life — from one's arrival to this world, to one's departure to another world. It is structured as a suite, in four sections plus a transition, but each section could stand as an individual piece. The first two sections consist of a combination of fixed media video and electro-acoustic music. By using the image related to my family and myself, along with abstract animations, these sections represent my relationships with my family, and the realizations about them that I had as an adult. I feel that the physical distance between us (we currently live very far away from each other) has influenced the feeling of the distance in our emotional connections. I do not know if it has made the distance shorter, longer, or neither, but I am aware that I now greatly cherish the connections with them. Also, the physical distance brought me a chance to develop a new way to approach my relationships with my family. The electro-acoustic music that features acoustic piano audio recordings paired with video represents the long path that has brought me to my new realizations and new approach.

In the last two sections, I strived to make the performance space a place where my past and present, and my consciousness and unconsciousness meet. The custom electro-acoustic instrument that I built connected my physical movements to sound by pulling thread. The speed of my movements became the speed of music. It is a metaphor for the action of digging up memories - of trying to find things without knowing what they actually

were. This instrument also controlled light intensities in the space to create a space that reflects my fluctuating emotions and thoughts about the past and present.

3. STRUCTURE

The suite is made of four sections and transitional music.

- けむり Kemuri — voice, flute, Pianica, Moog, digital video on fixed media
- あいだ Aida — piano, digital video on fixed media
- Transitional music — processed piano on fixed media
- みちに虹 Michi ni niji — voice, toy glockenspiel, custom-made controller, light dimmer
- ひぐれ Higure — voice, atoharp, flute, Moog, Pianica

4. SECTIONS

4.1. けむり Kemuri

Kemuri is a piece of farewell music, wishing him a safe journey to a safe place. The gradual and swelling textural development by layering and altering tracks projected my image of him rising to the skies, surrounded by guardian-angel-like figures. There were differences in spatial depths that surrounded the death, and I sensed the birth of a time gap between him and I since his time had stopped. The video represents these depths and a combination of motion and stillness (the time gap). I kept the visibility of the content of the video very low. This was a reflection of my mental state that I was not entirely ready to show what I was going through, and a reflection of the image that I received imagining what his world was like. By showing movements in a restrained visible world, I wanted to speak to the unknown sides of my and the audience's minds. Experiencing phenomena near the threshold of visibility and the slow manifestation of the images could guide one's mind in multiple ways. One could keenly focus on the movements in the video, one could obviously diverge from what one is watching, and one could make up images of their own to fill in the absence of image in the video. In any case, my aim was to bring up my and their personal experiences and memories through experiencing *Kemuri*.

4.2. あいだ Aida

In *Aida*, I took an approach to create dynamics by layering parts rather than playing each part with huge dynamic ranges. As a result, the music gradually built up. Overall, I avoided dramatic level and tempo changes in order to mirror the flow of my time. Time flows without ruffling the smooth surface. This dimension of my and other people's lives always moves forward. However, underneath the surface, countless events happen, and our emotional states constantly fluctuate. *Aida* partially represents my current relationship with my family. Our time passes regardless of our geographical distance, and I know that our life is not the same everyday. It is really not flat. But, I am not the one experiencing my family's life, and they are not the ones experiencing mine. We do not even observe each other much because of the distance. The music may seem to be flat to some listeners, but this is a metaphor of a forward motion of time that conceals the internal turmoil of people who I love. I used the word "aida" in the context of something close to the meanings of the words between, middle, or distance.

4.3. みちに虹 Michi ni niji

I saw an oil mark on a black pavement near my apartment in Providence. The sunlight made it iridescently shine, and seeing it sent me back to the time when I was a child. I was too small to know what the rainbow things on the pavement were, but they mesmerized me. My friend and I wanted to recreate the same beautiful rainbows, so we carefully poured seven different pigments into a puddle. They settled in the bottom of the shallow water, and no rainbows appeared. We stirred the water, but it simply made it muddy. By thinking about this memory, other memories from my childhood came back.

Michi ni niji was the first piece in the suite in which the dim light revealed the performance space, and I as a performer appeared in front of the audience. By singing a cappella while holding the instrument / controller, I revealed my live voice. The physical existence of the performer (myself) and the presence of human voice transformed the performance space in to a ritualistic space.

4.4. ひぐれ Higure

Higure conveys the feelings of later life, which includes wisdom, fatigue, resignation, acceptance, and relief. It represents the final phase in the arc of a person's life, and

my own life, as I imagined it to be. Tension and calmness coexist. The very slow tempo illustrates the time of decline in life. There is not much energy left, but one is doing one's best to live and getting ready to depart to another world. It is slow as if someone is resisting the flow of time. Time does not go backwards. The piece represents the mortal nature of the world and my relief at being surrounded by and yet able to escape from memories. It, too, is emotional to hold a ritual to send off lost ones and someone who I may lose in the future. That someone can be me as well.

5. THE INSTRUMENT - HAKO (BOX)

In *Aida*, the act of pulling thread from the Box was a metaphor of recalling hidden memories. I usually cannot guess what would trigger memories. Sometimes it seems to be random, and other times the connections of triggered memories are clear. Retrieving one memory could take a long time, but once I recall it, numerous memories flow out. There are times that I hesitate to unleash certain memories, too. It varies. The musical tempo changes tied to the physical motion of pulling were parallel to how retrieving memories works. The thread (effort and traces of recalling memories) lay on the floor forming a web, as if old memories hopelessly tried to capture the new memories without letting them slip away. It too, was a ritualistic act to protect the lost ones in the past (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The performer pulling the thread from *Hako* in *Michi ni niji*

The Box also controlled the intensity of light in the space by sending MIDI data to the DMX light dimmer through LanBox (DMX controller). By placing the lights near the floor, I created a localized and intimate but somehow solitary space. Lighting up the performer from below cast shadows on the walls. The shadows amplified my movements, and they made my identity unstable by doubling my figure.

I designed the enclosure of the instrument to look simple in order to leave myself and the audience free for interpretations (Figure 2). Depending on our different emotional states, the instrument would remind us of different things. Making the instrument wireless was necessary for free mobility and its clean appearance in order to create a ritualistic environment.



Figure 2. *Hako*

When a magnet on a spinning dowel passed over a Hall effect sensor on the electronic circuit, the Max patch triggered a bang (Figure 3). Since there were four equidistant magnets on the spinning dowel, it captured the time differences between the magnets and averaged these four values (one revolution). This averaged value was set to be the time period for the metro object. This metro determined the tempo of playing back the glockenspiel sound samples. If the spinning dowel was still, and no bang was coming for more than one second, the metro paused. Thus, the audio stopped, too.

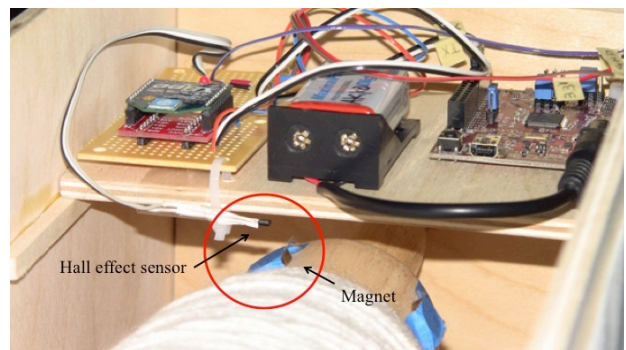


Figure 3. Hall effect sensor and magnets on the spinning dowel

6. CONCLUSION

It was an absolute pleasure to produce *Blind | The world where I can't be but you live in*. I experienced both

the pain and the serenity of creation by undergoing the process of making this multimedia suite. As a result, I am able to move on. Even though writing never defeats experiencing my works of art as a creator and as an audience member, retrospectively investigating my own compositional decisions and their backgrounds led me to numerous discoveries. I emphasized the importance of undertaking creative processes alone as a form of self-expression because this is what I am currently working on. However, I was never truly alone during the process. The support I received from my community was amazing. Without this support, I would not have been able to be in the mental and emotional state even to wish to create. I am a social creature. Thus, this piece included all of my surrounding.

Getting to know my art might be the best way to get to know me, and I get to know myself through the creation of art. If I were capable of expressing myself through speech or writing, I would probably not make music or art. *Blind* | *The world where I can't be but you live in mirrored who* I was as an artist and a person. This piece is, in a way, a record of me at this point of my lifetime, whether I know it or not.

7. AUTHOR'S PROFILE

Akiko HATAKEYAMA

Akiko is a composer, singer, and video artist. She is interested in crossing boundaries between traditionally written music, electronics, improvisation, computer based live interactivity, and visual components. Storytelling, memories, nature, and food often play an important role in Akiko's work, and she most often finds beauty in simplicity. She obtained her B.A. in music from Mills College and received her M.A. in Experimental Music/Composition at Wesleyan University. Since September 2011, Akiko has been engaged in PhD study in the MEME program at Brown University. Her principal instructors are Alvin Lucier, Anthony Braxton, Ronald Kuivila, Maggi Payne, Chris Brown, Todd Winkler and Butch Rovin.