

On our Past, Present, and Future with Web Audio Technologies – a participatory keynote address

Norbert Schnell
Furtwangen University
sor@hs-furtwangen.de

Preamble

- (1) Since I am infected, I often have a hard time to enjoy concerts. Most of them feel like ancient rituals representing the idea that we are unable to listen to and adequately express ourselves towards each other when we are more than a few. These rituals seem to remind us that if we express ourselves we have to make the others listen and that if ever we are more than a few we have to follow a leader and/or a detailed script. Meaningful relationships are often pictured as requiring elaborated action plans and persevering repetition. I don't really remember how this relates to my life.
- (2) Since I am infected, I don't understand anymore why so many creators spend so much time on producing works which exclude their audience from the relationships they represent. At best, the audience is allowed to observe meticulously elaborated symbolic enactments from afar.
- (3) However, I appreciate the collective silence before the show, when all participants are united in mutual attention.
- (4) Like other communication technologies, web technologies extend our possibilities to create, maintain, and control our relationships to others.
- (5) Music consists in its essence of metaphors for the relationships our lives are made of and for the way we create, maintain, and control them.
- (6) What I always liked about digital music technologies is the possibility to constantly build new instruments and environments that play with these metaphors to embrace very different practices, people and communities.
- (7) What I particularly like about web technologies is how they allow for effortlessly creating networks of mutual attention and multilateral interaction that may stand as lively metaphors for open, diverse, and pluralistic societies.

Conclusions

Evidently, since I am infected with the idea that our collective practices could be far more based on mutual listening and multilateral interaction than they are, I cannot conceive a keynote address as another of these rituals where an audience listens to somebody on stage.

Consequently, my contribution to WAC 2019 is the attempt to create a *participatory keynote address* where the WAC attendees are invited to talk about their experiences, projects and ideas.

Preparing this keynote, I am in touch with the difficulties of creating an experience where the participants are invited to express themselves. Despite my beliefs outlined above, I have strong doubts: Will the people actually be interested in *expressing themselves*? Don't they expect me to deliver a performance? – I guess, the WAC committee didn't invite me to let the others do the work. Are they able to listen to *each other*? How can I guarantee that this will be interesting and pleasant? – After all, *that* is my ultimate responsibility.

Despite the lack of understanding I displayed above, I *do* understand very well *why so many creators spend so much time on producing works which exclude their audience*. Over the years, I have learned to perform presentations, to lead the audience through ideas, to tell stories, to be funny, to provoke, impress, and please. But how to organize the spontaneous expression and exchange of others? Shall I guide them? Shall I let them free?

Over the past years, I have experimented with web (audio) technologies to create situations where participants would use their smartphones to spontaneously express themselves through sound. The participants were invited to connect to networks, collaboratively play on musical instruments, and collectively generate complex soundscapes. None of these musical experiences was as elaborate as the performance of a symphony or the free improvisation of a skilled musician. But similar to those, they created moments of profound collective attention and rich metaphoricity. Just that the attention of the invited participants was not directed towards a common object of interest, but towards each other.

An experience of this kind is what I would like to contribute to WAC 2019. Hope that works...



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