Notes on the Elimination of the Mobile Music Audience

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present some strategies for creating works in Mobile Music that diminish, undermine or eliminate the barriers between artist and audience. Inspired by the text "Notes on the Elimination of the Audience" by Allan Kaprow. We will discuss this subject considering a public of music and sound art, illustrating it through some work examples and detailing the compositional process of two works of Mobile Music made by the authors.

Keywords: mobile music, participation, music performance, site specific, ubiquitous computing

Towards the end of Theatrical Conventions

In 1966, after a large dissemination of happening practices in New York, Allan Kaprow wrote the text "Notes on the Elimination of the Audience", which lists some "rules-of-thumb" for this genre of performance. The main rule is: "It follows that audiences should be eliminated entirely. All the elements - people, space, the particular materials and character of the environment, time - can in this way be integrated.". The artist makes this statement aspiring that certain theatrical conventions would disappear, because these performance rituals would be a primary element for establishing the division between performer and audience. Nine years before, Guy Debord wrote in "Towards a Situationist International" ideas which resemble the affirmations made by Kaprow, applied to a different context, perhaps more broader, but pointing to a similar direction, "The construction of situations begins on the other side of the modern collapse of the idea of the theatre. It is easy to see to what extent the very principle of the theatre - non-intervention - is attached to the alienation of the old world."

The dialogue between performers and audience has been largely expanded during the last decades through many forms of collective authorships, getting to forms of creative processes that would be unimaginable in the beginning of the twentieth century. However the field of music performance, including contemporary classical music, has conserved the models of rituals of the concert room: clapping, hand shakes, silence, coughing and, rarely, booing. As Seth Kim-Cohen

points out "in music as an academic, artistic, and performance discipline, there is a perceived need to identify—often to eliminate—aspects of production, reception, or discussion that are not specifically manifest in material form. ". This approach "condemns" elements, which do not deal directly with the very basic core of sound (pitch, volume, duration, and timbre) and traditional music structuring, to the label of "extramusical", putting it into a subclass of musical building blocks. Emphasizing the aspect which Debord highlights in non-participative situations, that is alienation, leaving to the audience only the role of contemplating the great masterpieces of music. Even through the use of new technologies in performances of live-electronic music, most of the time the interaction tends to be restricted to the instrumentalist and computer, leaving the audience outside the conversation, and if we consider interactive installations of multimedia art in most cases the interaction happens between the public and an interface. It is odd to disregard the possibilities that could be generated by incorporating the participation of the audience in music pieces, considering aspects of performance and the perception of sound. Specially through the use of new technologies. Some examples can be found inside and outside of the concert room, wandering around the fields of music and sound art. We believe that one powerful environment for experimentation with interaction and sharing with the public is the area of Mobile Music, for its potentialities of data processing, network capabilities, wide accessibility and a growing community of artist and developers.

Mobile Music and Participation

The definition of Mobile Music might be as wide as as the concept of *Musica Mobilis* by Shuhei Hosokawa: "I define *Musica Mobilis* as music whose source voluntarily or involuntarily moves from one point to another, coordinated by the corporal transportation of source owner(s)." (HOSOKAWA p.166). Although, in practical terms it could be considered a music which any part of its compositional process is mediated by mobile devices and takes advantage of its portability. What could include stage performances with mobile apps, standalone mobile applications, algorithmic music that makes use of GPS data, portable interfaces, etc. What generates innumerable possibilities of performance and installation configurations. Two well-known crucial points for making Mobile Music so attractive and suitable for participative art are its networking capabilities, providing easy communication and peer-to-peer actions, and the built in sensors in tablets and smartphones, which are able to generate a great amount of data to be used in various structures of control.

The use participation in performance practices is a very delicate issue, depending on how the interactivity is placed to the participants. As the sound artist Georg Klein highlights "The

performer's relationship with the audience had already been approached and examined radically during the 1960s. Experimental concert forms, theatrical abuse of audiences and actionist performances broke down conventional audience attitudes, but their shock effect was also exhausted." Kaprow himself draws attention to the fact that the artist should prepare the audience beforehand, so they would know which role each participant would have, and that would be a form of showing mutual respect. This statement should definitely be taken into account, but we should also consider that the use of new technologies contributes to new forms of production and reception. Which, for example, the use of computers might add a more playful aspect. Debord foresees the implementation of new technologies as way to ease the participation, which he suggests for the firsts situationists actions: "Besides the direct means that will be used toward precise ends, the construction of situations will require, in its affirmative phase, a new implementation of reproductive technologies. We could imagine, for example, live televisual projections of some aspects of one situation into another, bringing about modifications and interferences." Maybe the idea of being "protected behind the screen" of mobile devices could be a form of inviting people in to the performance.

Inside the Concert Room

The concert room is certainly not the best place to execute a piece which requires participation. As we said previously the concert room is filled of rituals, what naturally affects our perception. For Mobile Music pieces it is not different, and the concert room physical disposition does not propose a dialogue. But some elements of it could be adopted, and corrupted. For this fact there are not so many Mobile Music participative works inside the standard contemporary paradigm of concert halls. The most prevalent choice in this configuration would be to use smartphones and tablets as a NIME (New Interface for Music Expression) to control sound synthesis, sampling and visuals. Using native sensors in the devices, such as accelerometers, compass and multitouch. There are a many artists working with this concept, like Atau Tanaka and Adam Parkinson, MoPhO (Mobile Phone Orchestra) and the DigiEnsemble. One seminal piece in the context of Mobile Music in concert rooms is Dialtones, by Golan Levin, Scott Gibbons, Gregory Shakar, Yasmin Sohrawardy, Joris Gruber, Jörg Lehner, Gunther Schmidl and Erich Semlak. This work, made in 2001, explores mobile phones as sound synthesizers and the disposition of the audience in space, generating a "crowdfunded acousmonium". Although the aspect of participation in Dialtones is quite limited, it does not necessarily take the public away from a mode of contemplation, but it brings the mobile phone into a prohibited place, where the participants focus on something that was merely functional, the ringtones. Another interesting performance that uses a simple artifice, using mobile devices in the concert room is an excerpt of "Digital Hug" by the chinese artist Leung Keichuek, aka GayBird. The artist points a camera in the direction of the audience, which is projected to the screen, and asks for the participants to put the light of their mobile phones facing the camera. Then GayBird turns a step-sequencer on, which plays a sound according to the luminosity read by the camera, and so the public can move during the performance and change the sequences executed by the algorithm. It is a very simple maneuver, but that public reaction exemplifies quite well the idea of the comfort of "being hidden behind the screen". On the next topic there is an example of a project which we developed for the context of Mobile Music in the concert hall.

Falantes (Speakers)

Speakers is a piece for electronic piano, projection, wifi router, mobile devices and participants, to be presented in a concert room. The piece begins with a pianist improvising on the piano, but no sound comes out. Behind the pianist there is a projection showing a network address, which the public should access through their mobile devices. After connecting to the server, the audience should download an application, which connects them automatically to the network and starts receiving the OSC data emitted by the piano. The app has some synthesizers that are randomly chosen in the moment that it is opened, enabling different users to produce distinctive sounds. When the notes emitted by the piano start being received by the users' devices the sound begins to be spread around the concert hall, and all gestures made by the pianist acquire another meaning. During the performance some messages are displayed on the mobile devices screens, asking for the collaborator to move around the concert room, changing the position of the sound sources. These messages may have an absolute direction, "Move towards the right corner of the stage", or a relative direction, "Join the player who is playing on your right". The timbre and messages on the screen are modified according to the sensors input embedded in mobile devices.



Speakers Interface

What means that the participant starts playing a "new instrument". Thus, piano and mobile devices become a single musical instrument, a meta-instrument, which is spread across dozens of sound sources around the room. Constituting a situation in which both, performer and participants, have to learn how to play in collaboration during the unfolding of the piece. We believe that this would be one way possible to subvert the relationship between performer and "audience". Stoping the public of being a passive and alienated element, to become fundamental part of the work.

Outside the Concert Room

Differently from creating works to be played inside the concert room, the outside world makes obvious that space and place are a crucial part of the piece, and that our perception is clearly affected by what surrounds us. The art work is exposed to aesthetic, sociological and political aspects in a much more crude and almost inevitable way, and the participant placed in a more complex situation. There are a lot of works with sound which explore the space and the walking as a form of remixing sounds, without the mediation of mobile devices, such as the Sound Walks by Pauline Oliveros, which is a very fruitful field for inspiration and reflection on how to create with pure sounds and the environment. These are not completely conceptual works, but leave hundred percent of the action to the participant. The same a idea of walking as an action of remixing sounds can be found on Electrical Walks, by Christina Kübisch, and Radioscape, by Edwin Van der Heide, in which both works make use of sonification of electromagnetic waves. But if we consider the fact that these are technology mediated works, they create a completely different condition of reception, comparing to the non-mediated works, which is more playful and musical. On the other hand, some works deal with the notion of the site specific. Klein applies the german word Ortsklang (Ort = address and *Klang* = sound, meaning the place or address of sound) to his works, that the author translates as SiteSounds, which express a stronger concept of site specificity (KLEIN). Creating this stronger relation with place the artists is able to compose relations with the participants in a much more intimate sphere, working with the deconstruction of our routine and everyday soundscape. The concept of *Musica Mobilis* by Hosokawa might be applied to both situations, considering that they explore the mobility the user and devices in space.

Hoketus

Hoketus is an interactive sound piece that intents to create augmented sound fields through the mediation of smartphones. Providing an environment for collective composition and an expanded listening of electronic sounds and the urban environment. The name is inspired by the musical composition technique, hoketus, used in medieval polyphony, which is the alternation of very short melodic phrases or individual notes, between many instruments. The work is composed only of portable devices: handmade speakers, smartphones and two applications developed for android and iOS systems. Therefore, it is an itinerant installation/happening, which is easily transported and installed. The area of the work is defined by the location of 5 speakers, that may occupy areas ranging from 20 m² to 100 m², depending on the urban zone to be occupied. Each speaker has a built in smartphone, running an application that generates a pointillist rhythmic electronic sound, in which each speaker completes the other melodically, like the medieval hoketus, creating an autonomous sonic environment. One of the mobile phones allows users to access the network, and download the application which communicates with the chorus of speakers. From the moment the user enters the network, all smartphones built in the speakers, which are hotspots, start tracking the user's position through the quality of wifi signal.





Users interacting with the firsts tests of Hoketus.

If the participant draws into one of the hotspots the application starts to produce a sound rhythmically similar to the one emitted by the speaker, adding a new layer of sound, which starts to influence the sound of the speaker as well. The sound produced by the users application may be controlled through the touchscreen, which manipulates harmonic layers and records audio snippets captured from the environment. As it was sad before a second sonic layer is combined to the landscape, which is heard without the use of smartphones, revealing a hidden sound layer, private to

the listener, just like in other softwares of augmented reality that usually affect only visual aspects. In hoketus we aim for an augmented listening. But the action of the participant is not limited to his own ears, because his actions influences the sound of the speakers that are close to him, making the rhythmic phrases change to rougher and continuous sounds, which may be modulated through different types of sound synthesis that vary according to the user's velocity. This allows communication between multiple users simultaneously, making the space among speakers a large instrument, suitable for collective improvisations.

Conclusions

The existence of an audience was something that drove happening away from one of the ideals of Kaprow, which was to bring art to life praxis together. As it was pointed out by Pieter Burger, it was one of the failures of the post-war avant-garde. Differently from Kaprow we have no interest in trying to get art closer to life praxis, but to appropriate, sample, hack and rethink some gestures transposed from our daily mediated life to a performance-like situation. By turning the portable devices into instruments in the context of a social collaborative situation, in which meta-instruments could be controlled through many hands. Therefore, the concept of stage and the traditional music audience are barriers between the ideas of Mobile Music and the possibilities generated through the use of mobile devices.

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