

Confessional
a user-driven installation

Michael Boyd
2014

Conceptual Premise

We've all made poor decisions – had one too many drinks, dated the wrong person, overused a credit card, accepted employment at a toxic workplace, and so forth. Some such questionable decisions are artistic in nature. Indeed when looking back on one's early work, it is easy to have tinges of embarrassment and regret. However, those emotions are often at least partially counterbalanced by feelings of warm nostalgia.

I have love/hate feelings about my own early compositions and suspect that many artists have similar relationships with their early output. John Baldessari made this dynamic compellingly tangible in 1970 through his *Cremation Project*, an undertaking in which he burned all of his paintings, baked some of the resulting ashes into cookies, and publicly announced the act in a newspaper as a sort of obituary. Viewing some of these cookies/ex-paintings several years ago I felt that Baldessari's approach to his previous work, simultaneously embracing, annihilating, and remaking, was a fitting way to let go of one's artistic past.

Installation Description









Confessional is a user-driven installation that provides the opportunity for composers to briefly take pleasure in and then (symbolically) destroy one of their dubious creations. This process is accomplished with a computer (running Max or Max Runtime) and a recording provided by the user that is processed live. The audio processing unfolds in stages and mirrors the phases of animal decomposition: fresh, bloat, active decay, advanced decay, and dry remains. Through this series of transformations, the user's piece transitions from its original state to nearly imperceptible bits of noise.

Users may also log this activity into an official registration book, and they may create and take home a frameable certificate commemorating the destruction. Any other way(s) that a user wishes to document the event are encouraged ("selfies," social media announcements, etc.), and a Facebook page ([facebook.com/electroacousticconfessional](https://www.facebook.com/electroacousticconfessional)) and hashtag will be provided to collect such documentation. For score-based works, implements will be provided to facilitate the physical destruction of scores: paper shredder or scissors for indoor venues, a fire pit or barbeque grill for outdoor venues (if allowed).

Physical Setup

The setup for *Confessional* is simple and flexible. A computer running the work's Max patch should be on a table or similar surface and situated so that one USB port or optical drive is accessible to users. The Max patch will be set in full screen presentation mode with a straightforward, minimal interface (see below). The computer will output stereo sound that can be played through a pair of speakers or one or more sets of headphones. The registration book, blank certificates, and score destruction implements (paper shredder, etc.) will be located near the computer with basic instructions.

Max Patch

<h3>Confessional</h3> <p>a user-driven installation Michael Boyd (2014)</p> <p>We've all made poor decisions – had one too many drinks, dated the wrong person, overused a credit card, accepted employment at a toxic workplace, and so forth. Some such questionable decisions are artistic in nature. Indeed when looking back on one's early work, it is easy to have tinges of embarrassment and regret. However, those emotions are often at least partially counterbalanced by feelings of warm nostalgia.</p> <p>I have love/hate feelings about my own early compositions and suspect that many artists have similar relationships with their early output. John Baldessari made this dynamic compellingly tangible in 1970 through his Cremation Project, an undertaking in which he burned all of his paintings, baked some of the resulting ashes into cookies, and publicly announced the act in a newspaper as a sort of obituary. Viewing some of these cookies/tex-paintings several years ago I felt that Baldessari's approach to his previous work, simultaneously embracing, annihilating, and remaking, was a fitting way to let go of one's artistic past.</p> <p>Confessional is a user-driven installation that provides the opportunity for composers to briefly take pleasure in and then (symbolically) destroy one of their dubious creations. This process is accomplished with a computer (running Max or Max Runtime) and a recording provided by the user that is processed live. The audio processing unfolds in stages and mirrors the phases of animal decomposition: fresh, bloat, active decay, advanced decay, and dry remains. Through this series of transformations, the user's piece transitions from its original state to nearly imperceptible bits of noise.</p> <p>Users may also log this activity into an official registration book, and they may create and take home a frameable certificate commemorating the destruction. Any other way(s) that a user wishes to document the event are encouraged ("selfies," social media announcements, etc.), and a Facebook page and hashtag will be provided to collect such documentation. For score-based works, implements will be provided to facilitate the physical destruction of scores: paper shredder or scissors for indoor venues, a fire pit or barbecue grill for outdoor venues (if allowed).</p>	<p>1. If you think someone used this installation before you, click this button to reset the patch (alternately you could also close and reopen the Max patch).</p> 	<p>2. Click the "open" button to locate the soundfile that you would like to use with this installation. (The soundfile, which you provide via a zip drive or other method, should be a recording of your own music that you find slightly to extremely embarrassing.)</p> 
<p>3. Type the duration in seconds of the soundfile you located in the previous step and then hit "enter." (Do not use a decimal point - round down to the nearest second).</p> 	<p>4. If you would like to record the destruction of your rather embarrassing piece, click the open "button" and choose a name and location for the resulting soundfile.</p> 	
<p>5. Set an initial volume level for the installation using the slider. This slider may be used during the installation to adjust the volume. Approximately 1/3 of the way below the top of the slider is a suggested starting point, depending of course of attached hardware.</p> 	<p>6. Click the toggle button to begin. The number boxes found below indicate the elapsed time in minutes and seconds since the installation's initiation. The process is complete just before the five minute mark. Enjoy!</p>  	
<p>7. Optional: Should it be necessary to immediately cease sound output, click the audio output button. Note that this button need not be used for any other purpose.</p> 		

Sonic Process

The audio processing, as mentioned previously, mirrors the phases of animal decomposition – both through the choice of transformation and the proportional durations of each stage. The basic nature of each stage is described in the table below. Once initiated, the processing is entirely automated.

Stage	I Fresh	II Bloat	III Active Decay	IV Advanced Decay	V Dry Remains
Duration	6”	20”	40”	1’40”	2’00”
Description	One segment of the piece is played back linearly without processing	Multiple segments of the piece are played back simultaneously; delays are used to move toward maximal saturation	Delays are faded and segments of the piece are gradually degraded (reduction in sampling rate, etc.)	Degraded segments of the piece are further reduced through filtering	Degraded and filtered segments are ring modulated against each other, resulting in a mixture of erratic noise and silence