Per Anders Nilsson, Palle Dahlstedt

Electroacoustic Modular Ecosystem

In this performance/lecture Palle Dahlstedt and Per Anders Nilsson performed with, and presented, an improvisation ecosystem for two interconnected modular synthesizers. The idea behind was to apply and implement an ecological systematic thinking in an electronic music environment. In this particular setting, two more or less identical modular synthesizers from the small British company Bugbrand was used. At the outset, each player made up one so-called patch for generating and controlling the audible outcome, a musical instrument if you like. In such an instrument, the player may put certain parameters under direct gestural control, e.g., speed/density, pitch and timbre, whereas other parameters are affected indirectly and/or controlled by random generators. Or in a combination of these. What makes this performance special however, is that each player, in addition playing his own instrument, also have an impact on the other's instrument, and vice versa. This creates a situation where both instruments make up a hyper instrument, mimicking an ecological improvisation system. An improvisation system, as we define it, is a system designed by somebody, with a specific configuration of human agents (musicians) and virtual agents (interactors and processors), with communication going on in both directions. Systemic improvisation is the act of a number of musicians playing in such a system. In our system, any change from one player may force a reaction from the other, and subsequently affecting musical outcome, and vice versa. In turn, such changes have an impact of next steps of action and interaction. Whatever you play will change the current state of the system, in a non-trivial way. One may say that each reaction is also an action. Anything a musician plays, in reaction to input from the other player and from the virtual interactors, the synthesizers, affects the state of the system, and as seen from an individual musician's perspective, playing is like chasing a moving target. The system is impossible (or difficult) to ignore, and every mistake is meaningful. Moreover, the system is always active – the performer enters the system and hereby make it fully connected, and then things start to happen. A constant system does not change the principles of its behavior, the musical output may vary considerably however, since development and radical change may happen, thanks to emergent behavior.