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This=Then=That Project Proposal

Title: pataugeoire
an interactive sound piece

Think of a context and an environment where you would like to intervene. Where will you present your project? Who is it made for?

In this project I would like to expand on an idea I proposed in etude I, the motion and sound installation which I thought would fit the kid's pool in Prefontaine parc. Among the elements that grabbed my attention in that location was the layout of the pool, its materials and its seasonal use as an instrument for play. The pool is a rather large space (x by y meters) bound by a short metal fence. A kind of sidewalk surrounds the foot deep pool. On this sidewalk are three foot tall concrete blocs that hold the jets that splash water around during the summer. The blocs are spread out around the perimeter of the pool. The open space is largest in the middle of the pool - in the middle ground between all the jets - but there is also ample space to move about between consecutive blocs. This place is conceived for active behavior, to let children channel their crazy in a playful manner. It is also large enough for multiple groups of people to each find a corner in which they can interact between themselves while sharing the public space. In the summer the pool is alive, with water running through the jets and children joyfully splashing about. In the fall, the place is deserted and in the chilly environment, the austere nature of the concrete slabs unfolds in a most striking manner. Concrete doesn't convey much liveliness unless it houses some kind of thing or activity. The goal of this project is to explore how to revive the slumbering pool by creating an interactive sound piece that involves the user's motion and action in the space. Much like water jets and concrete provide various tactile pleasures and a motive for active play among pool-goers (in the summer, mostly children), I hope to create a strong link between the inputs provided by the user's presence or motion within the space, and the sonic response that the installation provides, so that the installation may provide grounds for improvised play and curiosity towards creative interaction. Children can invent forms of play from almost nothing, but adults need more pretext, usually in the form of some element that spark fascination, tempting them out of their groundedness. The parc being a place for people of all ages, I would like this installation to speak to all ages and not involve any sort of learned musicality. My hope is to achieve a design that bares the differences of the audience in mind.

Think about the kind of relationship you wish to foster between your users and the artifact or installation. How can you use your project to destabilize the users and make them reflect on themselves, their environment and society?

One of the goals I allude to in the paragraph above is simply to place adults inside a space where children usually go and encourage them to play a bit. There is also a will to communicate the same feeling I got when I saw the space: an open slate, a blank canvas, something to be occupied and played around with, to create an opportunity to enjoy oneself - and include others - rather than waiting for the weather and municipal efforts to magically align. I would also like to refine the original idea proposed in etude I by introducing memory into the concept. Should the installation memorize past inputs and play them back against what the current user has done or is doing, then the relationship between individual users and the place becomes much more complex. A user in the process of producing sounds from the installation would hear the sounds that others inputted before, cementing invisible ties with the

past users which the current user does not know but in fact coexists with on some scale. I do not know yet how I would want to sequence user and past user inputs. They would have to be distinguishable, and so would recording and playback times. Maybe there is a button to push for 30 seconds of noises to be recorded. The user has a unique opportunity to leave a trace - with no strings attached - which will be sensed by future users. Hopefully, at the sound of other inputs, they are encouraged to leave a creative mark, and unleash their curiosity by playing around with the installation. Maybe there should be two modes of interaction: free and recorded. The impersonal recorded interaction would foster reflection on one's place in a dense and diverse urban society. The improvised play aspect would bring out aspects of childhood that all can relate to - in that way it would add to the intended message of conviviality.

Think about the notion of empowerment. Is your artifact really helping or challenging its users in any way or is it just another psychological prosthesis?

Think about something meaningful. What are you trying to tell us with your project?

When I think of empowerment, I can relate two ideas to this piece. First, that being able to revisit and recall the freedom of thought and action one experienced as a child is an empowering feeling. The focus on things sensorial, and the onus placed on one's physical actions within an otherwise empty space are meant to trigger the imaginary and foster creative action. The second aspect of empowerment relates to the space itself - gifting it with a second life after its usual season activity, and conserving the function of tying neighborhood folk together by allowing them to interact in the same space (less time) and contemplate each other's behavior in a comfortable state of common wonder. That last part is really a third notion of empowerment: that of bringing a user closer to their community through an exchange of gestures on a common ground, a common message, expressed creatively, that says: "what the.. this is fun!".

All in all I hope to create a versatile piece that can just as well bring the user to reflection and creative behaviour, but that could also be enjoyed as an object of aesthetic fascination. I think it's important that the design allow the mode of interaction to be quickly understood, but also provide different forms of sonic reactions. I hope to provide interesting sounds for the user to manipulate. In writing up etude I, I proposed mechanical sound sources such as using a motor to bang rhythms on a surface. I think creating a variety of this type of physical sounds would be interesting in the way it could tie the installation to the environment it sits in. I also think achieving variety will be a big challenge. Digital sound synthesis would be a more reliable and musical option, although less situated.

There would be two main modes of interaction in this piece – interacting physically and sonically with the space, and interacting with the trace of other users. The intended meanings are many fold. I want to make something that could potentially give life to a dead space in a neighborhood area. I would like to design interesting and surprising interactive means of making sound, and allow participants to experience traces of what past participants have done in the same space. I want to allow people to enjoy the space playfully and creatively, as kids do during the summer, and in doing so connect a with their “child side”, and with the space as well. I want to find some kind of sequence of actions that would make the sounds made by the participant and those made by others feel like they are in harmony or in rhythm, so as to create a sense of conviviality between the participant and the anonymous neighborhood folk that participated before. An oddity in the neighborhood that can change the participant's point of view for a brief moment and situate them in harmony with those that surround them and the space which they inhabit.

Scope

From here I can see two factors that would make this project quite challenging: weather at the end of this semester, and size of the location. For the issue of weather, maybe there are design solutions that could keep the system safe from cold and wetness. Maybe it would be best to make an indoor prototype based on the layout of the location. As for the size of the space, the easiest solution would be to constrain myself to using part of the space only. I see my project using modular parts scattered around the space however, so it could also be interesting to see how small things could help give meaning to the entire space.

There is also another direction which this project could take – that would be to design the pieces so that they could be placed in different environments, with different layouts. After all, the idea of reviving a place through play doesn't have to be constrained to the kid's pool inside Prefontaine parc. I do think it would still be interesting to make my initial design around that specific location, but I think it might be more meaningful to allow this piece to be housed in other places.

Research three similar projects and provide a summary of each.

1. 21 Swings

<https://www.instituteforpublicart.org/case-studies/21-swings/>

Daily / Tous les jours's 21 Swings installation that comes back to Place-des-Arts each spring has some points in common with my project idea. 21 Swings is a set of 21 swings placed along Maisonneuve street. Each swing produces music notes when used - and consecutive swings play music "together" if their swinging is synchronous. Later after its creation, an interactive game controlled via a phone app and the swingsets was added to the installation. According to my source it was commissioned in 2011 by the city of Montreal, then brought back year after year by popular demand. Part of the intention was apparently to create something that would invite people back into this area which had undergone a lengthy construction period. I like the playful approach to re-igniting a “dead” space in the city. I also, like most, really enjoy the simplicity of the play action chosen and how tactile the experience is as well. The piece excites many senses and its interactive quality gives grown ups a good excuse to hop onto a swingset, which most would say is a great sensation. I also like that the action isn't at all complicated – there is nothing to do but swing, except maybe in the case of the interactive game that was later added to the piece. I don't blame them for changing things up after having repeated the same formula many times.

2. Voice Array

http://www.lozano-hemmer.com/artworks/voice_array.php

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's voice array was also created in 2011. In the room there is an intercom that the participant uses to record his own voice. He then sees his voice translated to blinking lights and added to a larger array of blinking lights that stretch across the wall. He then hears the voices of the previous 288 participants sounding together, then the 288th participant, along, before he gets pushed out of the array. Lozano-Hemmer creates a rather convivial atmosphere in this piece by mixing together the participant's voice with numerous others that he cannot see but that stood in the same place as him - probably recently. Lozano-Hemmer found a curious type of liminal space in the intercom, and breaks normal protocol by letting 288 people after you hear what your cautious, confused or amused self had

to say upon entering the room. I saw the piece as it was in the Mexican Cultural Institute in Washington DC, bright white lights in a room that was also mostly white. It's interesting how the piece comes to life only after you had spoken into the intercom, so there is nothing to influence what people chose to say (supposing it's their first time there). I find this way of creating a relationship between participants quite inspiring and think it might be an interesting subject to explore in this project. It would be interesting if music from past participants would also sound conjunctly with the participant's sounds. There is a question of sequencing of actions and perhaps rhythm to explore here.

3. Lichtscanner

<https://vimeo.com/342591780>

This work might be the odd one out in this selection, but the use of sensors strikes me as being related to the project. This is a video in which a "Lichtscanner" (designed by Lars Vaupel) is being tested - it's a handheld metal box which has a light shining below it. It's plugged into a sound module that seems to react to the light that gets reflected back to the metal box, so there must also be a sensor where the light is placed. The artist moves the scanner around a large sheet with different patterns drawn on it, sending different kinds of inputs to the sound module which in turn produces different types of sounds. The drawings look like a clash between soundwave diagrams and futurist compositions, and seem tightly (although also mysteriously) related to the eerie sci-fi sounds that the module produces. Special effects are obtained by moving the box away from the sheet, and specific sounds are obtained by slowly shifting a piece of black paper under the scanner. I enjoyed seeing such a direct link between the visual and musical aspects of this machine. It's something the artist (Felix Kubin) used in live performance settings and which not only produced original sounds, but also added to the visual design of his performance act. Also worth noting is how random and unruly the sounds seem when a new part of the drawing is scanned - by shifting a piece of black paper under the scanner, the performer seems to figure out gradually what exactly it is that he is changing in the sound. Part of the appeal of this is surely the process of music making

Write a paragraph on how/why your project will be different and impactful in comparison to the projects you researched.

I do really like all three projects I examined, so it's hard to think mine would be any better. However this piece would differ from 21 Swings in that I hope to make the experience a bit more tightly related to the place. While the swings are a great way to make one stop and let their mind wander in that location, the synthetic sound design has the effect of taking you somewhere else. I also wish to make my piece a bit more physically engaged. In the 21 Swings piece one interacts only with nearby swing-users, while my piece would also include past users. While Lozano-Hemmer's piece shines with its simple interaction, the pressing of a button and recording of a message asks little involvement of the user, and the reactions that are captured are inevitably short, spontaneous and incidental. I want my piece to involve more senses and leave more room for the user to discover how the installation will react to his input. Besides that I do want my piece to feel more related to the space in which it is located, rather than leaving it in the abstract setting of an empty room painted solid white or black. As for the Lichtscanner work, I hope to create a simpler mode of interaction than what is presented there, though perhaps using similar means.